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E P R E S S

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Editors' Introduction

MONIQUE ROONEY AND RUSSELL SMITH

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.

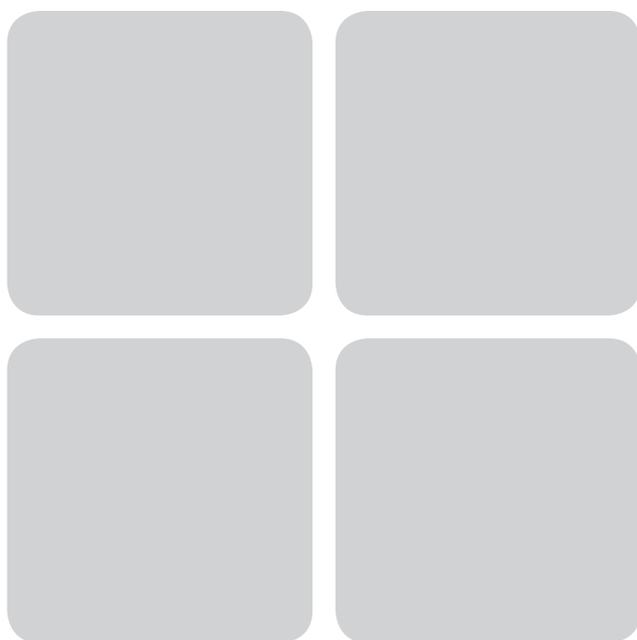
Enacting the metaphorical perversity of Sedgwickian logic is the final essay in this section, Melissa Hardie's 'The Closet Remediated: Inside Lindsay Lohan', which examines the 'closet epistemologies that have been remediated into the present tense by the emergence of new social media'. Hardie draws 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.



**SPECIAL SECTION: REMEMBERING
EVE KOSOFKY SEDGWICK**

Thinkiest

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE

All my feeling for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick comes from her writing. I wasn't a friend. I never met her or even heard her give a public lecture or present a paper. The closest we came was being bound together, one after the other, in the same edited anthology, my essay on sequence and precedence in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and its various adaptations following an extract from her *A Dialogue on Love*. If Sedgwick's essay and mine can be said to speak to each other, to strike a conversational pose, as though the breadth of a page might be mistaken for the more sociable span of a bar or table, it is only to point up the spuriousness of this effect. For whatever weight of significance the closing section of Sedgwick's essay might seem to license my finding in this happenstance—'I don't resist . . . secretly fingering this enigmatic pebble. I can't quite figure out what makes its meaning for me' ('Dialogue' 351)—is made implausible with the page's turn by the brutalist facade of my first sentence: 'Sequence is its own alibi' (352).

How much more death ramps up the stakes and scales of these kinds of fantastical calibrations of remoteness or proximity. As is often sorrowfully noted, the work of mourning must feel its way inside newly unstable structures of address as the usual conventions of tone, tense, and even nomination buckle under the relational effects of death's transformations of the person. Such transformations, however, do not stop at the person; death also works a textual transmutation by turning writings into a corpus. Despite the etymological connection, the advent of the corpus does not mean that writing dies. (The frequent posthumous spike in book sales suggests instead a widespread faith in writing as afterlife.) Rather, signaling a new finitude, the corpus means no more writing.

I came to Sedgwick late. The first thing of hers I read was *Epistemology of the Closet*, a borrowed copy brought back from England in 1990 by my doctoral supervisor, the margins of which were marked up in the intensely illegible microhandwriting of her then girlfriend, soon to be—and still—mine. Is it possible to be rescued by a book? Until that moment I had been trying to frame for myself a workable critical optic from models of knowledge drawn from my various activist engagements and a rattle-taggle clutch of French feminists in translation. Like many of Sedgwick's readers, I was transformed by the encounter. There were, of course, her big ideas: her insistence that matters of hetero and homo definition are central to Western thought, attaching to scenes with which they have no ostensible connection; her analysis of the irresolvable structural incoherencies of available categories of modern sexual identification;

her amplification of the complicated epistemological interiorities of ignorance; her investigation, after Gayle Rubin, of the implications for antihomophobic scholarship of thinking gender and sexuality separately; her revelatory reanimation of the commonplace that people are erotically different from one another in ways that elude the forensic attention of official sexual taxonomies. These are the 'thinkiest' ideas (*Fat Art* 160) in *Epistemology* and definitely the most portable, converted into the textbook plain style of countless introductions and summaries and briskly commodified as 'ideas' with their own independent value and circulation.

And there were—there remain—her minor ideas, those perceptive reorderings of critical and everyday truisms made sotto voce, almost as asides, buried in arguments apparently bent in some other direction and often missed on first reading. Here are some of the ideas tripped by my rereadings of *Epistemology*: sexual identity, although not sexual practice, is always relational; the incommensurability of scale between systems and individuals does not fully determine the outcome of their engagement; oral sex is less amenable than anal sex to the disciplinary codings of active and passive; the levels of psychic energy it takes to write a book might be necessary to reading one.

Reading Sedgwick for the first time was something like what I imagine it would feel to be fired from a cannon, spangled and spectacular, newly aerodynamic, holding everything together—including a temporarily aerial perspective—courtesy of an extrinsic propulsive force. Although I know *propulsive* to be a word Sedgwick favored and so for me now always 'Eve-saturated' (Kincaid 237), I was surprised to reacquaint myself with the knowledge that she had already more or less envisaged this whole scene as one frame of a complexly rendered account of her relation to reading *Remembrance of Things Past*, in which 'to be shot into this circulation with the force of some extra quanta of borrowed energy ('Proust') and with a disposition to travel always offers the chance, for long enough, of feeling like mastery' (*Epistemology* 242).¹ This can happen more often than is seemly or, more to the point, scholarly. I have lost count of the times that, nursing a figurative turn of phrase or worrying [the frayed end of some idea,] I have stopped in what would be horror if only it didn't so often resemble pride, on finding Sedgwick's fingerprints all over it already, myself little more than an accessory to the crime of my own authorship.

Although Sedgwick's phrasing is so well turned as to go on the high-rotation playlist of scholarly citation and her arguments are sustained with apparent effortlessness over the length of her buff essays, the unit of Sedgwick's thought is, I think, the sentence. Her fans and her detractors agree on this when they

¹ For a characteristically Sedgwickian use of *propulsive*, see, e.g., the last sentence of *Epistemology of the Closet* (251).

describe her style as ‘Jamesian’ (Weeks 412; Van Leer 127), by which the former mean complex and the latter mean convoluted. She was a James scholar—her essay on ‘The Beast in the Jungle’ was ‘the inaugurating investigation’ of *Epistemology of the Closet* (183)—and her style has affinities with James’s. There is the nip and tuck of their punctuation—a fondness for the parenthetical dash, which affords a small space of expansion for emphasis or something nearly forgotten, and for the semicolon, which dams the rush of the sentence only to increase it. There is the arch formality of their diction, the precision of which is not lessened by its often being the vehicle for if not actually a joke then a structure of address characterized by wryness. (For example, of *Epistemology of the Closet* Sedgwick writes, ‘[I]t seems inevitable that the style of its writing will not conform to everyone’s ideal of the pellucid’ [18].)² And there is the sense their sentences afford of being anchored to a position of narratorial rather than authorial stoutness—what Sedgwick herself calls ‘the Jamesian singular point of view’ (‘Queer Little Gods’ 205)—a position that has more to do with perspective than personhood.

To read Sedgwick’s sentences—even, sometimes, to reread them—is to apprehend an uncommon scene: the pedagogical at the moment of its transubstantiative purchase. It is to register, beyond or behind the specificities of what is being read, the alchemy of one’s own being made smarter. And yet to process through Sedgwick’s at once exuberant and disciplined sentences is not to feel processed by them. The generosity of her writing—by which I mean both its embrace of things more usually presumed to have nothing to say to each other and its insistence that knowingness is not the best measure of an argument’s worth—extends to readers a new license for what can be held thinkable. It is a wordless transaction, but if the readers in such scenarios spoke, they would say not ‘I see’, a grateful accession to another’s point of view, but a more self-flattering claim to a shared perspective: ‘I know’. Sedgwick, of course, says it better. In describing her encounter with Buddhist pedagogy, she represents the mode of her learning as one of assent: ‘mainly an exchange of recognition—at best, of surprising recognition. As if the template of truth is already there inside the listener, its own lineaments clarified by the encounter with a teaching that it can then apprehend as “true”’ (*Touching Feeling* 165). Even for those of us who read professionally, as it were, such pedagogical events are a rare experience, but to me they simply characterize what it is to read Sedgwick, sentence after sentence.

Alongside all the other things it means, then, the prospect of no more of Sedgwick’s writing registers as a loss of capacity in myself, a circumscription

2 In making this comparison, I wouldn’t want to forget that Sedgwick is also fond of working in the vernacular and does not shy, e.g., from elsewhere using ‘pellucid’ in the same sentence as ‘shit-kicker’ (*Epistemology* 141).

of my intellectual futures on what sometimes feels like the trading floor of the academy.³ This feeling would seem so narcissistically wide of the mark as to be better left unsaid were it not for the fact that here, as reliably elsewhere, Sedgwick has already drawn a bead on the matter with her question ‘What does it mean to fall in love with a writer?’ (*Touching Feeling* 117). She asks this question in an essay cowritten with Adam Frank in which the two explore their attachment to the psychologist Silvan Tomkins, a figure whose place in queer studies is secured by their devotion. For Sedgwick and Frank, to be in love with a writer means at least two things: wanting to make others love the writer and wanting to make others get how well the writer loves you. In the light of the first wish, Sedgwick and Frank try ‘to propagate among readers nodes of reception’ for what they find uniquely adorable in Tomkins’s work; in the light of the second, by way of demonstrating how his formulations anticipate theirs, they long ‘to show how perfectly Tomkins understands’ them (23). What endears this account to me is not only the way in which the attempt to alleviate what might seem the minor scandal of falling in love with someone one has only read embroils Sedgwick and Frank in the more presumptuous gaffe of fancying themselves at the proper centre of the transferential scene of reading, but also the way in which the stylistic extravagance of this one-two punch expresses my feeling for Sedgwick by capturing what it means to fall in love with a certain order of writing.

Annamarie Jagose, professor of film, television, and media studies at the University of Auckland, is author of Lesbian Utopics (Routledge, 1994), Queer Theory (Melbourne UP, 1996), and Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence (Cornell UP, 2002). She is also author of several prizewinning novels—most recently, Slow Water (Victoria UP, 2003). Her current project, ‘Orgasmology,’ is an investigation of the cultural meanings that accrued to orgasm across the twentieth century.

Acknowledgements

This essay was originally published in *PMLA* 125.2 (2010).

3 Glossing an argument of Lauren Berlant’s, Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark write, ‘Mobilized around the signifier “Sedgwick”, this field [of queer studies] is the privileged social space in which the telling of heroic stories of becoming possible in a heteronormative world can stand in for the rather more banal experience of becoming academic’ (31). No doubt it might, yet not necessarily. My experience of becoming academic—indissolubly connected to my experience of reading Sedgwick in 1990—registered for me more as a possibility than as a banality, something unanticipated that opened onto new prospects at once stabilizing and risky, the affective scale of which was most familiar to me from earlier projects of making sense of myself in heteronormative institutions both familial and academic.

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The Proximate Pleasure of Eve Sedgwick: A Legacy of Intimate Reading¹

ELIZABETH MCMAHON

They're all the same, these tricksters; they have no shame and so have no silence. (Hyde 153)

In her introduction to *Novel Gazing* Sedgwick writes that 'pleasure, grief, excitement, boredom, satisfaction are the substance of politics rather than their antithesis'. Further, she advises that we attend 'intimately to literary texts' because their 'transformative energies' are 'the stuff of ordinary being' (1). This essay speculates on the ways Sedgwick remapped the relationship between affect, intimacy and politics as a queer critical practice. It will consider the dynamism of this relationship in terms of the new spatialities of reading it enables, focusing on the operations of juxtaposition and proximity that her writing enacts. This focus is motivated by the understanding that Sedgwick deploys juxtaposition and proximity as strategies to confound accepted decorum regarding appropriate associations between subjects and objects, including the relationship between herself as author, the subject matter of her inquiry, and the reader. Further, her continuous re-assemblage of relations serves to remind us of the contingent or arbitrary nature of classificatory practices themselves. This essay argues that Sedgwick's complex re-negotiation of relations comprises one of her most radical and enduring analytical praxes. For the reader is invited to enter into the processes of contingent thought and analysis in a temporality of the present, a shared moment of thought and affect that is itself necessarily creative.

Sedgwick's remapping of relations, including the destabilization of the author-subject, is akin to Donna Haraway's formulation of 'situated knowledges', first published in 1988, and in expanded form in 1991—ie, at around the same time as Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1991). In her famous essay Haraway argues for

¹ Ken Gelder deploys the term 'proximate' in a related sense in his essay 'Proximate Reading: Australian Literature in Transnational Frameworks', forthcoming in *JASAL* 2010. Gelder uses the term to conceptualise new relations between readers, texts and meaning in transnational modernity.

This essay is indebted to the work of Elizabeth A Wilson. Her extensive analysis of affect is forthcoming in *Affect and artificial intelligence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010). I would also like to acknowledge and thank Monique Rooney for her detailed and astute editorial work on this essay.

politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. (589)

Like Sedgwick, Haraway dismisses the idea of impartial objectivity as an illusion, whether motivated by positivist or transcendental perspectives. Both Sedgwick and Haraway stress that the viewing position of the inquirer is situated, political and partial and that the putative object of inquiry, conventionally understood as free-standing, is but one aspect or moment in these relations. Further, both call for the agonistic rehearsal of the terms of these relations as part of critical methodology.

The projects of these two important theorists are, of course, separated by the particular fields of study and also by what I call Sedgwick's politics of tone, by which I mean the manner in which she situates herself, and the implications of this process for the reader, which is inseparable from the gesture itself. Thomas S. Frenzt's recent essay on Haraway suggests the ways in which Haraway's feminist vision might well be enhanced by 'laughter, vulnerable feelings, and a narrative form of lived experience' (841), which he associates with the figure of the trickster. Frenzt's model of radicality picks up on Haraway's own invocation of the trickster figure from Southwest native American accounts, which she posits as a model of productive disruption (Haraway 593). Whatever one makes of Frenzt's desire to transform Haraway, his description accurately describes Sedgwick as trickster. 'Laughter' and 'vulnerable feelings', together with the 'narrative form of lived experience', are lynchpins of Sedgwick's approach. Indeed it is the particular, complex and affective relationality between text, author and reader she constructs—what in literary criticism is conventionally understood as tone—that is one of the enduring legacies of Sedgwick's work and constitutes a formal enactment of her critical project.

Tricksters also reconstitute and reform these relations, George Kamberelis argues. They do this by embodying

the human capacity to (a) engage in abductive practices (bricolage) that bring forth new modes of being and acting from not-yet-articulated possibilities and (b) create abductive texts (montage, pentimento, and pastiche) that disrupt culturally contrived/inscribed boundaries. (Kamberelis 678, qtd in Frenzt 822)

By these means, Kamberelis claims, the trickster excites others to thought and action (Frenzt 822). This is true of Sedgwick's performative analysis, which opened up such possibilities for her readers and queer culture more broadly. This essay claims further that this spur to thought and action is embedded in the tone of her writing, which includes the reader in the process of its own thought

and action. In the texts I focus on here—*Epistemology of the Closet*, *Tendencies* (1993), the Introductions to *Novel Gazing* and *Shame and her Sisters* (1997 and 1995)—her invitation to this intimate reading practice was taken up by many and inspired many imitators. Indeed critics, such as Marilee Lindemann, have argued that queer analytical practice may have privileged the pleasure of this constitutive capacity, its ability to form a dynamic subjectivity and community, at the expense of other forms of political action. Thus, at this juncture, not long after her death, it is necessary to examine the embodied intimacy of Sedgwick's own writing: its contradictory capacity to identify and generate difference. For it may be that it is precisely this generosity and tutelage of her writing that threatens to distance her from us and consign her to the precise historical terms of these relations. This essay seeks to identify a number of the ways the invitation to engagement is issued in her writing through the overlaid patterns of relationality, and calibrate the efficacy of her method for ongoing inquiry. In this process, I situate Sedgwick as a trickster, a figure which may, ironically, locate her originality. For its association with a recognized tradition or tropism places it in a continuum into the future.

To follow Sedgwick herself, we could say the relational is axiomatic to her work. Hers is a relational analytic, affect, aesthetic and politics, hence the titles *Between Men* (1985), *Tendencies* (1993), *A Dialogue on Love* (1999), and her definition of the 'immemorial current' of queer in the Foreword to *Tendencies*: 'Keenly, it is relational, and strange' (xii). Her project is to identify and re-imagine relations across and between subjects, objects, discourses, institutions, readers and texts,² as she and Adam Frank state explicitly in the Introduction to *Shame and her Sisters*:

The bipolar transitive relations of subject to object, self to other, active to passive and the physical sense (sight) understood to correspond most closely with these relations are dominant organising tropes to the extent that their dismantling as such is framed as both an urgent and interminable task. (1)

To this end Sedgwick deploys a range of rhetorical manoeuvres by which she alters accepted relations and, while each of these moves has distinct properties, it is in some ways inseparable from the rest, constructing alignments and misalignments that overturn convention. One characteristic move prises apart naturalised connections founded on *a priori* assumptions and complicit

2 As Stephen L. Barber and David L. Clark put it, Sedgwick's work changed for a generation of scholars and activists 'how we think about the *nexus* of identities, desires, bodies, prohibitions, discourses and the play of power' (3; *italics mine*).

ideologies to reveal not only the perfidy but the stagnation and tedium of their alignment. And so, for instance, in the 'Queer and Now' chapter of *Tendencies* she writes of 'Christmas effects':

What's queer? Here's one train of thought about it. The depressing thing about the Christmas season—isn't it—is that it's the time when all the institutions are speaking with one voice. The Church says what the Church says. But the State says the same thing: maybe not (in some ways it hardly matters) in the language of theology, but in the language the State talks: legal holidays, long school hiatus, special postage stamps, and all. And the language of commerce chimes in, as consumer purchasing is organized more narrowly around the final weeks of the calendar year, the Dow Jones aquiver over Americans' holiday mood.

[...]

They all—religion, state, capital, ideology, domesticity, the discourse of power and legitimacy—line up so neatly with each other once a year, and the monolith so created is a thing one can come to view with unhappy eyes. (5-6)

There are two gendered figures by which she hypostatizes ideological uniformity here: the phallicised obdurance of the monolith, an image of congratulatory self-agreement and assumed prerogative, self-aurifying, congealed and lumpen; and a kind of Stepford Wives model of mindless replication and consumption. In the stead of these two models of sameness, Sedgwick proposes a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings, institutions and the elements of individual subjectivity can be at 'loose ends with each other'. She aims to disarticulate and disengage the 'lockstep of unanimity' in monolithic systems and institutions (6).

She deploys this same deconstructive optic to identify and challenge naturalised self-alignments in her own and others' academic methodologies, those implicit alignments by which academic inquiry unwittingly falls in with monological structures even when speaking against them. In her essay 'Nationalisms and Sexualities: As opposed to What?' she animadverts on a conference held at her own institution and in which she participated concerning Liberal Arts Education in the late twentieth century. While the conference included a range of contestatory topics and a diversity of approaches—seemingly a model of an environment at 'loose ends with each other'—Sedgwick's reflections on the conference at its conclusion identify a naturalised unanimity in the shared implicit acceptance of the relationship between liberal arts and the shoring up of the 'nation'. While the explicit topic of each paper or panel may have destabilized accepted understandings in different discourses, there was, for Sedgwick, a stable presumption on the 'primary realness of—of all imaginary

things in the world—America' (*Tendencies* 144). For Sedgwick, nationalism or the idea of 'America' that was unconsciously at work throughout the conference, holding it together, in some ways perpetuated the 'lockstep of unanimity' of liberal arts education with nationalism.

That the conference attracted criticism from conservative sections of the media and academy for fostering a decentred conception of literature only underscores her point. The target of the criticism is that the event's emphasis on the theories and practices of diversity constitutes an abjuration from the responsibility of the liberal arts to mold proper national subjects. In this claim, the criticism picks up on the unstated alignment between liberal arts education and nationalism at work in the conference itself. Further, the criticism is a clear enactment of the fear that diversity and dissent in one half of this reflexive couple (the liberal arts) will necessarily instill difference and dissent in the other (the nation). In a typical move, Sedgwick then proceeds from the lesson gleaned by this experience to perform a literary-theoretical reading in which she draws the threads of nationalist ideology at work in the already complex construction of sexuality, subjectivity and literature she examined in earlier works.

The performance of her analytical praxis as a series of graduated stages and revisions in 'Nationalisms and Sexualities' shows how the complication of naturalised alignments is as much about bringing together as it about prising apart. For her, the act of making explicit the nationalist agenda of the liberal arts simultaneously recognises and examines their inter-relation while seeking to fracture their homologous affiliation. The pattern of Sedgwick's argumentation is paradoxical in that distance and difference are enabled by the identification of, and immersion in, the intractability of unspoken connection. Accordingly, Sedgwick's practice of bringing together the seemingly incongruous, the disallowed and the denied into a myriad of dynamic associations can be seen as another move within the same operation. But where she wrenches apart the components of an accepted unanimity, her process of establishing incongruous or improper connections challenges the naturalised borders of proper separation.

In this vein she employs the proximity of juxtaposition and oxymoron for their conventional capacities to shock. The title of her famous essay 'Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl', for instance, derives its enduring humour from its breach of the tacit proprieties concerning the metonymic operation of Jane Austen as a literary safe haven for girls. In certain of its canonical readings—and this may be a broader function of canonicity itself—Austen's fiction is located outside or before the discursive deployment of sexuality; that is, in an imagined temporality before female sexuality itself. As Sedgwick notes, texts about female sexuality 'are supposed not to have had a broad discursive circulation until

later in the nineteenth century' (*Tendencies* 114). Hence Austen, her novels and readers are easily imagined in a place outside or before sexuality itself, a view that is underpinned by the fetishisation of Austen as a virgin spinster.

So, too, the essay's title and its substance write against the avowed heteroerotic program of romance narratives and their overdetermined imperative to coupled conclusion. Sedgwick's reading of *Sense and Sensibility* complicates this certainty to locate the function of heteroerotics within a broader circulation in which alloerotic and autoerotic relations represent intimacy and interiority. She does not designate one sexuality to replace another but proposes a queer reading in which sexuality is in process and constructed by forms of sociality and by genre. Further, this circulation is enmeshed in the fantastical practices of reading and writing. In these connected ways, Sedgwick juxtaposes her own close reading of Austen, not only with dominant scholarship on the canonical author that ascribes a lack of female agency to her heroines, but also with readings of her work that are framed by an overly prescriptive, historical consciousness. She brings Austen close to us not by diminishing her historical distance but by traversing the distance of Austen's auratic canonicity, that presumes the text is already known. Her close reading of Austen exposes its place, in literary history, as one that comes before the advent of modern female sexuality yet is engaged in its formation. Sedgwick's close reading thus breaches the distance between contemporary critic and auratic, scholarly text, and in doing so, elicits our intimate attention.

It is precisely this proximity that accounts for the vehement responses of the many commentators for whom the title represented a form of academic degeneracy. Sedgwick writes that the essay title was adopted by journalists as 'an index of depravity in the academy' and that it 'lets absolutely anyone, in the righteously exciting *vicinity* of the masturbating girl, feel a very pundit' (*Tendencies* 109; *italics mine*). Here Sedgwick exposes one of the calculated but costly risks of her approach. For, as she argues, the detractors may locate their judgments at a distance from her own, but their very locatedness is enabled by the range of new relations of her intimate reading practice.

The chapter 'Wilde, Nietzsche, and the Sentimental Relations of the Male Body' in *Epistemology of the Closet* also assembles ostensibly disparate components and shows the efficacy of their connection. Here, Sedgwick brings together Wilde, Nietzsche, and Willie Nelson, but also contemporary politics and literary classics, pedagogy and literary analysis, high culture and popular culture. Moreover, as with the opening narrative of the university conference in 'Nationalisms and Sexualities', the assembled subjects of discussion are linked by their significance to the authorial subject: an academic in nineteenth-century literary studies and queer studies; but also a car driver who listens to 'shit-kicker' radio and responds on cue to the emotional reaches of country music. The essay is

thus performative in that the movement across the disparate components and registers of the author's subjectivity mirrors the topic of discussion, namely the circulation of sentimentality as a marker of homosexuality.

This circulation is rendered problematic by Sedgwick's location in this economy; her access to male homosexual desire and representation is enabled in this essay by her capacity to share in the sentimental relations between men that does and does not codify homosexuality. Of course one of the most startling aspects of the Willie Nelson story to the new reader of Sedgwick is her admission of heterosexual desire, though this is not a simple matter—if it ever was. Anyone who has taught Sedgwick in sexuality courses is familiar with the moment when students first encounter the seeming anomaly that the Queen of Queer Studies was happily married to Hal Sedgwick—for 40 years. This is not an incidental aspect of her relation with her reader. Many of her obituaries presented this information as an interesting disequilibrium, which is not entirely wrong. It is a significant aspect of her positioning as a situated subject and of that subject's currency in a new field of inquiry. Firstly, of course, her position performs the universalising view of the sexuality she sets out on the first page of *Epistemology of the Closet* by which the homo-heterosexual definition is an issue of 'continuing determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities'.

She deploys this insight to produce such original literary readings, in which, for instance, the representation of lesbian nuns in Diderot's fiction provides a way to understand the operations of all knowledge (*Tendencies* 23-51). This universalizing approach is qualified and personalized, however, by her evident interest in the lives and representations of gay men and the circulation of male desire. Sedgwick shifts the formal ground of relationality by the particular relations of her own position within the components that constitute tone: reader, topic or subject matter, and the broader text. As the writer of the text, Sedgwick is explicitly situated, embodied, political and partial. And so in the concluding pages of the 'Axiomatic' in *Epistemology of the Closet*, she writes of her own vicarious investments in gay fiction:

There may be a rich and conflictual salience of the vicarious embedded within gay fiction. I don't point this out to offer an excuse for the different, openly vicariating cathexis from outside that motivates this study; it either needs or, perhaps, can have none. But this in turn may suggest some ways in which the particular obliquities of my approach to the subject may bias what I find here. (62-63)

There are many such passages in Sedgwick's work, where she draws our attention to what appear to be the limits of her inquiry. However this self-location and self-implication provides a more precise inflection of reading and

writing desire at work and invites the reader to position herself. In my own reading of Sedgwick, the instance that most challenged me on first reading in 1991 was her admission to enjoying country and western music and the erotic and sentimental portrayals of men therein. The levels and registers of the incongruous are set out here with such pleasure:

One night in Ithaca in the mid-seventies, I happened to tune into a country music station in the middle of a song I had never heard before. An incredibly pretty male voice that I half recognized as Willie Nelson's was singing:

And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own.
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

He speaks; and the sound of his voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing.
And the melody that he gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.

And he walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own.
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

I'd stay in the garden with him
Though the night around me is falling,
But he bids me go through the voice of woe,
His voice to me is calling.

She comments: 'This blew me away' (142). She records her amazement that erotic relations between men could be played with such candour on 'shitkicker' radio. She peers through the conventions of religious kitsch that provide the alibi for this erotic and sentimental representation and sees the richness of erotic relations and identifications the song offers. She thereby draws our attention to a disavowed homoeroticism at work in mainstream culture. Her recognition of this connection is the work of a trickster: we are accustomed to the connection between religious and erotic discourses, though this connection may still give pause in some quarters. Sedgwick's innovation here is the linking of eroticism with sentimentality and with the signaling of the availability of both to those who do not properly belong to them: a woman, a non-Christian, a ruthlessly-precise analytic subject. She is a trickster too in that her insight derives not only from her an 'abductive', in this case somatic, response but from the willingness to trust and follow that response.

The ensuing discussion further complicates this admission. She picks up the story ten years after her experience of radio rapture, when she encounters an essay on religious kitsch that criticises sentimentality and which directly references a version of the hymn Willie Nelson sings. Sedgwick identifies the twofold source of the author's disgust: 'one is topical, concerning the subject of sentimentality; and one grammatical, regarding its *relations*' (142) The second of these, the relational and grammatical pertains to the discussion at hand. As Sedgwick asserts, the first person 'I' can pertain to either gender, thereby enabling multiple identifications, of which Sedgwick avails herself. Moreover she identifies the equivocal first person or impossible first person (the dead speaker) as a particularly potent sentimental marker. She writes of her own response to this figure:

My goose bumps are always poised for erection at 'She walks these hills in a long black veil,/Visits my grave when the night winds wail.'
And my waterworks are always primed for 'Rocky, I've never had to die before.' (143)

Sedgwick herself performs the slippage across gender in her somatic responses: she is both 'poised for erection' and her 'waterworks are always primed'. As if in response to the gendered forms of sameness posed by monolithic alignments Sedgwick occupies and commandeers the prerogative of both sexed responses. Further, her own relation to the sentimental object itself is multiple: she is excited both by the male body as it is foregrounded for her as 'I' and by the ways it operates as an erotic object between men, a scene in which she is an onlooker. Furthermore, these positions are not mutually exclusive. Hence she concludes that sentimentality is not so much a thematic of a particular subject matter but a structure of relation.

For a writer as relentlessly analytical as Sedgwick, the absence of any account of her tastes and preferences is very marked in this discussion. Nor does she provide an analysis of tastes and preferences. She re-orders the relationship between subjects and objects by refusing to validate or explain the connections. They just are what they are. This is not to argue that she imagines these as self-generated but that her silence is a presumption of the legitimacy of her predilections. This refusal to explain taste and preference in regard to her own sentimental and erotic responses is also refusing the need to account for homosexual origin and preference. As she readily acknowledges, her own identity is not subject to the political and cultural opprobrium of homosexual subjects but is trickster-like. She does use 'vulnerable feelings' in an overdetermined sense here, that is as a stand-in for a shared sentimentality that is the means by which she repositions relations, to perform, in her own terms, a 'universalising' view that is nonetheless a 'situated knowledge'.

This performance of subjectivity and pleasure is risky for a range of reasons, one of which Marilee Lindemann sets out in her review of *Novel Gazing*, which opens: ‘The first line of this essay was going to be, *Queer Studies is fun*’ (Lindemann 757). Lindemann questions the direction in which she perceives queer studies to be heading because she thinks it is ‘possible to foresee “queer studies without lesbians and gay men”’ (767). She is also concerned that queer studies is not effecting any change in the status of people with ‘nonprocreative sexualities’ in institutions or the broader culture. Lindemann’s reading poses a number of questions for Sedgwick’s queer reading practice, especially as it has been taken up by devotees of her work. Most obviously, Lindemann’s reservations echo the controversy Judith Butler’s performative understanding of gender posed for feminism—namely that the volatile understanding of subjectivity may jeopardise a politics based on identification. Perhaps, also, Lindemann’s argument directs us to a problematic of queer studies itself, as practiced by Sedgwick, which is that it might be based on a set of practices that presume a kind of gender separateness. In this latter reading, Lindemann’s argument is an inevitable point of critique in the terms of the field itself. Indeed, the style, tone and structure of Lindemann’s essay locate her in this field, even if her essay is thoughtfully posited. The essay is at first entertaining and personal, setting up the project of reviewing as a situated dilemma in time, and then moves to a counter-narrative of queer studies derived from pedagogic experience. The mode and the tone are Sedgwickian. And it is not so much the humour or the pleasure that characterizes the connection but the moves across the registers of academic inquiry and everyday experience. Lindemann is writing in the very space that Sedgwick helped construct. That she arrives at a distinctive position that includes criticism of *Novel Gazing* only emphasizes this point.

This critique of Sedgwick is useful here too in relation to the questions of shame that preoccupied Sedgwick via Silvan Tomkins. Shame, according to Tomkins, ‘is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation’ (*Shame* 133) but it is also an originary affect. Hence Sedgwick and Frank claim that ‘for Tomkins not only shame but also theory come from shame theory’ (22). In the terms of Stephen Barber and David L. Clark, shame for Sedgwick ‘vivifies and consolidates the subject in a moment of wincing isolation’ (Barber and Clark 26). In the terms of this essay, shame shores up the subject in the moment of their individual if embarrassed intervention in academic inquiry. In a shame-prone environment such as the academy, Sedgwick’s legacy is a model of intellectual inquiry that is relentless, even ruthless, in its attention and precision. Yet, like Tomkins whose ‘brash generosity’ she so admired, she ‘burns out the fear response’ of complex argument and disallowed discussion by casting it as a shared present moment of discovery (*Shame* 1, 3). The act of burning out the

fear response occurs when anticipated rejection and shame are admitted and performed for us and shown to be neither annihilating or conclusive. Crucially, this act is not the eradication of shame but the acceptance of it.

Paradoxically, Sedgwick's acceptance of shame paves the way for unashamed and shameless inquiry, for shame is no longer a brutalizing endpoint. If, as Tomkins argues, shame is affect of strangeness—where one is shamed because our anticipated or sought-after acceptance is turned down—Sedgwick has provided a field of potential recognition and identification (*Shame* 123). In this way admission, embarrassment and the fear of error lose their deflating power in a circulation of ongoing realization, refinement and pleasure. Part of her gift in such shame-prone environments as the academy and queer communities is her acceptance of shame alongside a facilitating performance of continuing unashamed and shameless.

This refusal of the shameful ending re-situates the relation between writer, text, and reader and constitutes a radical practice that has contagious effects. There is a generosity in Sedgwick's self-placement here—and elsewhere—which is all the more so because it is implicit, embedded in the structures and grammar of her writing. The space she carves out for the relationship between writer and reader is one of co-readership. Reading is a shared enterprise—as evidenced by our reading of her reading. Reading is constructed in this narrative of reading as developing and accumulating over time. In the instance of her discussion of sentimentality, she gives us a narrative of reading according to the progression of Pindaric ode as deployed by the Romantic poets: strophe-antistrophe-epode or thesis-antithesis-synthesis. But here the somatic and sublime experience comes first (hearing Willie Nelson on the radio), followed by a disembodied analysis (not hers in this case) and then the yoking together of these two moments—ten years apart—for the embodied analysis that proceeds.

We, the readers, are allowed into this process as it develops and she presumes we are with her. Just as the hymn brought her into company of the speaker and his desired object who 'walks with me, and [...] talks with me', we are invited to 'tarry' with (the auratic figure of) Sedgwick and re-form the relations of her discussion by our intervention. In this way, too, Sedgwick is a trickster, for she both breaches distance between auratic texts and secular readers yet also re-institutes a reminder of the distance between star-author and close reader. She lets you in on the jokes, she happily owns her own position, she moves between the vernacular and highly formal academic idiom and in so doing enables and invites an intimate reading practice across difference. As an academic, what she convinces you, in addition to her many insights, is that there is nothing else you would rather do. For there is such pleasure in this activity, including engagement with the arcane and the vernacular, the cognitive and affective, the aesthetic and the political, which, when unashamed, provides, for those

inclined, those with those tendencies, a radical means by which to position themselves as inquiring subjects. What she restores to us as a kind of birthright is the pleasure of the libidinal charge of thought and writing.

The jury is out as to whether this legacy will continue. We are very familiar with the disequilibrium between the radical topics undertaken by some of the most conservative practitioners of our disciplines. The dominant mode of writing and communication remains staunchly monological, monolithic. It denies the historicity of its own invention in a bid to ensure an ahistorical relevance. Sedgwick's self-positioning must date her for she strenuously engages with chronology: her daily life in teaching and researching, her friends and colleagues, her anecdotes from the classroom, current cultural issues, the ways she shared the euphoria of the 'queer' moment of 1992 (*Tendencies*). One way of keeping her close, I am suggesting here, is to attend intimately to her texts and enter into their complex relationality. She opened up not only new spaces for inquiry and the inquirer but also the possibility of their ongoing dynamism. Furthermore she 'burned out the fear response' attendant on the necessary risks of this mode in inquiry. It is here, as ironic chameleon or trickster, that she teaches us how to read and, for many of us, how to live a reading, writing life.

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Queer Memoir: Public Confession and/ as Sexual Practice in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love*

ELIZABETH STEPHENS

In a revealing exchange during the documentary *Derrida*, the filmmakers ask Derrida what he himself would be most curious to know about the lives of the philosophers whose work had influenced his own. 'Their sex lives', Derrida replies, without hesitation. 'So, can we ask you about your sex life?' the interviewers ask. Derrida looks unimpressed. 'No', he says.

This staged, even solicited, refusal to provide any information about a subject he himself has raised as one of both personal interest and intellectual significance represents an exemplary moment in this film, which grapples with what it means to document a life—especially the life of a philosopher whose own work has so relentlessly problematised widely-held assumptions about the relationship between subjective experience and representational economies. From Derrida's earliest theorisations of the writing process—in which, through an analysis of the autobiography of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he drew a parallel between the way writing was culturally positioned as the 'dangerous supplement' of speech and the way Rousseau understood masturbation as the dangerous supplement of heterosexual coitus¹—Derrida has argued that all writing is inevitably inflected by the affective investments and the specificity of a subject whose textual presence is, in turn, simultaneously mediated by wider systems of language and representation which pre-scribe the terms in which (auto)biographies can be written.

The implications of this for contemporary understandings of first-person writing—and particularly of the possibility of self-representation for marginalised subjects examined within the context of queer studies—are most succinctly articulated in Derrida's theorisation of the signature, in which the concept of the signature provides a way to rethink the relationship between author and text by reconceptualising the autobiographical subject as a form of textual inscription. That is, the idea of the signature provides a conceptual

1 The 'dangerous supplement' is the term Derrida uses to describe the paradoxical relationship between the dominant and marginalised terms of a binary opposition, in which the terms are seen both as opposites, hence exterior to each other, but also as structurally and semantically dependent on each other, and hence inextricably interwoven: while the supplement 'is exterior to ... [and] supervenes upon' the dominant term, it does so 'always by way of compensation for [sous l'espèce de la suppléance] what ought to lack nothing at all in itself' (*Of Grammatology* 145).

framework in which authorial presence is neither identified as the source of textual truth nor entirely simply erased from the text the author produces, but is instead rethought as a dynamic that is mobilised in and through the practice of writing.² In *Glas*, Derrida theorises the signature through a comparative analysis of Hegel's apparently objective philosophical style and the highly idiosyncratic autobiographical fiction of Jean Genet, problematising the assumed 'contradiction between a discourse of philosophical teaching that represses, effaces and excludes the signature, and Genet's poetic text that carries his own signature, is or becomes or incorporates his signature' (30).³ This is the double impossibility of autobiography, of all writing, with which Derrida confronts his own would-be biographers: all writing is inscribed by the authorial subject whose specificity both shapes and eludes the text he/she produces.

While it may seem unusual to begin a study of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love* with this overview of the conceptualisation of autobiography in the work of another theorist, such problematisations of the status and singularity of the autobiographical subject lay at the heart of Sedgwick's own text and, more broadly, of those areas of queer studies principally concerned with issues of self-representation. The entire text of *A Dialogue on Love* reads like the result of having said 'yes' to the question about the sex life of the philosopher Derrida both posed and refused to answer. Like Derrida, Sedgwick recognises the sexual and affective attachments of the writing subject as integral to the text s/he produces; like Derrida, she also recognises the extent to which this sexual dimension—and, indeed, the importance attributed to sexuality

2 In *Signéponge/Signsponge*, Derrida identifies three 'modalities' of the signature. The first is 'the signature in the proper sense ... the act of someone not content to write his proper name (as if he were filling out an identity card), but engaged in authenticating (if possible) the fact that it is indeed he who writes' (52–54). That is to say, it is the autograph, the 'repeatable, iterable, imitable form' of the name ('Signature Event Context' 328). The second modality is 'the set of idiomatic marks that a signer might leave by accident or intention in his product. ... We sometimes call this the style, the inimitable idiom of a writer, sculptor, painter, or orator' (*Signéponge/Signsponge* 54). Just as the signature bears the recognisable mark of its author's (hand)writing style, so does the author's recognisable literary style allow us to identify his/her text as, for instance, Derridean. Thirdly, there is the 'general signature, or signature of the signature, the fold of the placement in the abyss where ... the work of writing designates, describes and inscribes itself as act. ... I refer to myself, this is writing, I am a writing' (ibid. 54).

3 Derrida takes Hegel and Genet as the two case studies through which to examine this issue precisely because their own respective approaches appear so fundamentally opposed. In contrast to Genet's insistently self-referential prose, Hegel's writing represents itself as objective and impartial, uninflected by autobiographical concerns: 'The first column devoted to Hegel emphasizes the fact that he doesn't sign, that a philosopher doesn't sign, that the name of a philosopher isn't essential to his discourse,' Derrida explains in 'Countersignature' (31). Derrida's argument in *Glas*, however, is that Genet's writing makes visible dynamics that exist within all writing, including the depersonalised language of philosophers: *all* writing reveals traces of its author's style or 'signature.' Arguing against the assumption, which he argues is evident in many philosophical texts, that the specificity of the writing subject can be erased in the articulation of some abstract philosophical Truth, Derrida contends that philosophy itself must be understood as *written*: the metaphors and allusions in which it couches itself are not ornamental or extraneous to it, but an essential and internal part of its meaning in a way it often tries to obscure. Truth is never 'present' in a purely objective, transparent articulation of Reason and Logic, but is always mediated both through the rhetoric, metaphors and figures of speech it deploys, as well as inflected by the specificity of the subject who uses it.

itself in the construction of subjectivity and textuality—is a product of a particular cultural and historical context. *A Dialogue on Love* is, it should be noted, written immediately after the publication of *Epistemology of the Closet*, whose Foucauldian central argument is that the contemporary understanding of sexuality as a private or secret or essential part of oneself is the product of new public spaces and institutions emergent during the nineteenth century. In her theorisation of the ‘glass closet’, for instance, Sedgwick contends that the trope of the closet is often invoked in nineteenth-century fiction as a means by which to represent sexualities that are publicly constructed as something hidden and private.

The text of *A Dialogue on Love* both continues and extends the argument about the importance attributed to sexuality to the construction and experience of subjectivity found in *Epistemology of the Closet*. A first-person narrative that traces the course of therapy Sedgwick undertook subsequent to her treatment for breast cancer, which included a mastectomy and the depression that followed, *A Dialogue on Love* provides a detailed account of Sedgwick’s relationship to and understanding of her body and sexuality. That someone who has just published a major reconceptualisation of the binarised relationship between public and private should produce, immediately afterwards, a public account of her own intensely personal experiences might strike the reader as a rather perverse act—and this perversity is, explicitly, a large part of the appeal such an act holds for Sedgwick, a means by which to inscribe the specificity of her own sexual subjectivity within the representational and epistemological contexts by which it is produced.

In this way, Sedgwick, like Derrida, draws her readers’ attention to the impossibility of the fascination at the centre of her own writing, and of the (auto)biographical act in which it is grounded: autobiography is a public account that produces particular aspects of a life as personal and private in order to ‘reveal’ them to the reader. In the stance taken by both of these theorists—manifested, on the one hand, by the awkwardness and dead silence that follows Derrida’s refusal to respond to his interviewers’ prompted question, and, on the other, by what Sedgwick herself refers to as the ‘teeth-grinding embarrassment’ (171) of her own voluble response—the double impossibility of sexual self-representation is made strikingly clear: the topic of sex(uality) is that which repeatedly imposes itself as a question without a (fixed) answer, but which one is nonetheless impelled repeatedly to pose. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick famously asserted that sexuality was so culturally central and significant that ‘virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it

does not incorporate [its] critical analysis' (1).⁴ The start of *A Dialogue on Love*, however, problematises her own attempt to discuss her sexuality before the text has even begun. Sedgwick reflects at the start of her sessions with her therapist, Shannon: 'I know I want to talk about sex, it's what I do for a living and I'm good at that. But my own sexuality—do I even have one?' (42). Thus while Sedgwick recognises, like Derrida, the role of one's own sexuality and affective investments in the production of knowledge and texts, she also recognises the simultaneous impossibility of talking about one's 'own' sexuality—either as something one owns or as a singular thing.

Like Irigaray, then, Sedgwick understands her sexuality as 'not one'—that is, as unrecognisable through the conceptual categories by which sexuality is conventionally understood, largely because it is neither singular nor unified.⁵ In Sedgwick's account, her sexuality operates across three different, often disconnected, fields. Firstly, there is the sex she has with her partner, a 'hygienic and routinised' practice of 'vanilla sex', undertaken 'on a weekly basis, in the missionary position, in daylight, immediately after a shower, with one person of the so-called opposite sex, to whom I've been legally married for almost a quarter of a century' (44). Secondly, there is the sex she has or thinks about alone, in masturbation and fantasy, which is focused primarily on an S/M eroticism and which she understands as most expressive of what she would identify as her 'sexuality'. Finally, there is her professional and social inclination to '(homo)sexualise' her texts and contexts, her role as someone 'whose work and politics and friendship, whose interpretive and teaching and lecturing life, talking and joking, reading, thinking, whatever, are probably as infused with sexual meanings and motives and connections—*gay ones*—as anybody's you're ever likely to meet' (44; original emphasis). This multiple and dispersed range of sexual experiences and expressions is not something Sedgwick is interested to—or knows how to—unify into one sexuality, or one subject position, or one kind of narrative. It is precisely this, as the rest of this paper will explore, that makes sex so central to and exemplary of the fraught practice of autobiography for Sedgwick, and which transforms *A Dialogue on Love* from a 'straight' autobiography into a queer memoir—it is a text that inscribes a 'self' which is not one.'

This is the issue at the heart of Sedgwick's text: *A Dialogue on Love* is not an attempt to provide a direct or unmediated account of her experience in therapy;

4 Sedgwick is speaking here more particularly of the binarisation of the categories of hetero- and homosexuality, emergent during the nineteenth century.

5 Irigaray argues that the 'at least two (lips)' of the female sex both materialise and metaphorise women's absence from the phallogocentric systems within which conventional notions of sexuality are conceptualised: 'Whence the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities. *She is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition' (26; original emphasis).

rather, it is a queer investigation of the terms in which such experiences can be inscribed, posing the question of how one might write about both sexuality and affective relationships—which, as she acknowledges, occupy such a prominent position in her own professional and personal life—when the conceptual terms and narrative trajectories available in which to articulate these circumscribe so much of what can be said and thought about them. In particular, Sedgwick wonders how she might enter the discursive space of therapy, find a way to articulate herself within a therapeutic narrative, while avoiding recuperation into its normalising narratives. As Foucault has so influentially argued, the nineteenth-century emergence of psychiatry was a crucial part of the disciplinary society developing during the same period, and came to constitute one of its key technologies of normalisation. As Sedgwick recognises, much of what she says about her own sexuality in *A Dialogue on Love* is easily, almost too easily, recuperable into pathologising narratives, psychiatric discourses. She notes: ‘the snowballing of gay-lesbian studies has given me a big, additional reason for being shy about my actual sexuality (if this even is one). Since it makes such a bad fit—and it’s been so much easier just to put other people’s queer sexuality in the place of my own, the place where, anyway, so much of my identification, passion, and thinking have always lived’ (171). Within standard therapeutic narratives, as Shannon notes in the extracts from his case files that Sedgwick includes throughout her text, the non-unified multiplicity of Sedgwick’s sexualities would be identified as a failure of subjective integration:

We return to sex and talk about how hard it is to focus on this topic. Part of it is the fact that, while sex is a presence in E’s life in myriad ways, these ways are so discontinuous. This makes it hard for her or us to form a coherent narrative understanding of it. E notes that all the elements of it were there in her early years but have become more fragmented—instead of more integrated—in the ensuing years. (158)

As a result, he continues a little later, Sedgwick has ‘no sexual subject position to organise her sensations’ (186).

And yet, despite the context in which her discussion of sexuality takes place, *A Dialogue on Love* is not the account of Sedgwick’s normalisation in and through the therapeutic process, the Foucauldian confession of her sexuality. Neither Sedgwick nor Shannon suggests that her dispersed sexualities constitute a problem or pathology: she seems content to enjoy each on their different levels and to be uninterested in unifying these into a coherent sexual identity. This is, of course, exactly the position one would expect from one of the founding figures of queer theory, who defined queer as ‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically’ (*Tendencies* 8). Sedgwick is not

interested, to paraphrase Foucault, in ‘making the difficult confession of who she is’, in subjugating herself before the master narrative of her therapist. The way she develops as the best means by which to avoid this, as the title of her book indicates, is to ensure the therapeutic process does not function as a clash of monologues, in which the therapeutic narrative comes to correct and replace that of the patient, but rather to transform it into a genuine dialogue, one in whose affective dimension she can trust. It is in this respect that Sedgwick’s project differs markedly from Derrida’s, and it is precisely this difference that propels her exhaustive response to the question of the sex life of the philosopher, and her examination of its role in shaping the theoretical work she produces. Whereas Derrida’s work focuses primarily on the possibilities and difficulties of autobiographical writing as philosophical problems—albeit problems in which he has a deep, and culturally-encouraged, personal interest—Sedgwick is motivated by her stated aim to change herself, to relieve the debilitating effects of depression: ‘I need you *to change me*’, she says to Shannon (51; original emphasis). To herself, she resolves: ‘If I can fit the pieces of this self back together at all, I don’t want them to be the way they were’ (7).

A Dialogue on Love is the account of Sedgwick’s attempt to establish a productive space in which such change can occur, as well as a record of her reservations about the possibilities of achieving this. She makes very clear to Shannon from the outset that she wants to avoid turning her therapy into a ‘disciplinary machine’, and that she sees placing positive affective relationships at the heart of the process as the best way to counteract this possibility. She says:

There’s something about pleasure that might be important. I don’t know how to say it properly; I’ve gotten hold of an intuition that if things can change for me, it won’t be through a very grim process. ... I used to take one deep masochistic breath, and determine I was ready to surrender to the disciplinary machine—in enough pain to have to do it—but then of course I didn’t know how to, and couldn’t sustain my resolve anyway; and nothing about the therapy would work. Now it seems that if anything can bring me through to real change, it may only be some kind of pleasure. (45)

There are no doubt compelling reasons why someone recovering from chemotherapy and a mastectomy, now suffering depression, would want to minimise grim experiences and prioritise pleasure; Sedgwick needs to be able to trust that Shannon has something else to offer than a reinscription of her identity and experience by the ‘disciplinary machinery’ of therapy. But the kind of reciprocity and mutuality she is looking for is also a necessary pre-requisite for the queer ethics and politics to which she is committed; they are the very condition of possibility in which different kinds of knowledge, social structures, relationships and forms of (self-)representation might emerge.

Sedgwick is, initially, unconvinced by Shannon's ability to enter into such a mutual process. She worries that he is too conservative to help her, not smart enough; that he will be '[t]oo dumb or too nice' (51). Most importantly, she fears he will lack empathy and understanding as a result of his own socialised position as a heterosexual male: 'He looks like a guy. Someone who's never viewed his body, or had or wanted it viewed, much as an object of desire. Someone also for whom, maybe—unlike me or most anyone I love—his entitlement to exist, the OK-ness of being who and as he is, has never seemed very seriously questionable. It worries me: how could someone like that have learned to think or feel?' (9-10). Yet Sedgwick and Shannon do establish a dialogue, across the space of these differences, as reflected, most obviously, by Sedgwick's increasing inclusion of Shannon's case notes within the space of her own text, so that Sedgwick is less the sole author of an autobiographical narrative than a participant in a dialogue about affective relationships and experiences. This is, indeed, what *A Dialogue on Love* is about: not an autobiographical account of Sedgwick's own experience in therapy—does she even have one?—but of the affective bonds, the love, she shares with her therapist. It is important to her, Sedgwick notes, that Shannon's love is somehow impersonal (that he loves her, but not only her, as she puts it), while her own love refrains from imposing itself, from seeing itself as a demand that must be acknowledged. Early on in the text, she writes:

I've already developed a strategy for 'We have to stop now' [the phrase that signals the end of each session]. In fact, most hours—not this one—I expect the sentence before it comes.

When it does come, I'll hop from the couch with an almost eager promptness. It's the same way, when I used to be in love with someone who wasn't in love with me, I would pantomime, 'But I'll never be a burden to you'. It signifies the supposed lightness of my demand and presence. (50)

The word 'supposed' is doing a lot of work here (not least because Sedgwick also confides that she sometimes drives past Shannon's office on non-consultation days, taking comfort in seeing the light in his window). For Sedgwick, however, a certain detachment within the space of the intimate relationship is a necessary prerequisite to a positive therapeutic experience, producing the space of openness in which she is able to establish dialogue and effect a personal change.

The extent to which Sedgwick is ultimately reassured about the reciprocity of the dialogue she establishes with Shannon is reflected in the increasing space she makes available for the inclusion of his case notes as the text continues, even granting him the concluding lines to a narrative that has become progressively more co-written. Noting (in contrast to her own comment above) that Sedgwick has a tendency towards 'not being able to stop', he remarks: 'She remembers

telling me how she waits for someone to tell her she can “stop now”—eg, die. She imagines me doing this some time in the future. She also talks about having come to be able to hear a voice like my voice inside herself when it is quiet that she can trust and have confidence in. I can imagine the voice telling her she can stop’ (220). This internalisation of Shannon’s voice reflects the level of trust that Sedgwick has developed in her therapist, but it is not, of course, an unreciprocated influence: rather, and as the comments from Shannon’s case notes come to occupy more and more of the text, it is evident how much Shannon himself had internalised Sedgwick’s voice, sometimes writing in the first-person from her point of view, or reflecting explicitly on his own sexuality or subject position in ways Sedgwick has clearly prompted him to think about.

And it is precisely in this respect that *A Dialogue on Love* reads more like a queer memoir than ‘straight autobiography’, whose conventions it largely resists. For a start, the narrative avoids a traditional linear trajectory and teleological function, not least because the main character declares that she has lost interest in the story and wanders off before the end of the text, leaving Shannon to finish the account. She realises that she finds the discussions of her sexual fantasies ‘boring, banal, stereotypic’ (174), rather than revelatory, and loses interest in further recounting them. Rather more pressingly, however, Sedgwick discovers during the writing of this text that her cancer has returned, and this news propels her into what she characterises as an ‘arts and crafts mania’: ‘I’ve started to elope from my school and writing, flying towards this stuff with the stealth, joy, almost the guilt of adultery’ (199). Despite the fact Sedgwick remains the central character in a text written in the first person, *A Dialogue on Love* is nonetheless not, as I have indicated above, an autobiographical account of one subject’s life or experiences; rather, it is the record of the intimate relationship that develops between two people (at least one of whom already identifies as multiple).

In *Glas*, Derrida claims that his theorisation about the relationship between subjectivity and writing occurs in the spaces between his two separate columns on Hegel and Genet. The dialogue, and the love, between Sedgwick and Shannon similarly take place in the space(s) between them, where their voices are able to speak to and be heard by one another. The first-person status of the narrator, so central to traditional autobiography, is here textually dispersed, with Sedgwick’s account augmented both by Shannon’s notes and the *haibun* (short Japanese poems classically used to describe travel) that break up the text. In this way, *A Dialogue on Love* is not the record of Sedgwick’s therapy sessions so much as ‘the writing of Shannon and me’ (203); it is about intimacy, not identity, affective dynamics rather than the therapeutic narrative. And yet, despite its focus on the unstable dynamic of love, rather than the life-story of a unified self, the queer narrator of this generically anomalous text nonetheless

remains an insistent, and dominant, presence within it. Despite her professed embarrassment in talking about her 'own' sexuality and her willingness 'to put other people's queer sexuality in the place of my own', it is still Sedgwick's own, often perverse, sexualised investment that propels the narrative forward: 'sexiness and embarrassment are two things that won't ever stay separate for me', she tells Shannon, noting to the reader: 'it's *exciting* for me to talk about this with him' (171; original emphasis). And, presumably, to talk about it to us—the public readers of this private record. *A Dialogue on Love* is, amongst other things, the inscription of this excitement, of the compulsively 'masturbating girl' Sedgwick identifies as, here and elsewhere, who fantasises at great and tireless length (as she tells Shannon) about the public exposure of her private desires. In this way, Sedgwick's queer specificity finds its way into her text, into her therapy, not through an autobiographical account of her own experiences or sexualities, but through the dynamic and inter-subjective process of writing itself, whose constant negotiations both exemplify and exacerbate her multiple attachments to the dialogue itself, that 'big, spreading field of intimacy where love just grows wild' (214).

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At the Time of Writing: Sedgwick's Queer Temporalities

ANNA GIBBS

This essay, written 'after Sedgwick', in no way attempts to imitate her inimitable writing, but operates, rather, in the wake of her work, drawing together some of the concerns that animated it—queer theory, affect theory, and literary performativity—and drawing on it, perhaps obliquely, to address an unlikely text, Jane DeLynn's *Don Juan in the Village*. It's an unlikely text because it seems in many ways too obvious (since it deals explicitly with lesbian sexuality and with the affects of shame and disgust and therefore can't possibly require 'queering'), and it's unlikely, too, because specifically lesbian fiction is so rarely taken to make present and palpable something of the politics of queer, never mind the politics of the literary *tout court*. On the other hand, though, Sedgwick's work amply legitimates such a perverse textual choice.

If the phrase 'at the time of writing' means *now*, in the present moment, it also suggests a qualification, the possibility that things may be different at some other time, in a future simultaneously anticipated and unanticipated. It is this *aporia* that renders conformity to certain theoretical routines futile, and that challenges writing to remain 'live'—alive to the unexpected spark that comes from a disruptive glitch in the smooth taken-for-grantedness of the self or social. This might take the form of the temporal disorientation brought about by the contingencies of queer lives such as those Sedgwick describes, in which the singular relationship to the succession of generations makes it clear that yesterday differs from today and tomorrow (*Novel Gazing* 26). Or it might more actively be brought about by a work of queer reading attuned 'exquisitely to a heartbeat of contingency' (25) and performed in a writing adequate to the moment in which identification 'falls across gender' and 'falls no less across sexualities, across "perversions"' (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 257). This process we now term 'queering' might once, in traditional English departments, have been called 'perversion', in the sense of unwarranted caricature, distortion, falsification, twisting or slanting (to cite the terms my desktop thesaurus offers as synonyms). If such work is now warranted by virtue of its articulation as a rhetorical method, it remains crucial not to forget the sexual sense of 'perversion' suppressed by my thesaurus—no doubt because of its history as a term of derision. It is crucial, likewise, to refuse to allow the term 'queer' to be completely detached from the marginalized sexualities and the very

particular political contestations which have revived it as a 'reverse discourse' (Foucault 101). For to allow this detachment would mean that 'queering' is no more than a metaphor for operations that may have nothing whatsoever to do with marginalized sexualities or those of us whose lives are still in many ways defined by them. But nor should it simply be reduced to them. Sedgwick's work makes clear that, if queer is always 'relational' to other flows, it cannot simply be assumed to exist but requires constant reinvention by a performative process—in which bodies are at stake—in the liveness of the here and now that is reading, as well as writing.

If some feminist theories of performativity in the wake of Sedgwick's work, and indeed Shoshana Felman's *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* (the translation of which from the French was first published as *The Literary Speech Act*), have sometimes seemed to disavow the materiality of bodies, Terry Threadgold suggests that one possible antidote to this tendency would be to explore 'the complex ways in which bodies and texts fold into one another, crafting and shaping the materiality of [both] texts and of bodies' (Threadgold). Sedgwick's particular commitment to the literary was, I think, an attempt to do just this: after all, it was an experience of reading (Proust) that introduced Sedgwick to the queer possibilities her work went on to bring into being (*Epistemology*). Now, in a context in which the literary has supposedly been rendered redundant by digital media and popular culture, it seems important to stress that literary reading is not only a site for critical work on and in language, through which we may discover the way language works us as we work it, but that literary writing in whatever medium also *does* that work—because literature, as Roland Barthes once put it 'performs language rather than merely using it' (*Leçon 19*; my translation). It is through 'literary writing [*écriture*], [that] knowledge reflects incessantly on itself, by virtue of a discourse which is not epistemological, but dramatic' (19). What this means is that bodies must always be at stake in it, since it requires that we give ourselves wholly over to active imaginative participation in it (at least at one stage of reading), rather than remaining at a detached and disinterested critical distance.

Fiction, after all, demands a visceral involvement, one that challenges the fixity of our own bodily limits. To read fiction at all is to lend our body to alien affects, and to allow ourselves to be possessed by them. Fiction solicits our affective energies and draws them into worlds of story for which it also requires a certain suspension of cognitive disbelief—that is, a willing belief in the face of knowledge to the contrary—a process known to psychoanalytic thought as disavowal. Fiction is, as Roland Barthes has it, the locus *par excellence* of disavowal, disavowal being, of course, the very badge of perversion. Arguably, all fiction is also contractual—another symptom of perversion, for it too is solicitous of an intimacy that is designed rather than spontaneous, although of

course neither meaning nor reading can ever be fully controlled or predicted, and this sets the stage for precisely the kind of contingency that queer readings will seize. We might even argue that fiction, both the writing and the reading of it, is an everyday perversion, and in so arguing, we see that perversion lies at least potentially within us rather than safely without. We can no longer disown perversion by projecting onto the other, whom we designate as 'pervert'. And here we glimpse what Freud (as against the sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis) saw: that perversion is a general state of affairs and so-called 'normality' a special case, often violently imposed.

For this reason, as well as because of its direct hold on the body, fiction may be, if not exactly a privileged, at least an important site for the explorations of queer theory. Especially so, perhaps, in its need to work with, as well as against, the fictions of the subject, among which I include the experience of the self which forms part of the culture of absorption—as opposed to what Margaret Morse has termed the 'culture of distraction'—to which fiction belongs.¹ Arguably, we are now starting to see another alternative emerge in new media cultures which remediate the literary but which also give rise to different forms of attention, different techniques of memory and different dispositions of the body—and with them, new, emergent forms of subjectivity. This argues a need to be alive to subjectivity as a process rather than a given. While there is a powerful line of thought that would want to dispense altogether with subjectivity as a foundation for queer theory (e.g. Lauren Berlant), Sedgwick's work rather insists on troubling and unsettling subjectivity above all by insisting on both its contingency and its relationality. This enables her to avoid its reification as a category, while still charting trajectories born of the moments where subjectivity exceeds what is normative in that particular moment. And it is this that qualifies her work as an ethical project.

Central to the experience of the self—perhaps especially in the culture of interiority and the politics of identity to which it has given rise—is the affect of shame. But shame is also what might shatter the plenitude of the self on which interiority and identity both depend. Shame is the site at which 'the *question* of identity arises more originally, and most relationally', according to Sedgwick ('Shame in the Cybernetic Fold' 239). Shame arises, according to Silvan Tomkins (to whose work Sedgwick and Adam Frank introduced queer theory and the humanities more broadly) at the precise moment when interest in, excitement about, or enjoyment of communion with the other is suddenly interrupted. Although of course one can feel shame at something remembered, or imagined, shame is prototypically relational in origin: it is a social affect in a way that fear or distress or interest are not. Paradoxically, shame produces

¹ According to Morse, the culture of distraction includes the contemporary experiences of driving on the freeway, spacing out in the shopping mall, and watching television.

searing consciousness of self at the very moment it threatens to dissolve that self completely. For that reason, the struggle between shame and the self has often been represented as a fight to the death: 'She would have thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead of which, the shame died'. Such is the experience of D.H. Lawrence's Constance Chatterley (258), harbinger of the discourse of sexual liberation movements that envisaged shame as something from which we could be freed. But for Sedgwick this is an impossible project, because even the 'affirmative reclamation' that makes 'queer' into a reverse discourse will never 'succeed in detaching the word from its associations with shame and with the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood' ('Queer Performativity' 4). Perhaps it's the case that that this is now less true for some (young, white people living in cities like Sydney or San Francisco, for example) than for others, but in any case Sedgwick's work finds a use for shame precisely because of the threat it poses to the subject who finds herself overcome by it. Yet to work on shame, and with shame, in the face of the politics of pride is a risky process. If shame tends to concealment and the cryptic, pride, on the contrary, calls for revelation and display. But not the revelation of shame. Shame, as Tomkins points out, is itself shameful and by virtue of that, reluctant to speak its name.

Perhaps it is not by chance that if Sedgwick is the cartographer *par excellence* of the complex convolutions of shame in theoretical writing, her counterpart in fiction should be a lesbian writer, Jane DeLynn, whose work has been little addressed by scholarly writing, perhaps because it coincides with the very moment when, as Sedgwick points out, the politics of pride have become reflexive.² But DeLynn's work is not anachronistic: it is writing post-Pride, writing that unfolds a landscape of the unspoken and the unspeakable concealed in the cracks of visibility and revelation. DeLynn is a New York writer and author of five novels, several works for theatre, and many short stories. Her fourth novel, *Don Juan in the Village*, was published in 1990, and it is from this book that the story 'Butch', on which I will focus here, is taken. The fifth—in some ways a sequel to *Don Juan—Leash*, was published in 2002.

Don Juan is a lesbian and the village in question is Greenwich Village in the late seventies. The novel is really a series of discrete episodes linked by the self-examination of their first person narrator who engages, with far more scientific curiosity about her own feelings and the meaning of her actions than her namesake, in a series of sexual encounters which essentially comprise a quest for amatory perfection that part of her knows is illusory. The original Don Juan figure was, of course, the masculine enumerator of sexual conquests who

2 Guy Davidson's essay, 'Bar and Dog Collar: Commodity, Subculture, and Narrative in Jane DeLynn' is not only an exception to this silence, it also adduces an excellent analysis of other reasons why this might be the case.

prided himself precisely on his lack of feeling, though not of pleasure. Don Juan uses women, but, as DeLynn points out in an interview with Noel King, 'the question of who uses whom in a sexual relation is much more complicated than most people allow' (King 1).³ Married women may use Don Juan to relieve their boredom—single women, however, risk having their reputations (and hence their livelihoods) ruined in the context of the sexual inequality in which the original stories are situated. In any case, who uses whom is much at issue in the episodes narrated by DeLynn's female Don Juan, just as the 'use' of other people as objects is one of the symptoms of 'perversion' in psychoanalytic discourses on the subject. These discourses, of course, classically assume that perversion is a masculine characteristic, built around the disavowal of the maternal phallus. More recently, Estela Welldon and Louise Kaplan have both argued that female perversion consists of the use of the pervert's own body (or possibly that of her child), rather than the use of a sexual partner (anorexia or self-harm of some other form would be paradigmatic here).

DeLynn's Don Juan, however, is not interested in self-harm but in self-knowledge, and her mimicry of her masculine namesake affords her identification not only with heterosexual men's relationships with women, but also with gay men's lifestyles, at least as they are glimpsed—or imagined—by the narrator. The epilogue of the book, entitled '1988' and written as retrospective reflection on the seventies, meditates on the distance between 'then' and 'now'. The 'then' in question—which, as DeLynn says in an interview, is like an old photograph, instantly acquiring 'a certain nostalgia' (King 2)—maps the period of the narrator's youth onto an essentially gay male pre-AIDS age of innocence:

Now the baths are closed, the pier has long since been torn down, and with the revellers of those bright days so too my envy has gone. Hot nights for men now consist of circle jerks; many of the former 'sluts' are chaste. I, myself, as the song says, don't get around much any more.
(*Don Juan* 240)

In 'Butch', the narrator brings home the ugly, thin, pale, battered girlfriend of a 'real' butch who in turn steps into the butch role vis-à-vis the narrator. This woman, Laura, is desired by the narrator precisely because she (Laura) disgusts her, and because under these circumstances (in which the narrator is 'obviously' the more attractive partner) the narrator feels 'no obligation' (nor apparently any desire) to take any sexual initiative or to be anything but passive. The narrator minutely observes her own reactions as Laura proceeds to tie her up, leaving her hands bound and a dildo up her arse when she eventually departs. For some readers, this material alone is sufficient to arouse both embarrassment

³ My thanks to Noel King for allowing me access to the complete unpublished version of the interview. Page numbers refer to the manuscript, not to the published version.

and disgust.⁴ But for others, it is not so much the sexual relations as the power relations played out through them that give offence. For feminist readers this is at least in part because these power relations seem to mimic certain heterosexual forms. At first, for example, the narrator is in a commanding position: she makes the woman, Laura, walk behind her 'like Chinese women used to do' (225) so no one will see them together. But the narrator's own redoubled shame immediately undermines her authority in the eyes of the reader: she tells the woman that it's because she doesn't want to be seen with a woman, rather than the truth, which is that it's because she doesn't want to be seen with her in particular, because she is ugly. The narrator's admissions, however, are not made in a confessional tone as if to elicit forgiveness, or even judgment. Rather, she is matter-of-fact, and seems to assume that her readers will be familiar with the kinds of feelings, and perhaps even the kinds of behaviour, she describes in herself. It is this fact that seems to affront some readers, provoking them to expressions of disgust at the thought of being assumed to identify with something abhorrent. While some readers might laugh in tacit admission of at least a grain of truth here, others, feeling themselves exposed, compromised, even contaminated, and wanting to distance themselves from the object of their disgust, will sometimes rationalise their response to the story on either feminist or clinical grounds. On the latter grounds, they might point to the classically masochistic behaviour of the narrator, who, for example, fails to put on more music, calculating that the silence will force Laura to make the first move (passive aggression), and that this will then free the narrator of responsibility for whatever happens between them (denial). In fact, though, 'perversion', so-called, when it appears in literary contexts, it is often designed to shock, and to produce, precisely, horror and disgust. This disgust response is legible in psychoanalytic writings on perversion, which often fall back on ideas of analytic neutrality or otherwise evince a need to keep a safe theoretical distance from the object that provokes it. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel—to cite only one of the most well-known writers—manifests such disgust by her generalisation that 'perverts lie', that they are 'deceptive' (34). The strength of disgust responses to perversion hints at the threat the pervert poses to the normative, and points to the need to maintain this distance, to remain uncontaminated or uncorrupted—that is, in the case of readers of DeLynn, unchanged by the encounter that is reading, especially the reading of a literary text.

Readers who respond to disgust with a reflexive desire for distance at all costs tend to miss the humour that Gilles Deleuze identifies in masochism (which he casts in the masculine). He points out that the masochist, feeling the Law to be inherently punitive, applies its punishment to himself in his punctilious

4 I have discussed this story at different times with students of writing, members of a feminist reading group, and at a conference of mental health professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts) and interested academics.

observation of the letter of the Law, making apparent its consequences, which are often absurd, the opposite of what was intended (for example, whipping induces erection). The masochist, he writes, is 'insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; in short, he is a humorist, a logician of consequences' (Deleuze 89). While sadism entails an ascent to principle and militates against the Law by irony and subversion, the masochistic ruse of apparent submission and its descent to consequences, to the detail of 'dirt under the fingernails', instead flouts the Law by means of humour, specifically, the reduction to the absurd. Indeed, DeLynn's narrator, eyes closed, hears the sound of Laura flushing the toilet, listens for the sound of the faucet (which she doesn't hear), and worries about germs. And, in fact, neither a clinical diagnosis nor a feminist analysis of the narrator's perversion would tell either her or the reader anything we don't already know: the point of the story is that there are no psychological depths to be discovered, since the narrator is the consummate anatomist of her own self-deception.

It is this painstaking attention to detail that allows the narrator to chart the way the power relations she describes come to shift, so that when Laura does begin to take the initiative, the yearning she arouses in the strategically passive narrator becomes anger that she is apparently being teased, and she observes that 'oddly, the angrier I got, the more my respect for her grew' (229). As the sex progresses the narrator comes to feel that 'things were more in balance than earlier in the evening' (230), until, by the end of the story the tables have been turned and narrator's mimicry of submission has become real. Just as important as this reversal, though, is the narrator's tracing of the vicissitudes of the excruciating self-consciousness which prevents her from ever being wholly *with* anyone—much in the way a certain self-consciousness seems to prevent some readers being wholly present to the story. In the scarifying sharpness of its contours, the narrative is a map of the 'psychic skin' turned inside out. 'Skin side out' is, of course, one of the names for shame (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 38), and points to the fact that both the boundedness and the autonomy of the self are at stake in it.

However, it is not on the moment of being flooded with and overwhelmed by shame that DeLynn concentrates. Rather, 'Butch', like all the stories in *Don Juan in the Village*, charts the trajectories by which shame increases and becomes mobile and by which it seeks concealment. It is characteristic of shame (as of all affects, according to Tomkins) that it forms positive feedback loops in which more of the same affect is created—that is, shame amplifies or intensifies itself as we receive feedback from our own blushing. Shame also tends to 'magnify' itself,

in Tomkins' terminology (Vol. 3), so that recalling one episode of shame tends to call up memories of others, until the self is overwhelmed and momentarily disappears, as if it had been swallowed by shame.⁵

This tendency of shame to reproduce itself and to extend its purchase from site to site as awareness of its possibility grows and the need to forestall it becomes more and more pressing, is exactly what DeLynn's fiction maps, and at one level the reader may go with the flow of identification with the first person narrator, and with the inevitable cascade produced by the mobility of shame, as it transfers itself from one situation to another. DeLynn's narrator seeks out intensity in order to feel real, but at the same time it seems that intense affect threatens her sense of control. If this is her problem, it is also the reader's problem as we are drawn in by the identificatory intimacy solicited by the first person narration but compromised by what it reveals. For 'Butch' does indeed compel experience of the very affects that will call into question, and then sharply define, the limits of the self. Disgust and shame, but not anger or fear or distress, are, as Adam Frank writes,

affects that for formal reasons are particularly well-suited to the activation of a theoretical frame ... that punctuates a system as distinct from its environment [and which] permit the system to make certain kinds of critical distinctions: about what should or should not be brought into, made a part of, or made otherwise perceptible for the system. (30)

For DeLynn's narrator, disgust may be a way of testing her own limits, of seeing how far she'll go, of mapping her own boundaries, or perhaps of giving herself the thrill of surprise. For the reader, disgust marks the moment we may have been contaminated. We have been *taken in* by—and by the same token have taken in, ingested—the disgusting object. There is no guarding against this when one is reading, for, unlike shame, the possibility of which causes excruciating anticipation, disgust always takes us by surprise. Even if one expects it at an intellectual level in the face of, say, a corpse, or one fears it going in to watch a horror movie, the affect itself, its viscerality, is always new. Having been disgusted, we have been compromised—our nausea is the symptom—and to regain our equilibrium we seek the distance afforded by reflection, for it is precisely aesthetic distance that disgust has temporarily destroyed. As Menninghaus reminds us, disgust has been thought of

5 'Magnification', in Tomkins' vocabulary, refers to the way in which having been sensitised to an affect, the subject may then tend to scrutinize the environment for potential sources of the same affect in order to avoid it—but in so doing, makes that affect even more salient in his or her world. See Tomkins, *Affect* Vol. 3.

as a 'dark' sensation that so categorically indicates something 'real' that it strains the distinction between 'real' and 'imaginary'—and therewith the condition for the aesthetic illusion: *I am disgusted—therefore I experience something as unconditionally real (not at all as art)*. (9)

It may be that this is the reason why DeLynn's fiction hasn't been much addressed in scholarly writing, queer or otherwise: not only is its exposure of the reader to her own shame unbearable, but the feelings of disgust it solicits in part by way of defence against shame may be an obstacle to the kinds of rhetorical analysis performed by queer theory because in the moment of disgust, the reader forgets that what she is reading is fiction, and that what has produced the feeling of disgust has in fact been staged, and staged precisely to produce disgust.

For DeLynn's narrator, affect—especially negative affects like disgust—is the *source* of knowledge. But not, as it turns out, transcendental knowledge. Rather, with hindsight, knowledge is exposed as limited, practical and site-specific: 'I had come to the bar for knowledge, but it turned out that that knowledge was only about how to behave in bars such as this' (241).

Now perversion is thought as the sexualisation of what would not ordinarily be sexual; for example, when punishment for transgression is sexualised, as when, classically, schoolboys who have been flogged—in reality or in fantasy—become masochists. The narrator does enjoy the (moderate) physical pain the 'butch' inflicts on her, but on the whole, 'pain' in DeLynn's stories means the 'punishing' qualities of the negative affects,⁶ especially anguish and the feelings associated with it: sadness, despair, loneliness and all aspects of the tragic, as reflected in the country and western music the narrator listens to some time after the butch has left and she has finally freed her own hands and removed the dildo from her arse. Thinking about the strange sadness she feels, she realises that 'It was the same sadness that was always there, and it occurred to me that I must like it. Why else did I keep going to bars, if not to find it?' (241).

If sadness turns out after all to be romantic, even sophisticated, the narrator is nevertheless hyper-aware of the need to avoid shame. Shame itself, as Tomkins points out, is shameful, and the feedback loop created by it is precisely what creates the feeling of vertigo it induces as the self disappears into it. Shame is the secret affect: a blush may betray it, but it resists articulation, and for this reason it often generates 'strong' theories and strategies of avoidance. DeLynn's narrator has a strong shame theory: that is, sensitised to the prospect of shame, she finds the possibility of it everywhere she turns her attention, even when it is to just such strategies of avoidance:

6 Tomkins explains that positive affects are designed to be rewarding, to make us want to prolong them, or to produce them again, while the negative affects are designed to be punishing in order to make us want to avoid them or put an end to the state of affairs producing them (*Affect* Vol. 1).

It could be a worry about how much to tip the cabdriver in the presence of someone you're hoping to go to bed with, how to hold a glass of beer or whether to drink from the bottle when you're cruising in a bar. Or it could be a worry about making a noise pissing in the toilet, therefore pulling off wads of toilet paper to conceal that noise, only to then worry that the noise of pulling off wads of toilet paper will draw people's attention anyway. (King 3)

Or, as in 'Butch', the worry is about farting in the midst of sex. It has been said that there are only three possible responses to shame: run, hide, or die. But the very intensity of the need to avoid shame may also provoke a fascination with it (if not a sexualisation of it) and what brings it about. For example: the experience of abjection generated by one's own contamination from proximity to what is disgusting. As DeLynn has said:

I think there *is* some connection between attraction and revulsion. Not always, but in certain kinds of ways and perhaps more so when one is in an extreme state, say involving drugs or alcohol. It's then that you maybe can *allow* yourself to be attracted to the abominable. It has a charge and, in a way, a charge is better than nothing. Or it could be curiosity. (King 4)

Perhaps the curiosity about which DeLynn speculates here is the perversity of one's own desire in the face of what is socially acceptable. The sudden reversibility of desire and disgust may suggest that what is most disgusting will provoke the most intense pleasure. Perversion, as psychoanalysis has thought it, does entail a valorization of the unvalued, and a concomitant devaluing of what is commonly valued. In fact, this reversal of value has provided an important strategy in queer engagements with the world, from Roland Barthes' sexual/textual plays on 'inversion' to Edmund White's discussion of gay life in the *Granta* issue on 'Shrinks', and it provides the foundation of the camp aesthetic as counter-discourse. As DeLynn says:

I think a gay sensibility is about being 'perverse'—not necessarily sexually perverse, but perverse in relation to whatever the prevailing norm is considered to be. Like, what would be perverse in the gay community now would be totally vanilla sex. It's a constant saying 'no' to everything—rather than saying 'yes' to anything. (King 21)

DeLynn's narrator takes perversity as a life strategy, valorizing homosexuality, and, by extension, perversion of all kinds, over 'normality', and pain, including the psychic pain of shame, over pleasure. Except, perhaps, the pleasure of writing the shame that should not speak its name.

In her essay on paranoid reading, Sedgwick comments on the privileging of the negative affects in queer politics, especially as they coalesce into a paranoid attitude or posture. It is, she says, the *raison d'être* of the 'x-ray gaze' of the paranoid posture to 'see through to an unfleshed skeleton of the culture; the aesthetic on view here is one of minimalist elegance and conceptual economy' (*Touching Feeling* 139.) But one of the problems of the paranoid gaze is that it always overlooks its own position, which it situates *outside* the problem it claims to diagnose by virtue of its capacity for mastery or its special insight. Above all, the paranoid reading seeks to claim the high moral or political ground, and this is why it can never afford a sense of humour. The very transparency of DeLynn's writing with its shameless anatomy of shame resists paranoid reading and works to undermine the very idea of any high moral ground by its leveling humour.

In the end, the narrator's mix of irony and nostalgia about her younger self makes us laugh—with her, not at her. We, like her, secretly know ourselves to be 'the most incredible human being in the world' (*Don Juan* 243), and DeLynn has found us out. But the other, shadow sense of 'incredible' ('pathetically unbelievable') is also secretly at work here. The flipside of the narrator's (and our) belief in our brilliance is the secret, shameful knowledge that we are, in fact, the worst human being in the world. What the vertiginous ironies of 'Butch' repeatedly make us perform is the rediscovery of the way in which we are actually implicated and involved in what is known, which lies, as Shoshana Felman long ago pointed out in an essay on the nature of teaching, at the heart of the analytic enterprise, as it does of fictional engagement. (Felman points to the myth at the heart of the analytic fiction, the story of Oedipus, who cannot see his own involvement in the text of his own story as he narrates it to himself (44).) 'Butch' doesn't just tell us that we, as readers of fiction, are as perverse as its narrator. Nor does it simply make us feel perverse. It rather makes us perform an act of attempted mastery over the sensate experience of story, and then reveals this mastery for the—perverse—fiction it is.

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The Closet Remediated: Inside Lindsay Lohan

MELISSA JANE HARDIE

When he announced the winner of the Best DJ category at the *Paper* Nightlife Awards in 2008, Michael Musto 'noted that Samantha Ronson could not attend as "she was busy inside Lindsay Lohan and that I'm happy if she's happy"' (Lewis). *Village Voice* gossip columnist and sub-Proustian chronicler of the intersection of celebrity and GLBT communities, Musto intensifies the fact of Ronson's absence by deploying a figure for the closet. His comment simultaneously outs and closets Ronson, figuring Lindsay Lohan's body as a carceral space of action and distraction: 'busy inside' her celebrity girlfriend, Ronson misses the insider event, confirming Musto's status as blasé commentator, the one who knows: 'I'm happy if she's happy'.

In its metaphorical perversity and perverse literal meaning, Musto's comment alerts us to the remediation of the gossip columnist as award-show announcer, a transformation of the all-knowing insider into celebrity explicator. Its contours offer an allegory for the fate of the closet in the last ten years. Whereas the old school gossip columnist works in the semi-slow medium of print, here the act of announcement takes place in an auditorium venue that imputes 'real time' access, acquaintance and substitution to mediated events: MC stands to columnist as twitter stands to column. Gossip or insider knowledge, as figured by the closet of print media is constitutively past tense: it is knowledge, typically narrational knowledge, of something able to be known. While gossip or insider narration may concern the ongoing experience or reputation of its subject, it imputes in the person of the gossiper a state of knowing prior to the moment of its enunciation. In this paper I consider how this closet epistemology, nostalgically tethered to the past and its modes of culture consumption, is remediated into the present tense by the emergence of new social media.

The closet epistemologies Sedgwick identified in 1990 have not simply evaporated. Indeed, in her Preface (written in 2007) to the 2008 reprint of *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick not only contextualises her book in terms of the socio-political preoccupations of the 1980s, but also addresses the question of writing an historical moment that is necessarily 'fleeting'. Sedgwick writes that one of the questions *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) asked is how it is that we 'can wrap our minds properly around the mix of immemorial, seemingly fixed, discourses of sexuality and, at the same time, around discourses that may be much more recent, ephemeral, contingent' ('Preface' xiv). A discursive

sexuality that exists in the *now*, rather than the *then* of a distant history—one that lends itself to the fixity of memorialisation—is found in *Tendencies* (1993), published soon after *Epistemology*. A collection of essays that includes a performance piece (with Michael Moon) about the outrageous 1970s and 80s film and video performances of transvestite celebrity Divine, *Tendencies* revisits the earlier book's defining argument about how homo/heterosexual definition structures modern systems of knowledge. While, in the Foreword to *Tendencies*, Sedgwick re-states *Epistemology*'s argument that 'gender inversion' and 'gender separatism' are the dominant tropes through which knowledge of sexual difference is metaphorised, she also writes that:

I have no use at all for the trope of homosexuality-as-gender inversion, with its heterosexist presumption that *only* a self that is somehow 'really a man' could be attracted to a woman, or vice versa. Yet the T-shirted carnival of cross-reference at last summer's pride parade also evokes a history of moments to which the gender separatist models just won't answer. (*Tendencies* xiii)

Sedgwick's revisiting of *Epistemology*'s argument in *Tendencies* is notable for the way it both observes and participates in the former book's defining argument. Sedgwick's disavowal of any personal identification with the argument that homosexuality constitutes gender inversion is made through a sustained use of first person singular, as she argues that she would 'find it mutilating and disingenuous to disallow a grammatical form that marks the site of such dense, accessible effects of knowledge, history, revulsion, authority, and pleasure' (xiv). Grammatically, and generically, first person, in the form of autobiography and allied genres, sustains the book's elaboration of the arguments of its predecessor in more experiential terms, more easily understood to address a present moment than the historicizing analyses of *Epistemology*. Though the 'T-shirted carnival of cross-reference' can be dated to last summer, it remains presently accessible to evoke 'a history of moments'. While *Epistemology* at several crucial points invokes the first person singular to orient its readings, *Tendencies* privileges such individuating locutions and essays in 'intimate adhesion' (xiv) to its predecessor. It's entirely consonant with this modulation that in *Tendencies*' performance piece, 'Divinity', Sedgwick and Michael Moon discuss the hyperbolic drag performance as a transgression of effete and effeminate stereotypes of male homosexuality; the performative nature of this discussion between the two illuminates an equivocal relation to and adjudication of both minoritizing and universalizing discourses. Similarly Sedgwick's declaration of her own desire, in 'White Glasses', to sport her friend Michael Lynch's frames closes an anecdote that dwells in the past as a place from which to escape a deadening future. Sedgwick recounts her secret forecast that 'white glasses' would become objects of desire among gay men and the 'fashion-conscious' before declaring

‘My instant resolve: I want white glasses first’ (253). This resolution, ostensibly oriented as a desire to be ahead of the pack, installs a desire to insert herself as a kind of circuit-breaker into the repetitions and imitations that effect the transformation of ‘white glasses’ into a trope for the closet epistemology that both conceals and exposes the question of homosexuality as an absent truth. In this case, such a rupture is provided by gender inversion precisely as gender inversion remains what allies his glasses to her. The closet continues to signify, even as it is elaborately exposed. Resolve, however, formed in an ‘instant’, can remedy its defeating logic.

Following Sedgwick, my argument here is neither that the ‘closet’ as a figure has disappeared, nor that either Samantha Ronson or Lindsay Lohan has ‘come out’. Nor am I making a claim about the lived experience of closeting. Rather, this essay engages with the relevance of closet epistemologies during a time in which new social media are shaping knowledge of sexuality and, in this case, through public understandings of the spectacle of the ‘private’ lives of celebrities. Public speech about the closet has come to a critical impasse. Recent scholarly debate about the closet, in the context of new social media, would suggest that a perceptual shift has taken place since the early 90s that, in turn, has had an impact on how both queer identities and queer spaces signify. For instance, when Hank Bromley looks at the prominence of ‘gender bending’ (86) in cyberspace he argues that the online environment facilitates constructivist notions of identity to suggest its limitations as well as its liberatory potential. Randal Woodland argues that the proliferation of cyberspace communities has enabled the movement of queer identities from the boundary to the centre, suggesting they can be understood to build ‘third spaces’ that combine ‘connected sociality of public space with the anonymity of the closet’ (418). Such a queering of the internet as a productively closeted space rehearses those dominant tropes Sedgwick identifies in both *Epistemology* and *Tendencies* as structuring a closet epistemology. Does contemporary screen culture, as Sue-Ellen Case predicted, make accessible a space that creates new forms of identification and desire and in a way that contrasts with earlier (cinematic) models?

In the context of this remediated technological environment, Musto’s two parallel phrases, ‘she was busy inside Lindsay Lohan’ and ‘I’m happy if she’s happy’—with their drift in tense, their floating subject, their impossible conjunction as a piece of direct speech—can be thought of as representing two tenses for the closet. In the first section of this essay, ‘She was busy inside Lindsay Lohan’, Musto’s past-tense formulation operates as a sign of the prevalence of a cinematic model for the ongoing operation of closet epistemologies. In a contemporary context, where new social media platforms rival the power of cinematic images, this first part of my argument considers the continued reliance on such images and how they service a closeting rhetoric in their use of tropes of impersonation

and gender inversion. This reading of cinematic citation as a remediation of closet epistemologies is further developed in the second section of my essay, 'I'm happy if she's happy', in which I look more closely at the figure of Lindsay Lohan as she is constituted through social networking forums. My argument here analyses the role of gossip as a form that remediates knowledge of the closet. In doing so, I want to suggest that, along with a change in the venues that air and repeat closet epistemologies, the conditioning influence of the closet has also shifted. Contemporary closet epistemologies, though they are still resonant, ramify less and their citation exposes purposeful redundancy.

'She was busy inside Lindsay Lohan'

The celebrity gossip columnist in code-era Hollywood regulated the 'putting into discourse of sex' that Foucault claimed to be 'subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement' (16). The contagious effect of celebrity is ideally instanced in the celebrity gossip columnist as celebrity, where the dissolute indistinction between the columnist and his subject forms an affective bond and affiliation between the two (even in the irony of 'I'm happy if she's happy'). Musto's comment parodies the status of 'inside knowledge' that permits the gossip columnist to regulate and proliferate the speculation that surrounds the conundrum of privacy and celebrity. It marks as a second-order affect the satisfaction of the columnist, whose affective state is conjured as conditional; rather than supplying a conduit for the publication of this 'status update', Musto's engagement is relative and mimetic. While it stages relational affect—of the kind that proliferates on networking sites like *Twitter* and *Facebook*—Musto's equivocal comment both ramps up and baffles this logic of attachment.

Writing of Henry James' evasive manoeuvres around homosexuality, Sedgwick suggests 'that the reifying effect of periphrasis and preterition on this particular meaning [that is, the meaning of 'homosexuality'] is, if anything, more damaging than (though not separable from) its obliterative effect' (*Epistemology* 203-4). Preterition is a rhetorical figure 'in which attention is drawn to something by professing to omit it' (*OED*). In her analysis of John March's ostentatious 'secret' in James's 'The Beast in the Jungle', preterition functions to draw attention to the 'emptiness of the secret, "the nothing that is"' (*Epistemology* 201). Periphrasis is a rhetorical term for a 'roundabout' way of saying something; 'a figure of speech in which a meaning is expressed by several words instead of by few or one; a roundabout way of speaking, circumlocution' (*OED*). Sedgwick identifies two consequences of periphrasis and preterition, reification and obliteration, and notes that the reification imputed by such speech acts is the more damaging. She continues that the decoding of such circumlocution places the reader 'in a discourse in which there was a homosexual meaning, in which all homosexual meaning meant a single thing' (*Epistemology* 204). Speaking around something,

in her example, leads not to the proliferation of possibility, but rather to a single meaning, a homosexual meaning, and this single meaning, in turn, promises 'the reassuring exhilarations of knowingness' that come from the specific formula 'We Know What That Means' (204), a formula which 'animates and perpetuates the mechanism of homophobic male self-ignorance' (204). For Sedgwick, then, part of the homophobic effect of not-saying is precisely the way in which it can be construed as a saying: the contingency of a strategy which orients its reference to the *singular* fact of male homosexuality; homosexuality as the (in this sense) natural and final point of preteritive relation.¹ Musto's comment conforms to the logic of the periphrastic: it is as though he is simply saying Samantha Ronson (or Lindsay Lohan) is a lesbian in a roundabout way, and that's what this strange expression means. As a way of speaking to the absence of Ronson, it offers a curiously cognate form of obliteration to the kind Sedgwick sees constitutive of the preteritive, that is, it puts words to the fact of an absence in the form of a closeted truth.

Has this circumlocutionary discourse, one that continually elaborates but never states its definitive intention, been shifted in the twenty years since the publication of *Epistemology*? One way in which a shift has occurred has come with the changing valency of 'outing' as a tactic that uses the medium of celebrity biography to make the celebrity a cinematic spectacle. 'Outing' as a mainstream phenomenon became possible when the capacity to give public articulation to the category of 'homosexual' post-Stonewall collided with the tactic of 'outing' as politicised speech through the late 80s and early 90s. One way to consider the short history of the outing epidemic would be as a bi-coastal articulation of the question of the cinematic apparatus's reach in the lives of celebrities and the public.² As Sharon Willis writes:

Even while offering the pleasures and the lure of an illusory highly privatized space, cinematic experience is, in many ways, the most eminently social form of consumption, [and] we must work on the contradictions common to the subject constructed through cinematic forms of address and to the apparatus itself; upon the crucial ideological formation that splits 'public' from 'private'. (265)

Here we might also consider the spectacle's close relations to the cinematic, and the inscription of the vocabulary of cinema within the vocabulary of private

1 This paper is concerned with that 'reifying effect', and the way in which its separation from the 'obliterative effect' of the closet might be considered as an effect of the remediation of the 'tense' as well as the 'space' of the closet.

2 Obviously, a more complete account of outing, such as Signorile's, locates a tripartite operation, including Washington, DC. as another crucial axis of power and closeted site. His representation finds its fruit in the anonymous novel (Joe Klein's) *Primary Colors*, for example, where the generic features of the *roman à clef* instantiate the thematic of homosexual secrets and abiding nostalgia for past regimes: libertarian and homophobic.

sphere actions and sexuality. If one of the preoccupations of a popular reception of cinema is, for example, the 'authenticity' of sexual performance in cinema, that is precisely because cinematic specularity itself rides on this productive misrecognition, and such a logic of misrecognition extends to the spectacular private lives of public identities. After all, actors are presumed to act.

So how is this cinematic imaginary put into work in Musto's periphrastic invocation of the 'inside' of Lindsay Lohan? Musto's citational relation to Lindsay Lohan must inevitably be contoured around one particular exercise of impersonation as incorporation. In February 2008, Lohan featured in *New York Magazine* in a recreation of the famous 'last sitting', a photo session of Marilyn Monroe taken in 1962, six weeks before she died.³

Bert Stern, the photographer of the Monroe session, took the photos of Lindsay impersonating Monroe, and in the article that accompanies the photo shoot Amanda Fortini writes:

Stern, who shot the photos on film rather than digitally, told me he was interested in Lohan because he suspected 'she had a lot more depth to her' than one might assume from 'those teenage movies'. (Fortini)

Fortini writes of the original pictures of Monroe that 'Stern excavated and preserved the poignant humanity of the real woman—beautiful, but also fragile, needy, flawed—from the monumental sex symbol', and Stern's comments about Lohan employ similar metaphors, where the nude celebrity portrait becomes ironically, or periphrastically, in a 'roundabout way', the opportunity to decipher depth. Reinforcing Stern's interest in Monroe's visible depth—that she might be 'more' than her image—is Fortini's discussion of Lohan's fascination with Monroe. For Fortini, Lohan's interest in Monroe

took root a decade ago with multiple viewings of *Niagara* during the London filming of *The Parent Trap*. She has even purchased an apartment where Marilyn once lived. 'If you saw my house ... I have a lot of Marilyn stuff', she told me, including a huge painting of Monroe.

'It's eerie', Lohan said of the painting, a Christmas gift, 'because it's this picture of her, and it's kind of cartoony, and there's a big bottle of pills next to her, and they've fallen over'.

Lohan's fetishistic collection of Monroe's 'stuff' suggests her desire to see beyond, or at least compensate for, deathly ('cartoony') images of her celebrated subjectivity. Fortini describes Lohan's work on the shoot as a form of 'strict mimesis: scarves, nudity, and all'. Further, Stern's use of film rather than digital

³ The image is available at <<http://nymag.com/fashion/08/spring/44247/>>. Accessed 16 May 2010. Photograph by Bert Stern. Published in *New York Magazine*, 18 February 2008.

technology to make his shots of Lohan is symptomatic of the essential nostalgia of the project, a mediation of the 'eerie' effect of the photographs that have become iconic prolepses of Monroe's death. The re-animation is thus spectral as well as uncanny: her representation of Monroe is not merely a doubling, but a form of technological exhumation. Fortini writes:

All made up, in winged eyeliner and shellacked blonde wig, Lohan, who has returned to her former voluptuousness, at times appeared more Marilyn than the thin, somewhat diminished woman of the original Marilyn photos. 'It was very similar, *déjà vu* you might say, like revisiting an old street', said Stern.

Revisiting not just an old street but the 'royal road to the unconscious', Stern's citation of *déjà vu* is an oddly inappropriate metaphor for an exercise in such deliberate reproduction; *déjà vu* involves, at least, the involuntary conjuring of an experience of prior experience, defined by psychiatrist Vernon Neppe in 1983 as 'any subjectively inappropriate impression of familiarity of the present experience with an undefined past'. The uncanny assertion that Lohan appeared 'more Marilyn than' Monroe situates Lohan as a 'real' temporally posterior to the 'real' of the image she reproduces. More precisely, though, the effect is cinephilic, what Christian Keathley describes as produced '*en plus*, in excess or in addition, almost involuntarily', 'a fetishization of fragments or moments' (35). As fetishised photographic image of the cinematic Monroe, the images elicit an experience of what Keathley terms a 'cinephilic moment' (30), where 'fleeting experience of the real ... is felt most intensely or magically' (37). Keathley traces this cinephilic 'moment' to the ontology of the cinema (Bazin), where 'the indexical quality of the film image is the mark or trace of a prior presence' (37), that is, of something that has been filmed. In this case, that cinephilic moment arises when the something captured on film is the trace of an earlier photographic moment; in another way of speaking, we might regard such an image as a form of periphrasis, a roundabout way of pointing to the real.

On Sedgwick's argument, such a roundabout moment points to one thing in particular; according to the epistemology of the closet, 'the reifying effect of periphrasis and preterition on this particular meaning [that is, the meaning of 'homosexuality'] is, if anything, more damaging than (though not separable from) its obliterative effect' (203-4). For Sedgwick, this 'meaning of homosexuality' is constitutively male; the formula 'We Know What That Means', the stance of 'knowingness', is one that trips association to the 'mechanism of homophobic male self-ignorance' and does so by orienting reference to the *singular* fact of male homosexuality.

Musto's oblique introduction of the term 'inside' as a modification of Lohan's name easily evokes another example of this logic, a film whose plot broadly

resembles Lohan's own career as starlet and 'triple threat', singer, actor, dancer, and which thematises gendered masquerade or disguise as a way of effacing *and* effecting a sexual 'outing'. Robert Mulligan's 1965 film *Inside Daisy Clover* tells the story of a tomboy who finds herself a career in the pictures as an aspiring young starlet. Daisy Clover, played by Natalie Wood, is embroiled in a relationship with the plausible playboy Wade Lewis, played by Robert Redford. The narrative is designed to indict the star system of the 30s, but as IMDB puts it 'the film is basically one big anachronism' as there's little of the 1930s in its *mise-en-scène*; its 'inside secret' is that Wade Lewis, whose original name is Lewis Wade, is gay, and so Daisy's affair and marriage to him are, like all his roguish behaviours, sham. As I have argued elsewhere, the figure of the beard—a woman or man who disguises the (true) sexual interest of her or his partner—metaphorizes disguise and disclosure as corporeal manifestations, and operates as a material signifier in a complex rhetoric of disclosure and orientation. The beard encourages us to take literally the visibility of sheer manifestation.⁴ Likewise it is tempting to read Musto's 'inside Lindsay Lohan' through *Inside Daisy Clover's* reframing of this question of visibility. Whereas Daisy is cast as beard, as visible metaphor for the homosexuality of the bearded body, Lohan is cast (in Musto's comment) as the distraction that makes Ronson invisible, not present to the assembled guests. Ronson's failure to show is a failure to be sheerly visible, a lack of visibility Musto ascribes to her subsumption inside Lindsay Lohan.

What finally draws together Musto's comments about the 'inside' of 'Lindsay Lohan', the Monroe photographs, and an historical preoccupation with the visibility of a gay male body is the way in which Musto interposed himself into the '*déjà vu*' of Lohan's impersonation of Monroe. Not long after the Monroe pictures appeared in *New York Magazine*, Musto organized his own photo shoot, in which he impersonated ('re-vamped') Lohan impersonating Monroe.⁵

Musto writes:

As the New York article unavoidably pointed out, it was six weeks after the legendary Stern shoot that Marilyn died of an apparent OD, a tidbit that looms over Lohan's Stern shoot like the griffin in *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. But the doomy parallels between M.M. and L.L. seem far less upsetting if you believe, as I'm sure Oliver Stone does, that Marilyn was actually murdered. Why would the Kennedys kill Lindsay Lohan? (Unless maybe *Herbie Fully Loaded* somehow reminded Ted of Chappaquiddick.) (Musto)

4 See my 'Beard.'

5 The image is available at <<http://www.villagevoice.com/photoGallery/index/351188/0>> Accessed 16 May 2010. Photograph by Howard Huang. Published in *Village Voice*, 4 March 2008.

Perhaps to insulate Lohan from the pernicious cycle he fantasises, Musto offers himself as third term, albeit as acquiescent rather than inciting: 'I gleefully agreed to star in an homage to an homage: Musto as Lohan as Marilyn. That's three generations of loveliness, and I prepared for it by not shaving or waxing a thing, just letting it all hang in the wind as both a nod to history and a means of reclaiming control'. Framing his contribution in an escalating hyperbole of 'insider knowledge' that reaches from paranoid stream-of-consciousness to first name faux-familiarity, Musto's camp reprise of the pictures returns periphrastic reference to its symptomatic meaning. That is, it is the 'outing' of male homosexuality through a singular act of cross-dressing which masks a doubling, the 'strict mimesis' between two women. Musto writes ironically that his unattended body is 'both a nod to history and a means of reclaiming control', and it performs both functions, offering himself, the third generation that can be interposed between Lohan and Monroe, as the truth 'inside Lindsay Lohan'.

Musto writes that he lets it all 'hang in the wind', a reminder not only of castration anxiety as a form of gender determination but also as the final term in his account of the contemporary anxiety over female bodies, hair, and exposure. Lohan's homage to Marilyn also provokes Musto's imagining of her 'dumpling' breasts, which he compares to his own 'desperate' desire to show-off his 'mantits'. However, for the rest of his column he plays obsessively with the 'horror of nothing to see' that attends his perception of female genitalia, the spate of pantless pictures and evident genital shaving that preoccupied celebrity gossip around Lohan, Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. In his analysis of cinephilia, though, Keathley notes its implicit challenge to history by speaking of 'the wind in the trees' in film as a cinephilic perception of something on screen that is distinct from the perceptions recorded in histories that catalogue and discipline films. By drawing attention to his body and what hangs 'in the wind' Musto frames his body in a similar way, as an object both vulnerable to and amenable to cinephilic perception, that is, desire, and the final reference point for a periphrastic rhetorical flourish. In these terms, it is *his* body, neither Marilyn Monroe's, nor Lindsay Lohan's, that is ontologically prior to the images he parodies, an inversion of usual temporal order (a preposterous gesture) that serves to demonstrate how complicatedly periphrastic reference can be returned to the 'single fact'.

Musto speaks, then, as an expert in the area of what it is to be 'inside Lindsay Lohan', jostling with her lover for that honour, and it might be that his second comment, 'and if she's happy I'm happy' speaks to the logic of affect contagion in a more complicated way than previously supposed, as his inhabitation of the

object Lindsay Lohan is now effected by his own history. Precisely as Musto interposes himself, as 'insider', between Lohan and Monroe, he finds himself again as the 'inside' third term between two women.

'I'm happy if she's happy'

How to unwind the complicated logic of Musto's periphrastic announcement? How to take it to another place, and what spatiality exists for this transformation, if any? Judith Butler parsed the problem back in 1991 this way:

Conventionally, one comes out *of* the closet (and yet, how often is it the case that we are 'outed' when we are young and without resources?); so we are out of the closet, but into what? what new unbounded spatiality? Curiously, it is the figure of the closet that produces this expectation, and which guarantees its dissatisfaction. For being 'out' always depends to some extent on being 'in'; it gains its meaning only within that polarity. Hence being 'out' must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as 'out'. (16)

There is another context for thinking about the role of the singular, male homosexual as an 'insider' and so capable of providing bounding structures for that 'unbounded spatiality'. The 'open secret' of homosexual identity for actors working in 1940s and 50s Hollywood is one that, like Musto's impersonation of Monroe, relies on gender performance as a way of elaborating homosexuality as an absent truth. The open secret functions in just this way in the 1959 movie *Pillow Talk*, in which a closeted gay actor (Rock Hudson) plays a straight man pretending to be a gay man. Hudson (Brad) and Doris Day (Jan) live in adjoining apartments and share a telephone line. This causes them to argue, but once he sees Jan, Hudson's character impersonates a Texan named Rex and in that guise contrives to meet her. To incite Jan to initiate sexual contact with Rex, that is himself, Brad suggests to Jan that Rex's failure to be sexually aggressive toward her might be accounted for by the fact that he is 'one of those men ... very devoted to their mothers ... you know, the type that likes to collect cooking recipes, to exchange gossip'. The closeted Hudson's impersonation of a straight man playing gay is not only a signal instance of a closet epistemology that played with its audience's familiarity with the 'gossip' exchanged about Rock Hudson. It also established a complicated set of meanings embedded in the phrase 'pillow talk', ostensibly a metaphor of conjugal intimacy but operating as a metaphor for bearding, knowingness, indirection, the periphrastic logic of 'I know what that means'.

The 'new unbounded spatiality' of online media reproduces closet epistemologies via gossip as periphrasis and remediation and in a way that suggests interdependence of old and new media. In March 2009, the artist

Jonathan Horowitz teamed up with Calvin Klein to support the Art Production Fund by displaying in the window of Klein's Madison Avenue store 'rotating pairs of white Calvin Klein pillowcases silk-screened with names of über-famous couples, like "Barack" and "Michelle", "Sam" and "Lindsay", and "Bert" and "Ernie"' ('Pillow Talk'). The 'pillow talk cases' were also on show at PS 1, the MOMA annex in Long Island City. Detailed with the names of fictional and historical pairs, gay and straight couples, the 'pillow talk case' borrowed the euphemism of the Hudson/Day beard relationship but re-oriented its terms. The pillowcase becomes a medium of amplification: whereas 'pillow talk' is understood to involve the privacy of the boudoir and its secret communications, a 'pillow talk case' operates as a case study of what happens when closet epistemologies become subject to public broadcast. The 'pillow talk case' offers one remediation of the closet. Evidently the story caught Lindsay Lohan's eye because on the 17th of March, four days after an image of a pair of pillow cases labeled 'Sam' and 'Lindsay' was published in *Women's Wear Daily*, she was using it for her profile picture on Facebook.⁶

This remediation of the logic of gossip, of 'knowingness', relies on the collision of old and new media, what Henry Jenkins refers to as 'convergence culture'. Lohan and Ronson are both adept and prolific users of social media, and their fandoms are similarly adept. Lohan and Ronson sometimes friend fans on Facebook, and sometimes respond to fans on Twitter. Mostly they don't, but sometimes they do. According to their fans, there's no logic by which their responses can be predicted, and their responses are unmediated by gossip and its history. During a period of time in which rumours circulated about a breakup between Lohan and Ronson, Lohan repeatedly discounted those rumours by asserting that they were still together. Here, the figure of 'pillow talk', redolent of the complexity of closeted reference, is circulated through the logic of digital replication and in the territory not of storied history but of temporal proximity. While it would be hard to acknowledge Lohan's use of that image as anything but out, it falls short of the logic of either the closet or its exterior. Despite Lohan's overt and repeated acknowledgment of the relationship through social media though, the fact of the relationship itself has been continuously rumoured, as if there were a question that it existed, as if, in other words, traditional media were more concerned with the stimulating effect of a closet epistemology than in the matter of ostensible report, which is, of course, precisely that mechanism of ignorance that the oscillations of closet epistemologies engender.

It's clear that there are suggestive parallels between the life of the star, beset by old media, and the closet. Writing on her Myspace blog, Lohan describes one outing:

⁶ The image was documented by the 'Lindsay-Sam' community on Livejournal.com. <http://community.livejournal.com/lindsay_sam/469992.html?thread=17803752#t17803752> Accessed 20 Feb. 2009.

all grown up and .. an outsider for some nights..

How does it feel to be an outsider?....behind the scenes type of feeling.

Picture this in your head, if you're willing to focus for a second my friends ;)

Washington, D.C.- you're probably thinking that you are going to a monument of some sort... well, you're highly wrong loves....

Washington, D.C.-you're in a club, you are here for support for someone that you care for very much, VERY MUCH.. But, you're here just to chill and support, not to be seen and heard... Not to be on display in the dj booth...or to feel as if you are in a cage at the Bronx Zoo...

Do you see what i am getting at???

Alright, so i am literally sitting in the dj booth at a club in Washington, D.C. where Samantha is djing and they have a computer at the back of the booth, which i am on right now..

aside from the fact that she is an amazing dj and i am having a nice time, the glass mirror placed to my left to hide me from photos (literally) is making it all a bit uncomfortable!!! (Lohan)

The blog entry allies the experience of the 'outsider' with a 'behind the scenes type of feeling'. According to the logic of the 'insider', the logic of the closet epistemology, the outsider relies on 'inside knowledge' for their knowledge of the closet, and yet in this blog entry Lohan identifies the feeling of 'outside' with a 'behind the scenes type of feeling'. Being inside and outside are two sides of the same coin. As Butler predicts, it is 'the figure of the closet' that guarantees that 'being 'out' always depends to some extent on being 'in'; it gains its meaning only within that polarity' (16). Lohan's blog moves between metaphors of 'in' and 'out', mirroring ('strict mimesis') and blockage as ways to articulate the experience of life within the ambit of media, figuring her blog as a means to escape this deadening logic. Typically, pictures were later published of her sitting at her computer blogging, and the night was reported at *Celebrity Gossip's* website like this:

According to a source on-hand, '(Lindsay) initially appeared completely anti-social, asking for a screen to be put up so only a select few at Lotus could even see her. Instead of grooving to Samantha's tunes, she spent the first part of her girlfriend's set instead staring at a computer looking through MySpace'.

The insider adds, 'But then Samantha went up to Lindsay, shared a laugh and, according to witnesses, gave Lindsay a kiss that completely changed her mood'. (Gossip Girls)

Social media offers an alternative orientation to the 'source on-hand', whose reportage conforms to the logic of inside knowledge. Can it be that one effect of the remediation offered by social media is that the closet itself may be remediated? In his *Queer Optimism*, Michael Snediker writes that his project might be thought 'a furthering of Sedgwick's account of immanent joy, in Proust' where the recognition of truths can itself be a source of joy; he quotes Sedgwick's observation that

In the paranoid Freudian epistemology, it is implausible enough to suppose that truth could be even an accidental occasion of joy; inconceivable to imagine joy as a guarantor of truth. (Sedgwick, *Novel Gazing* 16, qtd in Snediker 17)

Between the 'inside Lindsay Lohan' of Musto's quip and the remediated access afforded by new media a collision is taking place that has startling consequences. One of those, I hope, is that the closet becomes less ramifying than redundant, as social media organise new venues that interrupt the logic of disclosure and reinscription an epistemology of the closet requires. One way this mechanism works would be to take seriously Jack Halberstam's proposition that the 'strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices' (1) of queer time and space perform one kind of remediation, where the 'knowingness' of periphrastic reference and roundabout disclosure can be transformed from a 'restorative' to 'reflective' nostalgia. That is, such citation can be thought about as loss (or, as is said of recorded media, 'lossy', deteriorated) rather than fearfully installed as the fantasised re-inscription of singular reference and homophobic temporal lag.⁷

In 1959 the plot of *Pillow Talk* relies upon the conceit of the party line as a figure for congested miscommunication, a quasi-private space whose capacity to spill its contents into a more ambivalently open territory generates plot and enforces a closet epistemology. In 2009, the 'pillow talk case' refigures or remediates this trope or 'case study', organizing an elegant and supple metaphorical transition from the congested community of the party line to the happenstance community of online social media. Such transformations permit a kind of happiness, an affect associated with what happens, fortune, the cast of the day rather than the

⁷ My reference to the two types of nostalgia, 'reflective' and 'restorative' draws from Svetlana Boym's transformative account of the two in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*. Whereas 'restorative' nostalgia 'proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps' (41), 'reflective' nostalgia 'lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time' (41). Musto's performance of Lohan as Monroe attempts restoration.

logic of inter-generational transmission that Musto's 'strict mimesis', the logic of impersonation, would allow. The evolution of the closet may not, indeed, be sufficient to withstand the new circumstance in which we find ourselves; a closet epistemology, however you cut it, cannot revisit its deadening logic upon the 2009 version of pillow talk, and its incorporation into the space of social media resembles, to me, one of those 'accidental occasions of joy' Snediker writes about; perhaps its discovery was just one such moment of joy for Lohan. And if she's happy, I'm happy.

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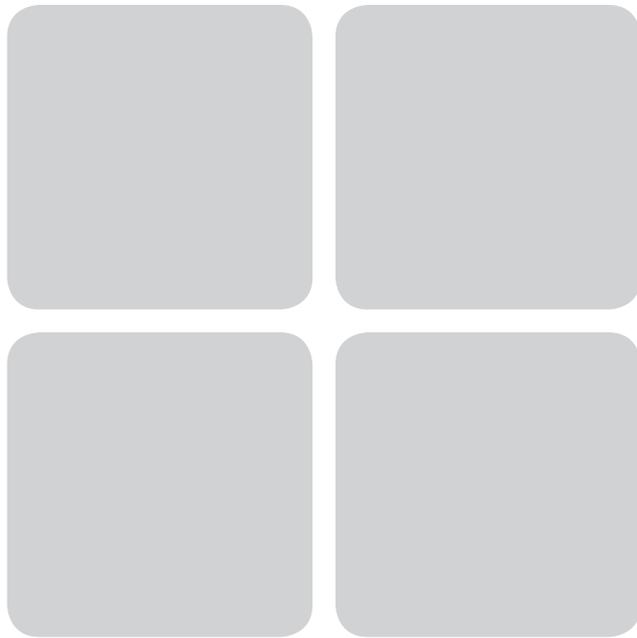
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THE ECOLOGICAL HUMANITIES

Introduction

THOM VAN DOOREN AND DEBORAH BIRD ROSE

This issue of the Ecological Humanities includes three original articles and an excerpt from an exciting recent book in the ecological humanities. The first article is Terry Gifford's 'Judith Wright's Poetry and the Turn to the Post-Pastoral'. Here, Gifford introduces readers to some of the important ecological dimensions and insights of this celebrated Australian poet. The second paper, Emily O'Gorman's 'Unnatural River, Unnatural Floods?', examines contestations between people living along the Murray River at a time of rapid riverine transformation. Focusing on the Hume Dam and the Snowy Mountains Scheme, the paper explores some of the very different ways in which these constructions were understood and implicated in two important flood episodes in the 1950s. Finally, Kerry Little's paper 'Democracy Reigns Supreme in Sikkim?' takes us to the north east of India, and into some very contemporary struggles over the building of a series of large hydroelectric dams that will flood the homeland of the Lepcha people.

The final part of this issue of the Ecological Humanities is a short excerpt from Jessica Weir's recent book *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners* (published by Aboriginal Studies Press). While the economic, and increasingly also the ecological, significance of Australia's inland river systems are frequently acknowledged, this section of Weir's book explores the vital need for 'cultural flows', as both a critique of contemporary water management and an important source of nourishment for these deeply historical, biosocial, landscapes.

Judith Wright's Poetry and the Turn to the Post-Pastoral

TERRY GIFFORD

Postcolonialism needs a post-pastoral theory of ecopoetics, just as the challenges of climate change demand a postcolonialism that can engage with environmental justice. The current environmental crisis, in so far as it affects both our planet and our human population, both land and its inhabitants, both the human and the more-than-human, challenges culture to reconsider its conceptions of nature. Some of the boundaries that facilitated colonial exploitations of both people and land need to be collapsed if environmental degradation in all its forms is to be reversed. Meanwhile, some of the distinctive qualities of culture and of nature need to be identified and brought into dialogue if they offer signs of a rightful and just way forward, however painful this process may turn out to be in the short-term. Long-term survival of our species will necessitate newly refined values and relationships in spatial terms—that is, how we relate to land in its organic forms and processes. In this our inner nature might have to attune better to the lessons evident in outer nature. One aspect of culture's attunement is obviously science—assessing the best evidence for conceiving of the natural processes upon which we depend. Another cultural tool of attunement we now call ecopoetry. Older than writing, the practice of ecopoetry has always performed this function of attunement in many cultures globally, often in the form of songs. In Western literature ecopoetry took the form of the pastoral tradition of poetry. Its neglect and decline has been a feature of the industrial-technological colonisation of the planet's resources that has led to the present environmental crisis.

The debasement of the tool considered essential since the beginnings of Western literature—the rich and long tradition of pastoral poetry—calls for a rediscovery of what I have called 'post-pastoral' poetry. This is not 'post' in the sense of postcolonial, for it was present in the work of some writers even as some of their other work was part of the decline of pastoral. It is more conceptual than temporal. It is 'post' in the sense of being beyond the traps of the pastoral, of being aware of some of the problematics of the pastoral, of pushing into the complexities of celebration and responsibility, of being a part of nature and yet uneasy with relationships of ownership and exploitation. At risk of

appearing programmatic, and in a spirit of offering a critical tool with which to improvise its use elsewhere, I have provisionally suggested that post-pastoral texts typically tended to raise some or all of the following six questions:¹

1. Can awe in the face of natural phenomena, such as landscapes, lead to humility in our species?
2. What are the implications of recognising that we are part of that creative-destructive process?
3. If the processes of our inner nature echo those in outer nature in the ebbs and flows of growth and decay, how can we learn to understand the inner by being closer to the outer?
4. If nature is culture, is culture nature?
5. How, then, can our distinctively human consciousness, which gives us a conscience, be used as a tool to heal our troubled relationship with our natural home?
6. How should we address the issue that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same mind-set as our exploitation of each other?

A re-reading of Judith Wright's poem 'The Eucalypt and the National Character' in the light of these questions might offer an opportunity to clarify the way in which postcolonialism needs a post-pastoral theory of ecopoetry. But first it is interesting to note a tendency to read Wright's work as colonial patriotic pastoral and the problems such readings make evident.

There is a recording of some poems by Judith Wright read by Peter O'Shaughnessy that includes the poem 'Bullocky' (O'Shaughnessy; Wright, *Collected Poems* 17). There is not a hint of irony in this respectfully straight reading of the poem. Indeed, it is a reading of such hushed reverence that the listener might be totally convinced that 'centuries of cattlebells' really had appeased the bullocky at his campfire (thus missing Wright's postcolonial joke). *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* reveals that 'the much-anthologised "Bullocky", a deftly constructed fable at whose heart is the archetypal figure of the ploughman [sic], can be read as a poem which gathers together the possibilities of several kinds of fruition, including the personal' (Hamilton 591). So a fable of fulfilment beyond the personal suggests that the fruit of the newly planted vines at the end of the poem symbolises some kind of social, even national, hope for the future. That Judith Wright's poetry has been appreciated by a generation of Australians for its archetypes of possible personal and national fruition was the starting point of Veronica Brady's essay sub-titled 'Judith Wright and the Search for Australia'. Brady sought to distance herself from 'our eagerness to read her poetry in patriotic terms' (Brady 14). It seems that the poet herself became

1 More fully elaborated in Gifford, *Pastoral* 146-174.

frustrated by this tendency. In a recent issue of the online journal *Colloquy* Jenny Kohn reminds us that Wright became 'distressed by those who took her poems as a simple valorising of the pastoral past, given her "own hardening view of it as a process of invasion"' (Kohn 118).²

The use of Kohn's word 'pastoral' is revealing here because it links Australian idealisation of settler landscapes with that very long European tradition of poetry that has been both revelatory and distorting in its representation of human relationships with land. Certainly the Biblical elevation of the bullocky into 'old Moses' on an archetypal journey with his suffering slaves suggests an idealisation of the poem's central figure. Indeed, the poem's ending rings with the promise of national fruition in the potent new vineyards on the slopes 'where the dead teams were used to pass'. So it is no surprise that the concluding lines have been read nationalistically: 'The prophet Moses feeds the grape, / and fruitful is the Promised Land'. The cadence of this echoes the ending of the classic example of English pastoral poetry, Alexander Pope's paean to the King's land, *Windsor Forest* (1713): 'Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains, / And peace and plenty tell, a STUART reigns'. Just as *Windsor Forest* is presented by Pope as a reincarnation of 'the groves of Eden', settler readers of Judith Wright would want to think of Australia as 'the Promised Land', especially in 1946, the year of the publication of 'Bullocky' in Wright's first collection. In this collection 'Soldier's Farm', 'The Hawthorn Hedge' and 'South of My Days' each apparently assert a hard-fought wresting of the Promised Land from less than promising land, a story that returning soldiers and their families would have been only too glad to read in this first collection by a young poet.

Yet doesn't the very elevation of those concluding lines invite an ironic reading of what began with an image of a cart-driver 'thirsty with drought and chilled by rain'? Jenny Kohn thinks so, as she draws attention to the madness of this 'Moses': 'The passage of time is threatening, here as in so many of Wright's poems; it makes the bullocky go mad' (Kohn 118). The Bullocky is 'widdershins', wrong-headed; he is deluded in seeing a road 'populous with fiends and angels'; he seems to see himself as Moses in his journeying; certainly he develops 'a mad apocalyptic dream'; he shouts 'prayers and prophesies'; and then there are those 'centuries of cattlebells' making their 'uneasy sound' in his head. So, by the end of the poem, the new vines (offering delusions to a new generation) are fed by the bones of those who thought they were Moses settling a Promised Land. Kohn concludes: 'To Shirley Walker the bullocky is a visionary; but in my view, the sense of unease throughout the poem demands an ironic reading' (Walker; Kohn 118).

2 Kohn is quoting Wright's biographer, Jennifer Strauss (Strauss).

After Kohn's analysis the poem begins to read as an anti-pastoral poem, in the tradition of poetry that seeks to act as a corrective to the idealisation of the pastoral, such as Stephen Duck's response to Pope in *The Thresher's Labour* (1736) in which he points out, in Pope's own poetic form, that some people have paid a price for that 'rich Industry' in hard physical labour: 'In briny Streams our Sweat descends apace, / Drops from our Locks, or trickles down our Face'. Three years later, of course, Mary Collier corrected Duck's anti-pastoral by pointing out that another section of the working population had been omitted from Duck's account when she published her own poem, *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr Stephen Duck* (1739). The earnest bitterness of some anti-pastoral poetry propels irony into sarcasm, for example in the case of George Crabbe's lines from *The Village* (1783): 'Can poets sooth you, when you pine for bread, / by winding myrtles round your ruin'd shed?' In 'Bullocky' Judith Wright's anti-pastoral irony is so subtle that it can be mistaken for pastoral by readers who need a vision of Australia as a Promised Land. But even the term 'anti-pastoral' seems inadequate for a poem that is more complex in recognising that need, at the same time as denying it. The poem is not a straightforward corrective since it is more ambivalent towards the human capacities for adaptation and dream, as is so much of Wright's poetry. 'Ambivalent' is a word that commentators on Wright's poetry frequently find themselves using. This is surely derived from Wright's deep sense of settlement as invasion: 'those two strands—the love of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion—have become part of me' (Wright, *Born of the Conquerors* 30). Perhaps this is where we need a term such as 'post-pastoral'.

The American ecocritics Leo Marx and Lawrence Buell might argue that such a term is unnecessary due to the adaptive abilities of the pastoral mode itself. Marx has argued that 'the wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relations with nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral' (Marx, 'Does Pastoralism' 222). Buell has suggested that American pastoral has persisted beyond 'the specific set of obsolescent conventions' ('American Pastoral' 23) because, as he put it in a later coinage, it is 'more strategised than mystified' (*Environmental Imagination* 44). Recognising that 'pastoral's ideological valance has become increasingly complicated', Buell believes that the 'US pastoral imagination can embed or prepare the way for ecocentric thinking' (*The Future* 145). Both critics point to the recent resurgence of American nature writing as the current extension of the US pastoral tradition. From a British perspective, however, Leavis's attack on the Georgian nature poets in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), together with Raymond Williams' landmark book *The Country and The City* (1975), have rendered 'pastoral' a pejorative term, as, indeed, it is used by Jenny Kohn in her phrase 'the pastoral past'. Leo Marx's potentially useful attempt to separate 'complex' from 'sentimental' pastoral has been ignored as much in the UK as it has by his fellow American critics of pastoral literature (*The*

Machine 32). To deal with texts that Marx might have referred to as 'complex pastoral' I offered the term 'post-pastoral' in 1994 to indicate that some texts could escape the closed circuit of the idealised pastoral or the corrective anti-pastoral (Gifford, 'Gods of Mud' 134). This new term offered to the American belief in an adaptive pastoral continuity a set of provisional criteria (the six questions above) by which to distinguish texts that lapsed back into a pastoral of the past and those that problematised their engagement with land.

I would now like to consider whether Judith Wright's poem 'The Eucalypt and the National Character' engages with questions one, three and six in particular of my definition of the post-pastoral. Such a mode of approaching the poem may provide not only a route of elucidation of the poem's nuances, but also require an alert evaluation of some of its strengths and weaknesses. Jenny Kohn has indicated that Wright herself might have hoped that readers could distinguish pastoral and post-pastoral qualities in her poems. Do her poems celebrate 'a simple valorising of the pastoral past' in land, or is land suggested to be an uneasy site of dispute as a result of a history of invasion? Indeed, might the subtle play of a single poem express the tensions between these two rather starkly stated positions? In this case might the eucalypt tree be celebrated, for subtle qualities we would do well to note, without being simply idealised for nationalistic purposes? Can a tree represent a national identity?

Since Wright's poem has its origins in the international context of a UNESCO conference, and also because I will argue that the poem has global implications for our environmental crisis, it may be worth noting the tendency for colonialists to seek a new national identity in a tree: Canadians in the maple leaf, New Zealanders in the tree fern. This may represent a colonial duplication of the 'naturalisation' of desired national characteristics in the home country. In Britain the oak tree has long been associated with national identity. The poet Geoffrey Grigson has pointed out that 'anciently pre-eminent among European trees, the Oak was sacred, sacredness reinforcing its strength, and strength reinforcing its sacredness' (250). He mentions a high point of oak veneration in Britain as the creation of a Royal Oak by Charles II in 1660 and its association with national character in the song 'Hearts of Oak' that dates from before the Napoleonic War. More recently British nature writer Richard Mabey has collected many examples of the important role of the oak in the folklore of Britain in his monumental *Flora Britannica* (72-77).

Perhaps of more significance to Wright's poem, the importance of individual trees to the mental and emotional health of those who have a relationship with them has a long literature of endorsement in Britain. One of the most perceptive is by Fraser Harrison who writes of personally living with a 'conker tree' and elaborates upon the idea that 'it is impossible not to sense a close correspondence between our family household and the vegetable life of the chestnut' (29). Most

recently, Richard Mabey's brilliant discussion of the cultural significance of the beech tree in his book *Beechcombings* (2007) engages with the issue of its place in relation to English national character associated with the oak. Beech is too wayward, unconforming to its archetype and unpredictable to qualify as a national tree, Mabey argues. In *Flora Britannica* Mabey had identified the 'grandeur, strength, duration and resistance' of the oak as the qualities that made it celebrated as a national tree (72-3).

These are matters upon which Judith Wright reflects in a foregrounded Australian context in her poem 'The Eucalypt and the National Character' (Wright, *Collected Poems* 362), which has its starting point as a response to a statement by a representative of the colonial establishment, Sir Otto Frankel. Used as an epigraph to the poem, a sentence from his presentation at the 1974 UNESCO Symposium on Man and Landscape, in Canberra clearly raises the hackles of the poet in the breathtaking hypocrisy of its evocation of a national 'informality':

I believe it is the casual informality of form, so much in keeping with what one has come to regard as the national character, which has given the eucalypts their unrivalled place in the Australian landscape, and in our perception and consciousness of Australia.

The first stanza of Wright's reply begins:

Yes, we do perceive her as sprawling and informal;
even dishevelled, disorderly. That may be because
we are still of two minds about militarism and class-systems.
When we are informal, we're half afraid of bad form.
She, on the other hand, follows a delicate bent
of her own. Worn by such aeons, dried by such winds,
she has learned to be flexible, spare, flesh close to the bone.

In relation to the first question typically raised by a post-pastoral text, in this poem Wright clearly expresses awe at the range of qualities that contribute to the adaptability of the tree. Its unpretentious creativity is used to critique a human society that tends towards 'militarism and class-systems' and thus the poem calls for a humility that might learn from the tree if it is to be associated with the Australian national character, as it has been by Sir Otto Frankel. His position as a titled knight of the realm has suggested a need for humility in the face of the persistence of those two Australian social tendencies named by the poet. Informality can disguise an arrogant complacency about various kinds of 'bad form' in Australian history and character. But unqualified awe for the eucalypt can easily become an idealisation in the classic pastoral tradition.

It is easy to see how Australian student readers of this poem have, in my experience, argued that the poem's praise for the qualities of the eucalypt tends towards idealisation. One might counter that the sharpness of the authentic biological points Wright makes about the tree could not be called idealisation, although this word might apply to Wright's view of the discourse of Sir Otto Frankel. Libby Robin has created the term 'Biological Cringe' for some attitudes towards Australian nature: 'The Biological Cringe is sometimes manifest in shame at the primitive and economically useless life-forms of the "continental museum", and sometimes also appears as an overcompensating patriotic strut about the Australian biota and its associated nation' (9). It is clear that any 'patriotic strut' associated with this poem is in its epigraph. Judith Wright's way of undermining this in her poem is to counter the male 'patriotic strut' of her epigraph with a female gendered tree in the poem. 'The toughest care' and 'the most economical tenderness' are hardly idealising, or, indeed, reductively feminine in the essentialist sense. Awe in this poem is used to counter the bombast and hubris of militarism and class-systems about which the Australian national character is apparently 'still of two minds'. But if humility is to be learned from the eucalypt, what forms might it take in Australian culture? Answers to this question might be found in a consideration of how the poem engages with the third issue raised by a post-pastoral text: if the processes of our inner nature echo those in outer nature in the ebbs and flows of growth and decay, how can we learn to understand the inner by being closer to the outer?

The dualisms of this poem appear to separate the inner human nature from the outer nature represented by the tree. The effect of gendering the tree as female is to associate the male speaker about national character with negative side of the poem's oppositions of nature/culture, tree/Australian society, fertility/destructiveness, wild/city and asymmetry/urban grids. These dualisms are apparently endorsed by the anthropomorphism of characterizing the eucalypt as female. But as Val Plumwood pointed out, anthropomorphism works both ways. It is the only way of giving voice to the other-than-human if we are to learn from its nature to inform our own inner nature. Plumwood extended the 'giving voice' or 'giving agency' potential of anthropomorphism even to particular stones, at the extreme of our notion of the concept: 'Much of the power human-centred reductionism has over us is gained by using concepts like anthropomorphism to enforce segregated and polarised vocabularies that rob the non-human world of agency and the possibility of speech, with departures from reductionist standards declared irrational and superstitious' (19). Plumwood argued that not only trees, amongst which she lived, but stones, with which she also lived intimately, should be invested with the agency that is channelled through anthropomorphism: 'A radical writing project should encourage us to think beyond these boundaries, to reinvest with speech, agency and meaning the silenced ones, including earth and its very stones, cast as the most lifeless

and inconsiderable members of the earth community' (19). To listen, in this spirit, to the eucalypt's qualities is to counter the aptness 'to turn crooks' that humans in Australia have so far exhibited, according to the poet's final line. It seems to me that this line acts as a challenge to an Australian reader in the face of the alternatives to be learned from the eucalypt. 'Apt' leaves the outcome open with Judith Wright's characteristic democratic ambivalence.

So we come to perhaps the most difficult, sensitive and topical issue raised by a post-pastoral poem in an Australian context: how should we address the issue that the exploitation of our planet emerges from the same mind-set as our exploitation of each other? The mind-set of exploitation of Other in nature and others in human society in Australia is certainly present in the poem in the form of references to militarism, class-systems, pine plantations, cities and the final sickness of being 'apt to turn crooks' implying the sicknesses (as in 'turn crook') not only of corruption, but a dishonesty to the earth and ourselves, the readers, as I suggested earlier. The replacement of eucalypts with 'regiments' of pine plantations speaks eloquently in this poem of the national character. 'Fat' 'gobbling' of native hills is a suggestive image for settler culture. But where in this poem is the voice of those who aboriginally inhabited those hills?

When I considered the aspects of the eucalypt that were missing from this poem I accumulated a surprising list: its 800 species; its role as a 'widow-maker' for settlers; its relationship with fire; its history of cultural representations, including the poem by Wright's friend Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 'Municipal Gum'; and Aboriginal stories about the meaning of the trees in different places. Then I realised that the Aboriginal presence was probably in the tree itself. The qualities attributed to the eucalypt that enable it to survive its ecological conditions might also be those that humans might adopt to be characteristically Australian, the poem suggests by implication. Indeed, for centuries the original Australians already had been living precisely those qualities, not only to survive, but to enjoy a rich living dialogue with the land of the continent. Of course, these are qualities that are absent from the speech of Sir Otto Frankel when he refers to 'the Australian landscape'. The 'casual informality' that he attributes to the eucalypt is a white Australian characteristic and it is undoubtedly white settler culture that he has in mind when he refers to 'our perception and consciousness of Australia'. So Aboriginal character, absent from Sir Otto Frankel's mind, is perhaps present in its absence from Judith Wright's poem.

This realisation—that the adaptability of the eucalypt might represent a way of living with the continent's conditions that has already been achieved by Aboriginal culture—gives the poem a current urgency in the face of so much evidence of a need to live with our evolving planetary conditions, now called 'climate change'. It is clear that the original question of the Australian national character in which the poem has its starting point has become a global challenge

to the character of the human species for a contemporary reader of the poem. The climate variations currently being experienced by Australia might be seen as typical of those to be experienced by the rest of our species in the decades to come. Perhaps we need to learn from the eucalypt an 'asymmetrical artistry', as the penultimate line suggests, in our developing a [inter]national character in order to turn from being capitalist crooks to planetary survivors. Judith Wright's poem offers several crucial lessons from the eucalypt that might be suggested by that combination of 'artist' and 'asymmetry': a non-Western way of knowing that is beyond dualisms; a pattern of understanding climactic change that is other than the four European seasons; a 'tough care' and an 'economical tenderness'; an artist's way of intuiting knowledge; a flexible bending of values towards the changing conditions ('What is the good life?'). The final possibility is that poetry itself, as in the final challenge of this poem, might bring the writer and the reader closer, in Wright's words, to 'know ourselves no longer exiles, but at home in a proper sense of the term' (*Preoccupations* 123).

Of course, the nature of our global 'home' has changed as a result of climate change, and if the Australian experience of it is to be regarded as typical, Wright's poem about national character may have, as I have suggested, more prescience than she could know. Libby Robin concludes her book *How a Continent Created a Nation* with an observation that could be a commentary on the potential international contribution of Wright's poem:

Why has Australia's exceptional nature figured only trivially in the rhetoric of nationhood? While difference and distinctiveness are forged 'culturally', through Australian sporting prowess and war efforts, the potential for Australia's environmental difference to contribute seriously to global knowledge remains unrealised (215).

I owe to Kate Rigby the observation that the 'Australian exceptionalism' of the eucalypt, in being able to deal with unexpected climatic conditions, is what is going to be needed by the rest of the world in the coming decades. Indeed, the second stanza of Wright's poem might now be heard as a vocalization of tree (in Val Plumwood's terms); as what humans might learn from a tree; as a celebration of Aboriginal living with Australian land; and as a challenge to the contemporary international reader of the poem:

Ready for any catastrophe, every extreme,
she leaves herself plenty of margin. Nothing is stiff,
symmetrical, indispensable. Everything bends
whip-supple, pivoting, loose, with a minimal mass.
She can wait grimly for months to break into flower
or bloom willingly bloom in a day when the weather is right.
Meagre, careless, indifferent? With the toughest care,
the most economical tenderness, she provides for seed and egg.

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Unnatural River, Unnatural Floods? Regulation and Responsibility on the Murray River in the 1950s¹

EMILY O'GORMAN

'I have read the reports in your newspaper of the recent flooding', wrote Geoff L. Harrison, Executive Engineer of the River Murray Commission (RMC), to the *Border Morning Mail* in 1958 ('Flood Control' pt. 2). '[A]nd', he continued, 'because of reported inaccurate statements regarding this flood and some misconceptions regarding floods generally, I feel that the following facts should be placed on record'. Harrison was responding to claims by farmers that the Hume Dam, operated by the Commission, had caused recent floods on the Murray River. He denied that water releases had exacerbated floods for those below the dam: 'statements that the gates were raised, allowing large volumes of water to escape, or that it was a "man-made" flood, are inaccurate as no stored water was released'. He argued that floods had occurred 'from time immemorial', and that when river flow was 'too large to be contained in the channel it spreads over its own floodplain'. He criticised negative press reports that 'abuse the river (or some convenient authority) for the destruction it has wrought' ('Flood Control' pt. 2). Harrison's position was that floods were 'natural' occurrences, dams and officials should not be blamed; but they were.

Harrison's strong defence of dams highlights significant changes in people's understandings about the river in flood with and without dams. The Murray River, like many rivers in Australia, has flooded (and dried up) intermittently since well before European settlement. The evolution of complex floodplain ecologies along the river attests to this. In the period since colonisation, those living along the river had experienced a number of large floods, for example in 1870, 1917 and 1927. However, the building of large dams and other regulatory structures brought changes to both the environment and understandings of floods and the river. What does it mean that floods could be seen as 'man-made'? What does this tell us about changing understandings of the Murray at a time when its flows were rapidly being regulated through large dams and other structures?

¹ This paper uses the measurements, monetary values and currency quoted in primary sources, except where conversions to contemporary units and values have been necessary for comparison or clarity.

Blaming the government for floods was a cultural and political shift induced by the timing and size of the 1956 floods, which occurred two years before Harrison wrote his letter. These floods remain the only time the Murray and Darling river systems have flooded together since European colonisation. The event occurred after four decades of transforming the Murray into a regulated river, a period of world history in which dams became powerful symbols of the transformative power of engineering and technology. Yet it appeared engineering had not delivered the promised environmental security. It seemed to some that dams, built to minimise the effects of drought, were paradoxically bringing floods. More, albeit smaller, floods in 1958 increased farmers' concerns over the operation of dams and indeed the very presence of these large regulatory structures in the upper Murray and its tributaries.

The Murray is one of the longest rivers in Australia, second only to the Darling, which is one of its tributaries.² Together, these river systems form what is now known as the Murray-Darling Basin, which covers approximately one seventh of Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Water'). The Murray's headwaters are in the Great Dividing Range, a mountain range that runs along the east coast of Australia. The river is fed by many tributaries that are filled by snowmelt from these ranges as well as rainfall. The Murray forms most of the length of the state boundary between New South Wales and Victoria, and also runs through South Australia before emptying into the Indian Ocean. The river is highly significant; it forms the cornerstone of Australia's agricultural industry, is an important site of biodiversity, and is deeply embedded in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures (Weir 26-46; Sinclair 3-25). In the midst of Australia's current period of growing water uncertainty, especially along the Murray, it is important that we revisit pivotal moments such as the 1956 and 1958 floods and the building of large dams which have shaped the physical and cultural landscape in such an enduring way.

This paper focuses on the 1956 and 1958 floods in the Murray as turning points in understandings of floods, the river and dams. Analysis centres on a set of newspaper clippings, as well as other documents, from two archives held by the National Archives of Australia. These archives are two halves of a bigger file, titled 'Flood Control – investigation of flood control and mitigation in the Murray Valley' ('Flood Control' pt. 1 and pt. 2). The records are from the office of the Commonwealth Minister for National Development, William Henry Spooner, and focus in large part on responses by the federal government to the 1956 and, to a lesser extent, 1958 floods. This department, which was created in 1950 and dissolved in 1972, was at the forefront of river regulation and the

2 The Darling River system, however, has a very different hydrology from the Murray River system and they are somewhat independent. The Darling River system is affected by northern monsoonal rains, whereas the flow in the Murray is largely dependent on winter rainfall and spring snowmelt (see Pittock *et al.*).

‘planning and co-ordination’ of other projects towards ‘the development of natural resources on a national basis’ (Department of National Development). It oversaw federal interests in the construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. In addition, Spooner headed the state/federal conglomeration that was the RMC, the precursor to the Murray-Darling Basin Initiative and the then facilitator of cost-shared engineering works as well as river research (Department of National Development; Merritt 62).

The newspaper clippings I have selected from this file centre on the increasing concerns of farmers about the effects of the Snowy Mountains Scheme and the Hume Dam on floods. In particular, I concentrate on newspaper articles from the *Border Morning Mail*, published in the town of Albury, then the centre of a dairy region and located along the upper Murray River in New South Wales, just below the Hume Dam. This region also encompasses the town of Wodonga, on the opposite bank of the Murray in Victoria. Through these articles we can glimpse bigger transitions in the way rivers and floods were understood after the construction of dams and some of the significance of these years of rapid change.

I focus on three issues that bring together and explore experiences of environmental, cultural, and technological transformation. First, I examine what greater government involvement in river flow and centralised control through large-scale dams has meant for changes in environmental understandings, particularly understandings of floods as ‘natural’ events. Second, there is an undercurrent of anxiety in newspaper editorials by farmers that dams had, and would continue to, change the way floods flowed across farming land, including their size and frequency. Following the 1956 and 1958 floods people were concerned that the dams could alter flood flow so drastically that previous knowledge and experience did not prepare them for these radically different flows. Dams became sources of uncertainty about future environmental, and related economic, change.

Last, I explore anxieties and disputes around dams and the floods within a political context. Non-irrigators expressed a sense of injustice towards government policies and river regulation that favoured the interests and expansion of the irrigation industries and small-scale farming, such as fruit, vegetable, and nut farming, small-scale dairies, and viticulture. Largely non-irrigating primary producers, like cattle and sheep graziers and some dairy farmers, were increasingly being sidelined in government policies and projects.³

3 There was both irrigated and non-irrigated dairy farming. Small-scale irrigated dairy farming was being encouraged at this time (and later) by state programs of closer settlement (see footnote 6). Dairy farmers increasingly employed irrigation techniques. For example, between 1979 and 1982, 79.4 percent of the total area under irrigation in Victoria was used for pasture (Powell, *Watering* 255).

They questioned technocratic projects of national development and the bias of governments at a time of widespread support for the regulation of the Murray for irrigation water supply.

The 1956 and 1958 floods and their fallouts must be seen within the wider context of inter-war and post-war development (1930s to 1960s) and the 1950s as a decade of change in Australia. As Nicholas Brown has argued in *Governing Prosperity*, 'the 1950s bear a particular weight as a point of separation between an old and a new Australia'; from 'an Australia of class, hardship, Empire and assertive nationalism' to 'the cultural diversity, the "quality of life" issues, the protest movements and the liberations of the 1960s' (2). This paper adds to Brown's critique of the common view of the 1950s as a period in Australian history that was conservative and static and supports his argument that it was rather a decade of transition. In order to demonstrate more fully the significance of these floods, then, I will draw attention to the wider context in which they occurred and begin with a short discussion of the regulation of the Murray and the ideas that underpinned the radical transformation of an entire river system.

Regulating the Murray River

In the 1950s, people living along the Murray were experiencing one of the most dramatic environmental interventions in twentieth-century Australia, the regulation of the Murray simultaneously for drought mitigation, navigation, irrigation and hydro-electricity. Dam-building was part of an almost worldwide post-war pursuit of progressionist development that provided employment for the unemployed and immigrants, new production bases, and symbols of nationalism. It was underwritten by a renewed faith in human ability and technology. Jacques Leslie, reflecting on the impact of dams in 2005, noted that large dams can today be found in '60 percent of the world's two hundred-plus major river basins' and geophysicists speculate that the shift in weight from these storages has 'slightly altered the speed of the earth's rotation, the tilt of its axis, and the shape of its gravitational field' (4). Constructions built in the post-war period were major contributors to this planetary change; they also heralded more local and rapid spatial, social, and political transformations.

The Murray was transformed into a 'regulated river' in just one generation, through state-, interstate-, and federally-built dams. The Lake Victoria Reservoir, Hume Dam, Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, five barrages on Lake Alexandrina blocking the Murray mouth, thirteen locks spanning the Murray,

Lake Mulwala and other works were completed between 1915 and 1974, and all were at least under construction by 1956.⁴ Most of these structures were the result of a concerted and shared effort to ‘canalise’ the river, a policy agreed upon by the members of the RMC after its establishment in 1917. The RMC included representatives of the three states that shared the Murray (New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia) and the Commonwealth government. The canalisation of the Murray aimed to make it into a channel to support water supply from dams to irrigation settlements and, initially, to improve river navigation. The expansion of irrigation soon became the dominant rationale for the regulation of the Murray. In effect, this was an attempt to create a new, controllable river (Lloyd 181-84; Wright 281-83; Connell 56-61).

The dams were built by governments, the largest through joint interstate and federal organisations like the RMC and Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority (SMA).⁵ One of the primary interests of these organisations and the role of the dams was to ensure security to government-backed soldier and ‘closer’ settlements on the Murray, which were mainly irrigation communities.⁶ The dams would control river flow, ensuring there was water in the river at the right times for citrus and vine cultivation and minimise the effects of drought.

These watershed management systems heralded a new kind of relationship between people and the rivers. The seasonal flows of the Murray River were reversed for irrigation needs and eastward flowing rivers turned westward by the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The fearless ideologies of control and management that underlay river engineering were given expression in the construction of dams and irrigation planning and farming. Such ideologies were rooted in ideas of holistic, watershed manipulation. It was an era when large-scale enterprises—‘bigness’—commanded national and international respect, both in the size of dams and control over entire river systems. Big achievements promised ‘great rewards’ (Casey v). Irrigation settlements had been established along the Murray since the 1880s, but the Hume Dam and Snowy Mountains Scheme were built to feed irrigation networks on an unprecedented scale.

4 A ‘barrage’ is a structure built across a watercourse to regulate and manage water flow. The barrages built near the mouth of the Murray were intended to control upstream water levels for irrigation, reduce salinity levels along the lower Murray, improve navigation at the Murray’s mouth and reserve pool water for Adelaide and southeastern South Australia (Murray-Darling Basin Commission, ‘The Barrages’).

5 The state governments involved in dam-building on the Murray and in interstate/federal organisations were the three that laid claim to part of that river: Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

6 ‘Closer settlement’ was the settlement of people on the land by the government at a high density, usually with the aim of increasing farming production through defined and limited farming plots within defined areas of settlement. Returned servicemen were some of those ‘settled’ on irrigation blocks (see Lloyd 184-185; Powell, *Watering* 146-47, 150, 167-70).

Dams and national development: the Hume Dam and the Snowy Mountains Scheme

Since the 1930s the Hume Dam has been the primary regulatory structure for irrigation releases along the Murray. Initiated in 1919 and completed in 1936, the Hume was built as a joint venture between the Victorian and New South Wales governments, and was operated by the RMC. The Hume was widely revered as a technological achievement and as representative of a new human ability to control the river. Built in the inter-war period, the dam was intended to support existing irrigation farming and to create the opportunity for state governments to expand agricultural production on an unprecedented scale (Sinclair 69-71).⁷

The Hume was intended to alter the Murray's flows radically, and it did. Historian Paul Sinclair has noted that by 1939, only three years after the dam began operation, 'the Murray's flow had been substantially modified from its natural condition by the operation of the Hume Dam' (69). The Murray changed from being 'generally high, cool, turbid, and fast-flowing in spring and early summer' to being 'low, warm, slow flowing and clear by the end of summer' (69). The dam held back water that covered an area of 33,000 acres and enabled dramatic increases in the area of land under irrigation in Victoria and New South Wales: from 814,000 acres in 1939 to 1,406,000 acres in 1946 (Sinclair 73). The Hume remains the 'work horse' of irrigation along the length of the Murray.

Together with the massive casualties of the Second World War came exponential leaps in technology, progressionist ideologies of control and concerns for national security. It was within this context that the Snowy Mountains Scheme was initiated. The Scheme, which began construction in 1949 and was completed in 1974, was envisaged as an engineering masterpiece of post-war reconstruction: an intricate system of dams to feed the Murray and Murrumbidgee irrigation industries and harness the regular seasonal snowmelt for hydro-electricity. Historian George Seddon has drawn attention to an important underlying motive for the massive engineering scheme: the belief that use of water resources on the dry continent needed to be maximised (Seddon 36-37; see also Powell, *Watering* 248-49). Post-war Australia aimed at national security, including food production, and the Snowy was an integral part of this plan as, together with the Hume and other structures, it would create a stable river for agricultural farming (Powell, *Watering* 207, 224-25). Whilst a product of post-war anxiety, it was also part of the 1950s self-conscious drive towards modernity, following the examples of America's massive water diversion and hydro-electric projects, such as the Hoover Dam, dams along the Mississippi River, and the Tennessee Valley weirs (Tyrrell 173; Powell, *Watering* 204-05; Powell, *Emergence* 48-51;

⁷ For more on the Hume Dam and the role of the RMC see Eaton 46-47.

Wigmore 122).⁸ It was conceived within, and regenerated, a national mood of faith in techno-culture. The Scheme became a powerful symbol of Australia's development and modernisation within a global drive towards technical advancement rooted in national and progressionist projects.⁹

The project was the largest engineering scheme yet undertaken in Australia and was vested with national pride. Sir William Hudson, Commissioner of the SMA, articulated the importance of the scale of the project, which was 'teaching us ... to think in a big way ... to be proud of big enterprises' (quoted in Seddon 36).¹⁰ Seddon likened the impact of the Scheme to the Gallipoli myth in the rhetoric of heroism that surrounded it. It was also similar in the public unity and support and sense of national pride it generated (Seddon xxiii, 36). Environmental historian John Merritt recently recalled that in the 1950s '[v]irtually every Australian knew something about the dams and tunnels in the mountains that would boost the country's electricity supply and make the Riverina a vast food bowl—even, as the author can attest, school children in far off Western Australia' (59). The Scheme also attracted international attention for its 'complexity and size' (59). It was a symbol of post-war prosperity and is still referred to as 'the greatest engineering scheme in Australian history' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme').

The 1956 floods in an engineered landscape

In an era of 'bigness', the 1956 floods conformed. In January 1956 the rivers and their tributaries were already high from heavy rainfall and flooding throughout the Darling and Murray watersheds in 1955, so that relatively little rain in 1956 could cause rivers to flood (Bond and Weisner). The earth was so saturated that rain did not soak in, but ran directly into swelling waterways and ravines. By February 1956 the McIntyre and Condamine catchments in Queensland were so waterlogged that the Bureau of Meteorology recorded a 100 percent runoff rate, causing increased flooding from relatively minor amounts of rain (25 to 100 millimetres) (Bureau of Meteorology; Brundt). On the Murray, especially near the point where the Darling was contributing its flood flows, the ground

8 Indeed, the Snowy Mountains Scheme's Commissioner, Sir William Hudson, recruited experienced hydroelectric engineers from America (Merritt 59-60). Ian Tyrrell has documented early Australian and American (especially Californian) exchanges of irrigation techniques, water management bureaucracy, knowledges and engineers. For further discussion on the probability that Australian water management influenced management in America, see Powell, *Emergence* 48-50; Powell, 'Australian Water' 61; O'Gorman 200.

9 For examples of dams and other technological projects in other countries that were connected with nationalism and state development in this period, see Leslie; Mitchell; Leybourne; Taylor; Worster; Reisner.

10 For further examples of the emphasis placed on the 'bigness' of the Snowy Mountains Scheme by its promoters see the Preface and Foreword to Lionel Wigmore's commissioned history of the Snowy Mountains Scheme written by the Right Honourable Lord Richard Gavin Gardiner Casey and Sir William Hudson respectively.

was also saturated. In the irrigation district of Mildura, located on the Victorian side of the Murray River, the ground became so water-soaked in 1956 that the artesian aquifers rose to the surface. This made the ground so unstable that electricity pylons began to float. A resident later recalled that 'the ground was so saturated ... [that] in the switch yard you could push a 4 x 4 red gum straight into the ground over four foot just like that' (quoted in Chandler 16).

The hopes that dams would provide environmental security and a more consistent river were shattered by the floods. Water moved amorphyously over the dams, submerging many irrigation areas. The Darling and Murray rivers and their tributaries all flooded in that year. Each waterway experienced localised floods and also, in most cases, a series of peaks. If the total area of the Murray and Darling systems is taken into account, floods were occurring from January until November, with the major peaks in the Murray in August and in the Darling in September. The floods were nebulous, spreading, peaking and pulsing through the watershed in irregular bursts and cumulative waves. Rainfall in April along both major rivers dramatically increased river heights, contributing to higher floods in August and September (Harrison; O'Gorman 215-33).

The amount of rain, length of its duration, and area it covered compounded to cause one of the most significant flood events since colonisation in what is now the Murray-Darling Basin. A later RMC report estimated that the floods in the Murray watershed alone covered approximately 1.75 million acres (as in the floods of 1870 and 1917)—it was amongst the largest floods along that river in terms of peak heights and submerged area (Harrison 12).

One year after the floods, the RMC assessed the total damage in the Murray and Darling watersheds to be £5 million (Harrison 23). Damage to private property, in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia combined, was estimated to be £1.5 million, two thirds of which was in South Australia. The remaining portion of the estimate referred to damage to infrastructure and other government works and facilities. In 1997 Emergency Management Australia (EMA) produced a new cost estimate of the damages caused by the floods (EMA, '1956 Floods'). It estimated the floods between May and December 1956 to have cost £30 million (\$840 million, 1997 values) in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia combined, increasing the initial assessment by £25 million. A large proportion of this overall cost was attributed to subsequent losses in agricultural production (EMA, '1956 Floods'). For example, the Australian Dried Fruits Association estimated in 1957 that 63 percent of the raisin crop, 22 percent of the currant crop and 27 percent of the sultana crop had been destroyed ('Severe Dried Fruit Losses').

Even in its failure, the new frame of engineering that scaffolded the river became the frame through which the floods were understood and reflected upon. None

of the dams were constructed to mitigate floods, or included flood mitigation in their designs. Although the Murray River had flooded periodically, it was rather experiences of drought and the possibilities for irrigation (including increased population and production) that dominated popular and government desires for engineered works. Indeed, few dams in Australia then included any specific allowance for mitigating floods. The potential to use dams for this purpose had long been recognised by engineers in Australia and around the world, but mitigating floods through dams was costly and often any gain was thought to be outweighed by the expense of the structures. Flood mitigation more usually took other forms such as levee banks.¹¹ After extensive and hugely damaging floods in parts of New South Wales and Queensland in February 1955, mitigation of floods through dams was initiated on a number of coastal rivers in New South Wales. One of these rivers was the Hunter. On this river other means of flood mitigation that had been developed since the 1870s were overcome by the unprecedented 1955 floods. The floods caused extensive damage in this region, which had become a highly profitable farming area. Recuperation from the 1955 floods required significant state aid. The building of a flood mitigation dam now became justifiable in economic and humanitarian terms (Lloyd 288-89).

Following the 1956 floods, investigations into what was termed the 'flood problem' also began to receive greater attention along the Murray. Many people living along the river were concerned that flood mitigation now be addressed more thoroughly, either through dams or other means, such as building more levees. Some residents were also worried that the dams themselves could cause floods by redirecting water from one river into another. The Snowy Mountains Scheme, which had just come under construction, became an object of anxiety (Harrison 12).

Doubting control: the 1956 floods

One of the first indications of concern over the effect of dams on increasing flood heights came from a letter written by the leader of the Country Party in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Thomas Francis Percy Byrnes. Byrnes wrote to Prime Minister Robert Menzies in the wake of the massive 1956 floods. He raised questions that had been put to his Party by people who lived along the upper Murray as well as 'further along the River'. People were 'disturbed at the possibilities of water being passed into the River from the Snowy Mountains Project at such times that floods would be augmented and damage done to adjoining lands' (Byrnes to Menzies, 9 November 1956, in 'Flood Control' pt. 1).¹²

¹¹ Levees could, however, be problematic as they could raise flood heights in other places (see Lloyd 289).

¹² Thomas Francis Percy Byrnes most often used his middle name 'Percy' as his first name, thus the letter in this file was attributed to 'P.T. Byrnes' (see Costar).

The list of questions Byrnes included, based on those of residents, were probing and technical, focusing on the effects of water releases into the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers from the Scheme's generating plant, once it came under operation. These questions expressed anxiety about changes to flood and river flow from the Scheme. Residents also sought reassurance as they scrutinised the SMA. They asked, for example, about the timing of dam releases, the amount of water that would be diverted from other rivers, whether gauges would be installed to monitor how river flow was affected by dam releases, where these gauges would be located, and, perhaps most tellingly, could the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Commission (SMC), the working branch of the SMA, 'accurately assess the flow of these rivers, and ... calculate the effect which discharge of water from their generating plant will have upon the flow of these rivers, especially at times when these rivers are at their peak flow'? (Byrnes to Menzies, 9 November 1956, in 'Flood Control' pt. 1). This last question is significant as it sought to examine the river knowledge of the SMC. The floods had not only cast doubt over the abilities of engineers to control the river but also over their knowledge of the river. Did the Commission know enough about the interrelationship of the rivers, dams, floods and floodplains? Further, in asking how the SMC intended to monitor changes in river and flood flow, for example through river gauges, residents were also questioning the Commission's research and operational priorities. Not only were residents asking whether SMC and SMA decision-makers knew if floods might be increased in some places, but did they care?

As the 1956 floods occurred the river was undergoing major transformations. The previous year the first of sixteen dams that were eventually built for the Snowy Scheme was completed (Guthega Dam) and many others were under construction, including the massive Eucumbene Dam, the largest in the Snowy Scheme, which was finished two years later. However, the concerns over regulation in 1956 focused on problems of the future—what would happen to the river on completion of the Snowy Scheme—rather than in any way connecting regulation directly to the floods of that year. The floods triggered concerns about the future effects of the Scheme and also about human ability to create a stable, controllable river. The floods represented an uncontrolled danger, something that had not been foreseen, and also triggered wider doubts about what else had not been taken into account in the Scheme's planning and construction.

The Prime Minister's Office forwarded Byrnes' letter to Spooner and the Department of National Development for a response. Similar concerns had

recently been expressed by other residents and a summary of the SMA's position had been compiled by its Commissioner, Sir William Hudson.¹³ Now, the Department addressed residents *en masse* through the press.

In the final month of 1956 Spooner issued a press statement assuring concerned residents in the Murray Valley that Snowy Scheme water releases would not aggravate 'severe' floods (Press Statement, 26 December 1956, in 'Flood Control' pt. 2). Spooner's press statement, which called on the expertise of Hudson, stated that the Commissioner had had 'this matter thoroughly investigated'. Hudson and the SMA further defended the Scheme, arguing that once completed it would in fact 'have a marked effect in reducing flooding in the Murray and Murrumbidgee' rivers via a system of reservoirs on the upper Tumut and upper Murrumbidgee rivers and water diversion tunnels. Spooner also drew attention to plans to enlarge the RMC-operated Hume Dam by a further 500,000 acre feet (half the cost being paid by the SMA), which, together with current enlargement works, would provide flood mitigation as well as more irrigation water storage (Press Statement, 26 December 1956, in 'Flood Control' pt. 2; Merritt 62).¹⁴

This press statement was picked up by a number of regional and metropolitan newspapers, including the *Border Morning Mail* (Albury), *Advertiser* (Adelaide), *Mercury* (Hobart), *Ballarat Courier* and *Argus* (Melbourne) ('Flood Control' pt. 2). The headline of an editorial in the *Border Morning Mail* read: 'Snowy Surplus No Danger to Murray River'. The article, printed on 31 December 1956, put the issue within the context of the floods of that year:

With vivid memories of the all-time record flooding of the Murray in the year ending today and the tremendous damage to valuable properties that followed and continued for several weeks, it was only natural for those in that famous old stream's lower regions to ponder upon a greater menace when the waters of the Snowy were ultimately diverted to the Murray and its Murrumbidgee tributary. ('Flood Control' pt. 2)

Residents, claimed the article, while 'as proud of the immense Snowy River project as they were when the giant Murray was harnessed in 1936' (when operation of the Hume Dam commenced), had some reservations about engineering and its consequences for the river and floods, and ultimately their lives and livelihoods. Spooner had put minds at rest, according to the *Border Morning Mail*: 'Fortunately for all concerned their qualms no longer exist' ('Flood Control' pt. 2).

¹³ Concerns had been expressed by September 1956 (see W.H. Spooner to Secretary [H.G. Raggatt], 17 September 1956, 'Flood Control' pt. 1; 'The Effect of the Construction of the Snowy Scheme on Flooding in the Snowy, Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers' and 'The Effect of the Diversion of the Snowy River on the Flow of the Upper Murray River', statements by William Hudson, 3 September 1956, 'Flood Control' pt. 1)

¹⁴ These works on the Hume Dam supplemented another enlargement of the dam that was already increasing it to two million acre feet. An acre foot is a unit of volume, i.e. acre = area, feet = depth.

Spooner's and Hudson's quick response to farmers' concerns must be seen in the context of the national and international status of the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The reputation of the Scheme as a technological achievement and national benefit was actively cultivated by its publicity branch and its leaders, including Hudson (Seddon 25-26). Merritt, in his study of the changing political and environmental contexts of grazing in the Snowy Mountains in this period, has drawn attention to the efforts of Hudson to maintain popular support for the project, as it was only through sustained public enthusiasm that the Scheme could maintain its status, avoid controversy, and, indeed, continue. For example, Merritt noted that in order to avoid negative publicity over environmental degradation during construction of the Scheme, especially soil erosion, Hudson had included a soil conservation section in the SMA's scientific division. Hudson foresaw the potential for significant political fallout as irrigators could potentially join with recreational, scientific, and other lobby groups over the issue and 'embarrass Hudson'. 'But', Merritt wrote, 'no experienced hydro-electricity engineer would willingly allow such a [public relations] disaster to happen' (60). Perhaps this was also the case with Hudson's and Spooner's speedy reply to farmers that the Scheme would not increase floods.

Challenging control: the 1958 floods

Anxieties over the effects of the Snowy Mountains Scheme on flood heights that had surfaced in 1956, which may not have been completely eased, resurfaced in 1957. The Victorian Premier, Henry Bolte, raised the issue in a letter to Acting Prime Minister Arthur Fadden in May 1957 (Bolte to Acting Prime Minister, 28 May 1957, in 'Flood Control' pt. 2). Prompted by '[r]epeated representations ... by landowners along the Upper Murray', who feared increased flooding as a result of the Snowy Mountains Scheme, the Premier put forward the concerns of a recent deputation and added some of his own. Those at the deputation, Bolte wrote, 'even now' experienced damaging inundations in the snowmelt months of late winter and spring which, he implied, were exacerbated by the year-round increased flows in the river, in turn due to Snowy Mountains Scheme diversions. The river, already carrying additional water because of the Scheme, flooded to a greater height.

While 'present flooding had its problems', Bolte wrote, 'the prospect of additional water flows', as more dams began operation, 'could be a matter of most serious concern, particularly to smaller land holders who envisaged the whole of their properties being rendered unproductive' (Bolte to Acting Prime Minister, 28 May 1957, in 'Flood Control' pt. 2). For Bolte, the SMA was clearly liable. However, in referring to the conditions of the Snowy Mountains Agreement of 1949, he was troubled that while the SMA was required to provide against soil erosion and siltation that occurred because of its regulation, it did

not include any 'specific reference to flooding'. Bolte was further concerned that farmers and others in vulnerable areas along the Murray were not legally protected because the Snowy Mountains Agreement of 1949 authorised the diversion which caused the flooding.¹⁵ In view of the legal situation, where the SMA was under no obligation to prevent flooding caused by engineering, Bolte requested the Acting Prime Minister to extract an 'assurance' from the SMA that it would 'do all that it can to avoid damage being caused ... and that, where it is not possible for damage to be avoided, take action to compensate appropriately those persons who may suffer injury as a result of the Authority's actions' (Bolte to Acting Prime Minister, 28 May 1957, in 'Flood Control' pt. 2). Whether floods were increased by regulation was a continual source of anxiety for residents along the Murray River, particularly with the completion of the largest regulator on the Murray system, the Snowy Mountains Scheme, on the horizon.

After further floods along the Murray in 1958, residents became more outspoken on the subject, bypassing government representatives and going straight to the press. This time, though, farmers criticised the Hume Dam as well as the Snowy Mountains Scheme. In September and October 1958 the *Border Morning Mail* published a series of articles written by Harrison, by people in its readership sphere of the upper Murray, and by newspaper staff ('Flood Control' pt. 2). Following the newspaper's report on a 'flood protest meeting' held at Albury on 26 August, prompted by the Murray again breaking its banks, Harrison wrote a letter, published in early September and quoted at the beginning of this paper, defending the RMC's operation of the Hume Dam. Harrison denied that water releases exacerbated the flood for those below the dam, declaring that, it was not 'a "man-made" flood ... as no stored water was released' ('Flood Control' pt. 2). *Border Morning Mail* reporters and those who had experienced the floods saw things differently.

On the day following publication of extracts from Harrison's letter, an editorial rehashed the opinions of 'primary producers' who had held the protest meeting. The report detailed their calls for an inquiry into the role of Hume Dam releases in causing or increasing the flood, because of concerns that too much water was released by 'mistake or miscalculation'. The editorial backed the protesters' views, adding that when the Snowy Mountains Scheme was completed floods could be further 'aggravated' ('Flood Control' pt. 2).

Accusations that the RMC's operation of the Hume Dam increased flood heights along the upper Murray kept coming. In early October an article written by Albury resident V. A. Krueger, printed in the *Border Morning Mail*, blamed the RMC's policies as the primary source of increased flood heights ('Flood Control'

15 See *Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Power Act 1949-1973*.

pt. 2). Krueger argued that the RMC's policy was to fill the dam to capacity well before the irrigation season in September, refusing to leave it empty to catch floodwater—and thereby possibly reduce flood heights—because of its commitment to irrigators. It was, Krueger described, a 'no risk' policy: the RMC would not risk having an empty dam at the start of the watering season. The Albury resident labelled the policy 'weak and defeatist' arguing that those who were not irrigators suffered as a result: 'filling the weir at the earliest[,] no risk is taken with [water] conservation while every risk of flood devastation now falls on the downstream landholders—a full weir will not hold its flood waters' ('Flood Control' pt. 2). By maintaining a full dam the RMC was responsible for the flood by neglecting mitigation.

The Snowy Mountains Scheme also made an appearance in Krueger's account. The Scheme would be used to divert Snowy River water into the Hume Dam in dry years, to supply irrigation along the Murray. If a flood was then to occur, Krueger speculated, the additional water in the Hume weir would cause the peak to be higher than it would have been if the dam had remained without the diverted water. Krueger claimed that: 'Feeding these volumes of water into the [Hume] weir could, under this stringent conservation policy, later become the basis for intensified flooding' ('Flood Control' pt. 2). River regulation, which privileged irrigation, stirred emotional responses from this non-irrigator, who blamed the structures and the RMC for being impartial to his situation and that of fellow floodplain dwellers to the point that engineers would (possibly) risk exacerbating flooding for the sake of irrigation. Krueger stated that:

These water schemes have involved the nation in considerable expenditure, and in return the people are entitled to anticipate every possible benefit. But under the prevailing River Murray Commission policy one section of people [irrigators] receives benefits while other people who could be benefited [others on floodplains] are not even considered. ('Flood Control' pt. 2)

Governments were increasingly trying to manipulate an entire river system predominantly to sustain a single industry. Those who were thrown into the shadows of these policies were speaking out. The floods in 1958 affected the dairying regions of Albury more severely than the irrigation districts on the Murray, and this also possibly contributed to the outcry by non-irrigators. Here we see the beginnings of some familiar debates in the second half of the century between advocates of wild and regulated rivers.

The state and Commonwealth governments' bias towards irrigation created animosity from other non-irrigators, who expressed their sense of injustice at having to suffer floods for the sake of irrigation and full dams. A. Reuss,

president of the Albury-Wodonga Milk Producers Association, spoke out on behalf of dairy farmers in the *Border Morning Mail* ('Flood Control' pt. 2). He blamed the Hume Dam for more frequent and larger floods that had limited milk production and ruined fodder crops. Reuss argued that floods were increased because the dam was 'kept full all the time' so that heavy rainfalls more easily turned into floods. Changes in flood rates and heights had undermined his farm knowledge and planning. The newspaper reported changes Reuss had observed. Reuss 'took over his property late in 1931 and up to 1946 there was only one flood, in 1939, and he "never had to shift a beast". The years from '41 to '45 yielded below-average rainfall. But between '46 and this year, he had been forced to move his entire herd three times'. Reuss clearly felt that dams had radically altered flood frequency and flow across his farm. One of his concerns was the damage caused by the floods, another was the uncertainty over the changing behaviour of floods. He told the newspaper, '[w]e just don't know what to expect and the authorities can't tell us'.

Reuss had little faith in 'the authorities'. He was quoted as saying: 'They are completely destroying us and we don't know how long we can stand it from a financial point of view ... you can see what the weir has done' ('Flood Control' pt. 2). The RMC was specifically targeted, as he claimed 'the RMC is not helping us at all. The man below the weir is not being considered'. He told the newspaper that the situation was so critical that he and others were organising a deputation to Spooner.

Reuss' belief that the Hume Dam could actually be used to mitigate floods added to his sense of injustice. He argued that if the RMC 'gave us a full river' as soon as the dam reached capacity, the peak height of a flood could be reduced as the water would be released steadily and the dam could hold back more of the incoming water. Like Krueger, Reuss was arguing that dams, built for irrigation, should be used to serve the interests of non-irrigators. This was a political argument. In this context, arguments for dams to be used for flood mitigation drew attention to the narrow development focus of governments towards irrigation and challenged governments to broaden the use of dams to benefit a variety of people.

The newspaper article that discussed Reuss' views was, like the others explored here, a clipping in the files of the Minister for National Development. Next to this clipping the Minister's Secretary and head of the department, Henry George Raggatt, wrote a note that outlined the difficult position of the RMC in using the Hume Dam for flood mitigation:

The RMC had a special meeting about this. They ‘can’t win’. If they keep the dam full & it rains they get this kind of complaint. If they don’t keep it full & it doesn’t rain then all the irrigation cockies [small-scale farmers] will say what B.F.’s [sic] they are.¹⁶

The dam had been built for irrigation and seemed only able to be used for *either* industry water supply or flood mitigation, polarising the interests of irrigators and non-irrigators.

A changing physical and cultural landscape

Brown has argued that the 1950s witnessed greater government centralisation, partly as a by-product of the previous decades’ mobilisation for war and need for increased national organisation (9). Projects of ‘national development’ provided a new focus for bureaucracies, such as the RMC, and the saw creation of new administrative units, like the SMA and the Department of National Development, that were the avenues for centralised government and aimed towards government projects.

That Reuss and Krueger blamed ‘the authorities’ is significant. Greater government involvement in river flow through these centralised organisations and dam construction and operation had made them responsible for the river in many people’s eyes. Dam construction had altered the river and changed what were previously seen as natural systems. As a result floods were no longer natural disasters in the way they had been and were instead seen to come from a river controlled by officials.

In the aftermath of the 1956 floods on the Murray River, less blame was directed at the RMC, SMA and Hume Dam than two years later. The main source of anxiety for farmers was the future effects of diversions and consequent increased flooding from the Snowy Mountains Scheme, rather than the influence of dams on the current flood, even though the Hume Dam had already been operational for two decades. However, the 1956 floods witnessed the beginnings of major concerns over the effects of dams on floods, which brought together wider anxieties and a sense of injustice around dams. The debates that took place in the pages of the *Border Morning Mail* in 1958 show that those tensions between residents of the upper Murray and governments had not disappeared but had in fact grown, with people connecting existing regulatory structures to the floods they were experiencing. Perhaps continued flooding had made pressing concerns more urgent, and farmers, with stretched finances, more demanding. Perhaps, too, the era of technological optimism was drawing to a close.

16 ‘B.F.’ was a common acronym for ‘Bloody Fool’.

Technically, the Hume Dam did not increase the 1956 or 1958 floods. The RMC was, however, as Krueger and Reuss argued, implicated in its failure to mitigate the floods, especially in 1958. The Hume Dam became benign in large floods, such as 1956, and tended to slightly reduce the peaks of minor floods, as in 1958. Indeed, the Hume Dam was so successful in reducing floods, later research showed that it had helped to prevent a number of floods occurring both before and after its enlargement in the late 1950s, for example in 1937, 1941, 1959, 1962, 1963, 1965 and 1968 (Sinclair 70). While this may be seen as a benefit in terms of flood mitigation, steadier river flows and the accumulation of longer periods with fewer floods has caused ramifying ecological disaster along the river and floodplains (Sinclair 70; Weir 26-29).

The construction of the Hume Dam, designed as a remedy to droughts, had coincided with a series of wet years and this may explain the causation assigned to the dam by some farmers in 1958. Their sense of injustice towards the operation of this dam was felt rather than vindicated. Perhaps non-irrigators' accusations were influenced by a broader sense of injustice, as many grazing licences in the Snowy River area had been suspended in 1958 to stem catchment erosion as the Snowy Mountains Scheme continued construction and lobby groups reacted to the environmental impact of the work (Merritt 90-92). The dams may have also become the focus of a sense of loss, symbols of changing government interests and a transforming landscape. That people were able to blame dams for floods, however, marks a shift in understandings of floods, rivers and dams. With dams and other forms of river regulation, governments became intertwined with river flow: they were, in a very real sense, embedded in the river. The distinction between natural and unnatural river flow became increasingly blurred.

Conclusion

The 1956 floods set a new agenda for engineers. In the following decades the eastern states embarked on extensive programs of dam building: to feed irrigation networks, encourage new ones, supply enough water to growing populations and industries, and in some areas to mitigate floods. The concerns of residents in Albury over changed flood flows were felt across the nation as the environmental changes caused by dams, irrigation industries' privileged position, and the challenges of limited water resources all helped to turn dams from revered national icons to controversial constructions responsible for social injustice and environmental degradation.¹⁷

The 1956 and 1958 floods prompted a decisive shift in popular thinking about responsibility for floods; thereafter governments were assumed to be responsible

¹⁷ See Powell, *Watering* 246-47, Figure 61 'Simplified chronology and cumulative storage capacity, Victorian water supplies' 252; Lloyd 281-89; Hallows and Thompson 41-57.

for the wayward behaviour of rivers. The floods brought forth anxieties about environmental change and revealed a deep sense of injustice by non-irrigators towards governments' pro-irrigation policies and radical changes to the river for this industry. The floods were deeply entangled in the transformation of the Murray, both inducing and reflecting changes. The 1950s have a reputation as years of 'dullness' and conservatism, and yet here we have a major environmental event that was a turning point and which had serious long-term political effects. The 1950s was indeed a decade of change that separated an old and a new Australia. It is out of these histories of dramatic as well as subtle change, much of the complexity of which remains hidden, that we will need to create liveable water futures.

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Democracy reigns supreme in Sikkim? A long march and a short visit strains democracy for Lepcha marchers in Sikkim

KERRY LITTLE

Arundhati Roy, when writing about the Narmada dam said: 'It's possible that as a nation [India] we've exhausted our quota of heroes for this century, but while we wait for shiny new ones to come along, we have to limit the damage. We have to support our small heroes. (Of these we have many. Many.)' (53).

This is a story about small heroes and another dam on another Indian river—the Teesta river in north-east India. It is a contemporary story about traditional people—the indigenous Lepcha people of Sikkim and West Bengal—who are fighting to stop their sacred homeland being destroyed by mega-dams, built for hydro-electricity. The Lepchas are fighting Big Government and Big Development and in fighting to save the river have also had to fight for their democratic right to pilgrimage and protest.

Introduction

On 10 August 2007 the Information and Public Relations Department of the Government of Sikkim issued a press release condemning a newspaper article from the day before which had questioned democracy in the north-east Indian state of Sikkim. The press release stated that: 'Democracy ... not only exists in Sikkim but also reigns supreme ... there is total freedom of self-expression and right to criticise the Government both through press and speech, equal opportunity to all the citizens in all walks of life without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and faith, no ban of forming Association and holding of public meetings and rally, including hunger strike' (*NOW*, 'Democracy reigns supreme' 1-2).

This defense of Sikkim's democratic credentials followed attention given to a protest by Lepcha activists who oppose the development of six mega hydro-electric dams on the Teesta river in their Lepcha reserve, Dzongu, in North Sikkim. The Dzongu dams are part of the Indian Government's 50,000 MW

Hydroelectric Initiative;¹ a program of dam construction designed to create another 200 billion cubic metres of storage throughout India (Dharmadhikary 28). The plan includes many dams in India's north-east. In Sikkim there are currently more than 20 dams forecast or in progress.

Three weeks before the State Government's press release, Lepcha protestors and members of the social activist group Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT), had sat in front of Bhutia-Lepcha House (BL House) in Gangtok (the state capital) and commenced an indefinite hunger strike.² The hunger strikers attracted blanket media coverage and support from within and outside Sikkim, and through their non-violent action shone a light on government process and probity in relation to the dams, disrupting the State Government's plans for a smooth and trouble-free implementation of the projects.

Since early 2006 I have recorded traditional and contemporary narratives of Sikkim's indigenous people, the Lepcha. I ask elders for their memories of stories told to them by their parents and grandparents. From the youth, I ask questions about belonging, identity and what it means to them to be Lepcha. I am examining whether young, modern Lepchas, who are influenced by the more dominant Nepali culture in Sikkim³, are still culturally connected to their traditions. Early in my research, I met the young Lepcha activists from ACT; the self-described 'first educated generation' of Lepchas. It is these educated, English-speaking Lepcha youth—many of whom were schooled at colleges and universities in the larger Indian cities and who now spend much of their time in Gangtok — who traverse tradition and modernity. Their education gives them the sophistication to create a protest narrative that incorporates ownership, tradition, culture, religion and concern for the environment. They deploy their mythology as a protest narrative in order to affirm the sacredness of their land. By telling Lepcha traditional stories that 'prove' the sanctity of Dzongu they are, in one way, giving me answers to my questions about their connection to Lepcha identity. In trying to save their land, they are, in many cases, concurrently bonding with their culture. I don't know exactly how much impact the threat of losing their culture has had on their desire to live it, but I suspect it may be a catalyst for saving it.

Lepchas were the first inhabitants of the Himalayan land that connects north-east India, Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal. They live in Sikkim and its borderlands including the Darjeeling district of West Bengal (which includes Kalimpong

1 The 50,000 MW Hydroelectric Initiative was launched by the Prime Minister of India in May, 2003. 162 hydroelectric schemes have been identified with an aggregate installed capacity of 50,560 MW. They are located in sixteen Indian states. For more information: <<http://www.powermin.nic.in>>

2 BL House is a large, run-down building on Tibet Road in Gangtok used by the Bhutia and Lepcha communities for meetings and events.

3 Sikkimese of Nepali origin make up approximately 80% of the population. Lepchas represent less than 10 percent of Sikkim's population of 610,000.

and Kurseong), the Ilam district of Nepal and pockets of west and south-west Bhutan. There are approximately 45,000 Lepchas in Sikkim (State Socio Economic Census 61) and 70,000 outside Sikkim.⁴ They have a shared history, language, and traditions and like other indigenous people who are a minority in the land they live in, they share the struggle to retain their identity against the influence of more dominant cultures, in particular Nepali culture in Sikkim and West Bengal.

In Sikkim, Lepchas make up 7.8% of the state's population of 581,500 (Government of Sikkim 61). However, in the sparsely populated north, where the Dzongu Lepcha Reserve is located, they are 37.47%—the largest ethnic group of the population. The 7,000 inhabitants of Dzongu are almost all Lepcha and practice Buddhism. They also include shamanistic nature worshipping rituals in their worship, conducted by Lepcha bongthings and muns—male and female Lepcha priests. For decades, most of them worked their land and farmed cardamom. However, now it is all but finished, partially replaced by ginger, mustard and oranges. Eco-tourism is emerging as a source of work for young Lepchas. Many educated Lepchas have government jobs outside Dzongu, in Gangtok or other parts of Sikkim.

Lepchas are widely known for their knowledge of botany and ecology and describe themselves as *Mutanchi Rong Cup* meaning 'Beloved Children of Mother Nature'.⁵ They worship Mount Kanchenjunga, as their 'mother mountain'.

Their mountainous land contains dense forest, wild rivers and several hundred species of birds, butterflies and plants. Kanchenjunga National Park, which is partially inside the Dzongu Lepcha Reserve, is part of the Himalayan biodiversity hotspot.⁶ Dzongu has for centuries been a quiet land. Its remoteness and status as a Lepcha reserve has both protected it from the march of development in other parts of Sikkim, and at the same time hindered the progress of the Lepchas living there for whom access to health and education has, until recent years, been difficult. The protest by Lepcha youth against the hydro-electric projects has broken the stillness of Dzongu. This small patch of rural Sikkim was rarely visited and rarely heard of, but during 2007 and 2008 when the Lepcha protest was at its most vigorous and most public, Dzongu was rarely out of the Sikkim news.

This Lepcha story is also a globalisation story, heard in many villages throughout the world. Around the world, the growing need for energy has brought

4 It is difficult to ascertain the true number of Lepchas for people with one Lepcha parent or grandparent may or may not identify as Lepcha. The numbers given therefore are official numbers given by the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association but cannot be verified beyond this source.

5 The Lepchas' reputation for botanical and ecological knowledge started with the early British explorers who were often accompanied by Lepchas. It is repeated in contemporary writing on Sikkim and its people.

6 <<http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org>>

development to wild rivers in remote places. The rush to development is often a test of democracy and when the people from these remote places act against the will of governments and big business their beliefs and rights are often forfeited.

This paper relates one story of how the Lepchas' protest has tested democracy in Sikkim, particularly during three days in April 2008 when people from outside Sikkim, who supported the protest, entered the small Himalayan state. First were the West Bengal Lepchas, followed by the well-known social activist and anti-dam campaigner Medha Patkar. These visits by 'outsiders' strained the fine thread of democracy that is woven through Sikkimese politics and revealed the inequity of justice that applied to the Lepcha protestors and pilgrims—Arunthati Roy's 'small heroes'—who continue their battle for Dzongu.

Pilgrimage and protest

It was the Lepchas from what is now the Darjeeling subdivision of West Bengal who were undertaking a pilgrimage to Dzongu in April 2008. It was organised by the Kalimpong-based Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association which had a recent history of supporting ACT's protest against the dams. This had made them unpopular with the Sikkimese Government and they continue to be vocal opponents of the hydro-electric projects in Dzongu. Their support took the form of protest rallies, hunger strikes and on one occasion, a blockade of the National Highway (NH31).⁷

However, this April 2008 pilgrimage was presented as a holy march, and included Lepcha elders, lamas and shamans. Perhaps the realisation that Dzongu was threatened had brought with it an urge to see their homeland. Most Lepchas who live outside Dzongu have never been there, although Dzongu under its original Lepcha name *Mayel Lyang*, meaning 'Land of Hidden Paradise', features prominently in their folklore, their literature and their prayers. Known in West Bengal as the 'utopia of Lepcha culture' (Foning 261). Dzongu has long been thought of by the Lepchas from West Bengal as a hidden place, and now they, along with the Sikkimese Lepcha activists, feared it might become a 'lost place'.

The West Bengal Lepchas, despite their geographical distance from Dzongu, felt compelled to save it. Lyangsong Tamsang-Lepcha wrote: 'No sensible Lepcha in this world can sit silently, their hands folded, and look at Dzongu, the holy land of theirs, being defiled, raped, disgraced and dishonoured today' ('Editorial' 5).

Anti-dam movements in India are populated by those directly affected by the projects and also by people from outside the dam sites and river basin. 'They

7 NH31 is the highway which links the hill towns to the plains and is often referred to as 'the lifeline of Sikkim'. Blocking it is a common form of protest in the hills, mostly by the Nepali community in the Darjeeling district who frequently block the highway to highlight their demand for a separate 'Gorkhaland' state.

are voluntary groups taking an active role in mobilising and organising popular action ... primarily motivated by the need to arouse collective consciousness and action against exploitation and oppression at the local level' (Swain 825-7). One of the most famous anti-dam protests in India's history is that against the development of 30 large, 135 medium and 3,000 small dams to harness the waters of the Narmada and its tributaries spearheaded by Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement).⁸ That movement gained support from people outside the affected areas in India and abroad and, under the leadership of Medha Patkar, an 'outsider' from Mumbai who first went to the Narmada Valley as a social worker and became an advocate for the residents affected by the dams, the Narmada development received international attention. The attention led to the World Bank and the Japanese Government, key investors in the projects, withdrawing their funding.

The battle for the Narmada River, which flows through the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, is being fought mainly on the grounds of human rights, in particular opposition to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of villagers. In Sikkim, displacement is not the main issue as Dzongu is sparsely populated and there is no call for relocation of villagers. According to ACT, environmental and cultural sustainability are more at risk, as are the many places in Dzongu which are sacred pilgrimage sites for Buddhists.

The West Bengal Lepchas also campaign against the projects on the grounds that Dzongu is a sacred land for Lepchas. Like the Sikkimese Lepchas, the West Bengal Lepchas are appropriating their mythology to strengthen their protest narrative. When members of Rong Ong Prongzom, the youth arm of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, blocked National Highway 31A to protest the projects, one of the organisers, Azuk Tamsangmoo Lepcha, said 'Dzongu is a holy place, where our age old culture and traditions are still intact. We believe that our souls rest here after death. We will not tolerate any dislocation and threat to this place' (*New Kerala*).

The protest from the West Bengal Lepchas gave the Dzongu campaign enormous strength, for the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association's committee members are experienced campaigners in relation to Lepcha affairs in West Bengal and have relationships with ministers and bureaucrats in the Central Government.⁹ They are also well organised and able to spread the activists' message beyond the West Bengal-Sikkim border. For the Sikkim Government, used to keeping matters about Sikkim inside Sikkim, this has been confronting. The State Government's rhetoric to the Central Indian Government is that Sikkim is a peaceful state,

8 For more information on the Narmada movement refer to <<http://www.narmada.org>>

9 The ILTA has for many years lobbied the West Bengal and Central Indian governments for recognition of Lepcha language in the Darjeeling district and for it to be taught in schools as it is in Sikkim.

one of the few states along the north-east mountain block where there isn't any internal unrest. The Central Government has a strong army presence in Sikkim, situated along the borderland of Tibet, where some lands are disputed territories. And, as Sikkim receives a high level of funding from the Centre—many say a disproportionate amount compared to other states when considering the size of Sikkim¹⁰—the State Government is naturally protective of its image in New Delhi where defense and funding decisions are made and where, according to the Governor in his 2008 budget speech, it enjoys the status of 'one of the best performing states in India'. The Governor said the achievement was possible because 'we are an insurgency free state with no communal and religious tensions. The peace and tranquility has, therefore, been the most important factor which has accelerated the development process in our state' (Agarwal).

Any sign of tension in the state is, therefore, troubling to this Government which has built its reputation on its ability to maintain peace and harmony. The Lepchas' protest has always been peaceful, and they have long enjoyed a reputation as peaceful people.¹¹ However the Government's rhetoric throughout the campaign—particularly in relation to the hunger strike - often urges the Lepchas to discontinue their protest 'for the sake of peace and tranquility in the state.' Peace and tranquility can be translated to mean 'Central Government praise and funding', for the words have in effect become a propaganda slogan for a Government intent on communicating its good management of Sikkim's affairs to those in Sikkim and, possibly more importantly, to those outside the state, in particular Central Government bureaucrats and Ministers in New Delhi.

As Indian citizens, the West Bengal Lepchas do not require a permit to enter Sikkim. However like everyone who is not from Dzongu they require permits to enter this area—the destination of their pilgrimage—and these permits are obtained from the Sikkim Government. Lyangsong Tamsang-Lepcha wrote to the Chief Minister of Sikkim, Pawan Chamling on 8 February 2008 requesting permits for the pilgrims. His letter did not mention the power projects or the protest. He first offered detailed information about Lepcha culture, language and rituals and then informed the Chief Minister of the visit. He did not ask permission for the march but, perhaps foreseeing an objection, chose instead to quote the Indian Constitution as a reminder of his rights.

10 This is a frequent observation by Gorkhaland supporters who complain that Sikkim receives far more funding than they, as part of West Bengal, receive.

11 The Lepchas' reputation as peaceful people was much lauded and written about by the early British explorers and officials who visited Sikkim before India's Independence. It is a label that the many Lepchas have adopted. However, the Sikkimese writer Pema Wangchuk in his thoughtful paper, 'Some issues in the early British construction of Sikkimese history', delivered at The Golden Jubilee Conference of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim, 1-5 October 2008, rejects this assertion. Wangchuk argues that 'the Lepchas, as a people, have been forward looking, ambitious and even aggressive throughout what we know of Sikkimese history'.

Lepchas from different parts of the Indian Republic have decided to undertake a pilgrimage trip/tour to Dzongu Reserve, for the purposes of performing our traditional rites, ceremonies in the sacred, holy places located in Dzongu ... We therefore request you, Sir, to extend your co-operation and direct the District Collector, North Sikkim, to issue entry permits for a period of ten days during the course of which we would like to associate ourselves with our holy places in Dzongu...we trust you will appreciate our sincere intentions and thus honour and uphold our constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms under Articles 19 and 25 of the Constitution. (Tamsang-Lepcha, Letter)¹²

Article 19 of the Indian Constitution concerns the right to freedom and states that all citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression, to assemble peaceably and without arms, to form associations or unions, to move freely throughout the territory of India and to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India. Article 25 concerns the right to freedom of religion and the protection of human rights regarding freedom of speech and conscience, and freedom of profession, practice and propagation of religion.

Lyangsong Tamsang-Lepcha's letter and its reference to the Indian Constitution contained a carefully constructed message to Pawan Chamling; permission to enter Sikkim wasn't for the Sikkim Government to grant, and to withhold permits to visit Dzongu would contravene the Constitution. It would therefore, be undemocratic to try to stop the pilgrimage.

Insiders and outsiders

Sikkim is in some respects a society of insiders and outsiders. The varying status accorded to its people forms a patchwork of 'rights' which stem from its history as a Kingdom ruled by a Bhutia King who wanted to ensure that the rights of the first Sikkimese subjects - Lepchas, Bhutias and early Nepali settlers - were protected when Sikkim merged with India in 1975. There are different tax arrangements for 'Sikkimese Individuals' and 'non-Sikkimese Individuals'. Some may sell land to whomever they please, others may not. Some can enter all of Sikkim; others need special permits for certain areas. Some hold Nepali citizenship, some may not marry a non-Sikkimese and keep taxation-related and social and financial benefits. Some are members of scheduled tribes; others wish to be to avail themselves of the social and financial benefits this brings.

¹² The letter from Lyangsong Tamsang to Sikkim's Chief Minister is reproduced in *Aachuley* magazine 12.1, April 2008, published by The Lepcha Literary Organisation, Kalimpong, pp. 24-29.

The Lepcha Association in Sikkim has applied for 'primitive tribe status' which would recognise their indigenous connection to Sikkim and therefore accord them the status of 'first insider'.¹³

Within Sikkim, groups position themselves as insiders in order to gain political leverage, their insider status strengthened by their tribal tenure on the land. The insider/outsider frame is a common measure of someone's identity and rights in Sikkim.

Prior to the 1973 agitation against the monarchy and consequent elections in 1974, Sikkim's elections were held under a system of balanced representation of different communities based on the principle of 'communal parity'. Ranjan Gupta noted that the parity formula was 'bitterly resented' by the Nepali Sikkimese, for a successful candidate for the State Council had to obtain at least a minimum of 15% of the votes from a community other than his own.

In addition, under the election rule proclaimed in March 1953, the Sikkim Council consisted of six Nepalese members, six Bhutias and Lepchas and five members nominated by the Chogyal 'in his discretion'. The declared object of this system was to safeguard the rights of the minorities. But the political parties argued that it was really intended to stop a predominantly Nepalese majority Government from taking office. (786-98)

The agitation for more representative government was successful, reflected in the 1974 election which was held under the guidance of the Chief Election Commissioner of India and which effectively ended the parity formula. The National Party, predominantly Nepali Sikkimese, long treated as outsiders despite their majority numbers in Sikkim, won a clear majority and the King, who remained the secular and religious head, was sidelined. The outsiders had become insiders and were now running Sikkim. The following year, Sikkim joined the Indian Union.

Sikkim's history and the shifting ground under the feet of various rulers and leaders hold significance in contemporary political and social debate. While the official message is one of communal harmony, the status and special concessions for various tribes is an important thread running through Sikkim's political narrative. The Sikkim Bhutia and Lepcha Association (SIBLAC), when arguing for the rights of Bhutias and Lepchas, regularly cites Article 371F of the Indian Constitution which allows for special provisions with respect to the state of Sikkim including: that the privileges of the Lepcha-Bhutia groups are assured as minorities, that their rights and interests will be protected and that the

13 This move has not been welcomed by all Lepchas. Those opposing the application believe that the label of primitive tribe counters their progress.

Government of Sikkim make provision for the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim for them.¹⁴ When supporting the Lepcha protest against the dams, SIBLAC often refers to the 'protectionery [sic] provisions in the Indian Constitution viz, Article 371F' (SIBLAC).¹⁵ Similarly, they often reference this Article when putting their case against what they describe as 'displacement and dilution of the Indigenous minority tribal Bhutia-Lepcha people of Sikkim.'¹⁶

When people enter Sikkim from outside the state it allows everyone living within the state to become rhetorical 'insiders', for the Government often uses the insider/outsider frame to discredit the opposing views of those from outside Sikkim. The 'dangerous outsider' threat is often invoked and the pilgrimage by Lepchas from West Bengal to their Dzongu holy land was met with suspicion. The Sikkim Government painted them as 'outsiders who spread false and misleading propaganda' and who 'risk the peace and tranquility of Sikkim' (*Sikkim Reporter*).

The request for a Dzongu permit by the pilgrims proved a major headache for the State Government which switched between several access options including: no permit; permits for just five people; a permit that allows five pilgrims at a time escorted by police; and finally, a permit for everyone but conditional on them crossing into Dzongu, walking to the traditional Lepcha House at Nampringdang (where many Lepcha festivals and prayers are held), conducting their prayers and then immediately leaving the Reserve. Despite eventually granting permission for the pilgrims to travel to Dzongu, the Sikkim Government stated in a press release: 'these groups have now attempted to create fear and alarm amongst different sections of the people on grounds of religion, race and caste for their narrow self interest' (*Sikkim Express* 1).

The pilgrimage by West Bengal Lepchas to their ancestral land which began with much enthusiasm on 14 April 2008 ended ingloriously just two days later. The Sikkim Government and its supporters created a climate so hostile that the pilgrims had no choice but to leave.

14 Article 371F was inserted into the Constitution of India in 1975 when Sikkim became the 22nd state of India. It is designed to protect the old laws of Sikkim and the rights of Sikkimese people. Article 371F also provides that the Government of Sikkim shall have special responsibility for peace and for an equitable arrangement for ensuring the social and economic advancement of different sections of the population of Sikkim and in the discharge of his special responsibility under this clause, the Governor of Sikkim shall, subject to such directions as the President may, from time to time, deem fit to issue, act in his discretion.

15 Letter to Sonia Gandhi sent 25 October 2006 by SIBLAC.

16 An analysis of article 371F and related issues can be found in Biraj Adhikari's self-published book, *Sikkim: Wounds of History* (2010).

The Long March

They called it 'the long march'. They had walked for hours, from Triveni in West Bengal on the banks of the Teesta River, to the bridge at Rangpo, at the border between West Bengal and Sikkim. As they set out, a Bongthing (Lepcha shaman) offered prayers for their holy land Dzongu. There were approximately 500 marchers, wearing traditional clothes and carrying banners that gave tribute to Dzongu. They arrived hours later than expected, for the rain and wind had hampered their progress and also because, as one of the organisers told me when I phoned him from Rangpo to check their progress, 'we are Lepcha, we are always late'.

Greeting them on the West Bengal side of Rangpo were some 300 Lepchas from Sikkim, also dressed in traditional clothes; also soaking wet, for the rain fell relentlessly and it was heavy, sleeting, steamy rain; testing their resolve perhaps, but not their kinship, for the welcome party had waited patiently for hours. A lama, Lhazang Lepcha, who is the father of one of the hunger strikers, Dawa Lepcha, stood resolutely by the side of the road. An old man, he seemed impervious to the weather and the weight of his lama's robes which were soaked through and fell heavily around him. Water streamed through the weave of his white wool cap forming rivulets along his face. He greeted everyone, not moving from his post until the last pilgrim from West Bengal crossed the bridge into Sikkim.

There they were met by a different greeting party of around 100 police. Although the police were armed, they were clearly not expecting any danger. They slouched and smoked nonchalantly in doorways to escape the rain before escorting the group onto the Singtam Road. The Lepchas from both sides of the border walked and sung together. The choir of pilgrims sang folksongs, and shouted *Auchuley*, which in Lepcha language means 'hail to the Himalayas'. The atmosphere was festive, happy, uplifting even, until they reached Singtam to find that they had been locked out of their guest house and left to wait in the street. Hungry, cold, wet, with their feet blistered from eight hours walking in wet shoes, it appeared they had already worn out their welcome in Sikkim.

One of the activists from Dzongu, Mayelmit Lepcha, travelled to the border to meet the Kalimpong pilgrims. She described the moment she saw them approach the bridge at Rangpo: 'It was my biggest memory ... being a minority in Sikkim, when the majority of Lepchas from Kalimpong in their attire and all came marching, I felt very proud, very happy to see their smiling faces'. Mayelmit was perplexed by the police presence at Rangpo:

I don't know what the Sikkim State Government thinks about Lepcha people, because we are the peace-loving people, we are the nature

believer, we don't go for violence and all, but that day the number of police persons they kept for security, I feel they wasted their time. We are in the peace rally; our aim was just to go on peace rally to Dzongu along with the Lepchas from Bengal.

'Still,' she reflected, 'we have to thank the police personnel because they walked with us, although it was raining and they were giving the best service to the people of West Bengal.'

'We all walked through to Singtam,' Mayelmit recalled:

When we reached there something happened, because it was totally silent, all the shops were closed and the place we had booked for the long marchers was locked. They [the West Bengal Lepchas] were our guests, they were walking all the way, almost 70 kilometers, old men, old women, elders were there, they had to face problems because the place was closed. People might have threatened the owner of that lodge. Some people wanted to upset our peace march.

Eventually the marchers in Singtam gained access to the guest house and slept there. The next day, the pilgrims left Singtam with the intention of marching through Gangtok on their way to North Sikkim. Mayelmit waited until the pilgrims had left Singtam, then came by car back to Gangtok to sit her exams. While juggling activism and education is at times a struggle she is certain of the importance of both:

We are the first generation from our village in Dzongu getting a little bit of education. With education, we can study, we can work, we can earn for ourselves, but education also allows us to explain to the people what is right, what is wrong. If you can't fight for this movement ... I don't want the coming generation to point at us and say these sisters were there, these brothers were there when this was happening and they didn't do anything. I don't want this statement to come from the coming generation.

The next two days of the march were confusing and heartbreaking for the pilgrims. The Government decided at the last minute that the pilgrims could not enter Gangtok and diverted them around the capital towards Dikchu, a town near Dzongu which is the site of a recently completed 510 MW dam. The Government took the unusual and extreme step of imposing a 'Section 144' in Gangtok, to be enforced for one week from the day the pilgrims were due to pass through the town (15 - 21 April 2008). Section 144 is an old British law

that restricts free assembly.¹⁷ It was drawn up in British India following the First World War in a futile attempt to put an end to the growing movement for Indian independence from British rule.¹⁸

According to the Sikkim Government, Section 144 was invoked 'in light of the proposed rally through Gangtok by the group of Lepchas from the neighbouring hills on their way to Dzongu and its potential to create a law and order situation in the capital' (NOW, 'Section 144' 1). However, there had been no sign from the pilgrims that they intended to cause trouble; the march was peaceful.

An analysis of Section 144 published by Chinmayee Prasad from the National Law Institute University in Bhopal states that the scope of Section 144 is anticipatory, and utilised to restrict certain actions before they actually occur. He points out that 'anticipatory restrictions are imposed generally in cases of emergency, where there is an apprehended danger of some event that has the potential to cause major public nuisance or damage to public tranquility.' He also points out that:

The order must state the facts on the basis of which the Magistrate has decided to invoke the section. The mere statement of a Magistrate that he considered the case to be imminent is not sufficient to give him jurisdiction, if the facts set out by him show that really there was no urgent necessity for action in this connection (Prasad).

Using Prasad's analysis of Section 144, the Sikkim Government's order appeared to be a cynical response to the march. There were no signs of agitation from the marchers who had informed the Government of their intention two months earlier and had not been refused. Large rallies are not uncommon in Sikkim and neighbouring West Bengal. The headquarters of the Gorkhaland movement for a separate State is in West Bengal, and the movement enjoys the public support of the Sikkim State Government. The Gorkhaland movement frequently holds political marches, rallies and bandhs (strikes) in the area.

Modern state-making in India emerges out of the intersection of colonial forms of knowledge and the specific rationalities of postcolonial socialist state formation. (Sivaramakrishnan 449). In Sikkim, modern state-making has its roots in plurality management (Phadnis) and a post-democracy desire to rid the state of monarchical policies that disadvantage the dominant Nepali-Sikkimese in favour of the minority Lepcha and Bhutia tribes. Furnivall wrote that plural societies 'mix but do not combine'. Each group 'holds by its own religion, its

17 Section 144 of the criminal procedure code empowers state-level authorities to declare a state of emergency, restrict free assembly, and impose curfews. Officials occasionally use Section 144 to prevent demonstrations. See <http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc_country_detail.cfm?country=2949&pf> (Accessed 15 Sep. 2008).

18 <<http://www.derechos.org/saran/bhutan/28.txt>> (Accessed 15 Sep. 2008).

own culture and language, its ideas and ways ... [a] plural society, with different sections of the society living side by side but separately within the same political unit' (cited in Malik).

Many see the movement against the dams as a 'Lepcha thing' or a 'Dzongu issue' and do not examine the wider context, by asking whether mega hydro-development is appropriate for Sikkim or India.¹⁹ A pilgrimage by Lepchas to Dzongu is enmeshed with the movement against the dams. The Lepcha activists and pilgrims when talking about Dzongu do not separate their identity from their holy land. Conversely, dam supporters, which include obviously the State Government, do not separate the Lepcha pilgrimage from the activism and therefore viewed the march solely as a political rally. This view is understandable for before the movement to stop the dams there had been little in the way of mass pilgrimage from West Bengal to Dzongu. Even so, it is the Lepchas' democratic right to peaceful protest. The Government's objection to the march out of concern for 'peace and tranquility' appears misplaced when those disturbing the peace are pro government and dam proponents; not the West Bengal Lepchas.

The pilgrims adhered to the conditions of the Section 144 and circumvented Gangtok on their way to Dzongu. However this did not appease their adversaries who ensured the shops on the road to Dzongu were closed so they could not buy food. The rain continued and the pilgrims entered Dikchu wet, tired and hungry where, having silently endured all attempts to thwart their journey, they were met by pro-dam agitators (many of them Lepchas who support the Dzongu government representative and therefore the dams) and 'rent-a-crowd' Government supporters who threw rocks at them and, according to Dorjee Lepcha, 'used provocative and filthy language' (*The Telegraph* 10).²⁰ Not wanting to clash with their fellow Lepchas, the marchers turned back. The police took them back over the bridge at Rangpo, which just two days earlier they had crossed with so much hope and enthusiasm.

Not all Lepchas opposed the dams. The Lepcha community in Dzongu were divided in their views and the gap between Lepchas that do or don't oppose the projects has widened over time. The most influential supporter of the dams at the time of the long march was the Dzongu MLA (Member Legislative Assembly) Sonam Gyatso Lepcha, a member of the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front party.

¹⁹ This was relayed to me by a Nepali-Sikkimese lawyer who supports the movement against the dams because he believes the size of the developments will be bad for Sikkim. He is frustrated by his attempts to engage his social group, mostly educated Nepali-Sikkimese.

²⁰ Rent-a-crowd support is common in Sikkim among Government and Opposition parties who bring people in from outside to swell numbers and show support for their position. I have been in Sikkim several times when rallies are held and seen jeeps packed with people brought into areas where a show of support is needed. After the Dikchu incident I was told many of the people who were brought into the town were not aware of the reason, just that support was needed for the Government.

He campaigned vigorously on behalf of the State Government for support for the projects and was instrumental in persuading many Dzongu residents to sell their land to the developers. He is also able to muster a significant number of people when he needs a show of support for his and the Government's position.

Another outsider

The second 'outsider' to enter Sikkim at that time was the prominent social activist Medha Patkar who is a veteran of another long march, in 1990, from Rajghat town to the site of the Sarvar Sarovar dam in the Narmada Valley, where after eight days she and 3,000 displaced people from the Narmada project were stopped at the Gujarat border by police.

Her visit to Sikkim was planned independently from the West Bengal Lepcha pilgrimage but the arrival of a second 'outsider', so close to the first group, pushed the State Government's anti-protest narrative to the limit. The West Bengal Lepchas were accused of 'creating fear and alarm ... on grounds of religion, race, caste and residence for their narrow self interest' (*Himalayan Mirror* 1) and Medha Patkar was dismissed as 'neither a historian nor an expert on environmental related issues' (*The Statesman* 5).

Medha Patkar stayed in Gangtok for no longer than 12 hours (including overnight) yet her presence was a milestone for ACT and the movement and a morale boost for the hunger strikers who were in hospital during her visit. Her pending arrival was communicated to the media when she was 30 minutes from Gangtok and by the time she reached BL House, there was an enthusiastic waiting party of approximately 50 journalists, activists and supporters.

At her media conference, which she conducted in English, she referred to the failed West Bengal Lepchas' pilgrimage.²¹ 'On the way, I met the marchers who were turned back. We were stopped at Nandigram [in Bengal] too, but we ultimately won there' (*The Telegraph* 10).²²

The same day, the spokesperson for the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front, K. T. Gyaltsen, had called the march by the West Bengal Lepchas a plot by the Opposition. 'By bringing people from outside and interfering with the internal matters of the state, the Opposition parties are trying to obstruct the development process' (*The Telegraph* 10). The 'outsider as troublemaker' mantra is chanted frequently by the Sikkim State Government, its overuse revealing its sensitivity to unplanned and unscripted attention focused on the state.

21 The most common language spoken in Sikkim is Nepali, but English is the language used for official correspondence and as schooling is in English, it is spoken by educated people. Hindi is not widely spoken in Sikkim, but, like English, is understood by educated people and is taught in schools.

22 Nandigram was the proposed site of a petrochemical hub which has been shifted to the island of Nayachar.

Medha Patkar spoke convincingly and passionately against the Dzongu projects at her media conference and then shifted her focus to the hospital where the hunger strikers Dawa, Ongchuk and Tenzing Lepcha waited. At that time, they each weighed little more than 40 kg and were plagued by headaches. But they wouldn't stop, not without a concession from Government, and they hoped that a visit from such a prominent campaigner for social justice would bring their movement gravitas, publicity and a much needed boost to morale.

I observed her dramatic arrival, through the swinging doors of the adjoining emergency room, a large group from Bhutia-Lepcha House swarming after her. As cameras flashed and the visitors squeezed into the small spaces between the beds, she greeted Dawa, Tenzing and Ongchuk, placing her hand on the forehead of each, enquiring about their health, their treatment, the stage of their hunger strike. She understood exactly what they were feeling for she had been on a 20 day hunger strike two years earlier to protest the raising of the height of the Narmada dam.

'How are you feeling?' she asked Dawa, as she inspected the long tube that hung from his nose and was taped to his temple.

'Now that you are here, we are strong Ma'am,' he responded. 'Now that you are here, we are stronger' said the man who hadn't eaten for 39 days and was 20 kg under his usual weight.

Later, when introduced to a young man from Hee Gyatang village who had been imprisoned after forcibly removing dam workers trespassing on Lepcha land, Medha, who has done her time in police custody said 'you have been cleansed,' to the smiles of his activist colleagues.

She met Opposition politicians who tried to bask in her star power. They spoke indignantly of the undemocratic way the Government had managed the projects. 'What politicians promise in Opposition often changes once they gain power,' she said and everyone knew she had their measure.

The next day the State Government claimed her support for the Lepcha activists was 'politically motivated' at the 'instance [sic] of the Opposition parties' and that she 'has always been against the development and prosperity of the country' (*The Statesman* 5).

The 'D' Word

The word democracy is frequently used in connection to protest movements and the rhetoric relating to the movement in Sikkim against the dams has been no exception to this. It was implied in Lyangsong Tamsang-Lepcha's letter to the Chief Minister advising him of their constitutional right to their pilgrimage.

The Government's cry that 'democracy reigns supreme in Sikkim' was curiously employed when they wanted the protestors to stop their hunger strike, which was not undemocratic; quite the opposite, as it is their democratic right to protest. It is understood when Dawa Lepcha says: 'The only law that the Government is currently upholding is the Land Acquisition Act, which allows it to displace people. All other laws are thrown to the winds' (International Rivers).

On a recent visit to Sikkim an Opposition politician, referring to the Lepchas' hunger strike, turned to me and angrily asked: 'Is this democracy? It is not democracy is it?'

While the Opposition politician lambasted the Government for its undemocratic process I couldn't help but wonder if he had been in power instead of in Opposition would he be lured by the big money the dam operators offered? As Medha Patkar had pointed out a few days earlier, 'What politicians promise in Opposition often changes in power.'

The State Government cancelled four of the six Dzongu projects in June 2008. The reason given was that they were 'taking into consideration the sentiment of the local people and the need to conserve the environment'. In reality the Government was under enormous pressure to cancel these projects as they were inside the biodiversity hotspot of Kanchenjunga National Park.

Swain notes that protest reflects the key aspect of political life—the relationship between the rulers and the ruled and that popular protests force policy makers to be accountable to the people for their actions. He argues that 'with the advent of these protest movements, Indian democracy may appear to be 'ungovernable,' or 'disordered' or 'noisy' but it certainly has not weakened. Rather democracy is going through a process of consolidation by enticing greater popular participation' (832). ACT members informally claim to have improved the running of Government. A public service which had operated without attention to process and paperwork was put on notice. When a member of ACT asked for paperwork in relation to due process and the projects, formerly lax Government departments—in particular forestry and energy departments—had to provide it or complete it. Or, as had been the case, claim it had been 'inexplicably' lost. ACT has taken legal action against the Government for illegal land acquisition, ignoring the terms of the carrying capacity report, and for signing illegal Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). The number of MOU signed in the North-East is now referred to as 'the MOU Virus'.

The rush to development puts a strain on democracy; the democratic processes of consultation, compliance, probity and the freedom of people to protest can be at odds with the political expediency desired by governments to reap financial and political gain while they are in power. Sivaramakrishnan noted:

With its impulse to create plural structures of political decision making, democracy combines awkwardly with development, which serves most often as a vehicle for elite nationalism, to create a tense field of force for modern politics ... democracy and development conjure different frameworks of citizenship. (449)

In Sikkim, the nationalist rhetoric in relation to development dangles a promise of self-reliance from the Centre's purse-strings. The State Government in response to ACT's concerns released a statement on its hydro-electric energy policy that 'to develop hydel schemes [is] to utilize its available natural resource to attain self-reliance, which will bring about socio-economical upliftment of the Sikkimese people and shall generate adequate revenue for the State to usher it to the 21st century' (*Sikkim Times*). Self-reliance is a phrase that has a lot of traction in Sikkim where the State's dependence on the Centre for funding is widely known. For those who object to Sikkim's reliance on India for economic survival, the Lepcha activists' campaign to stop the dams is a backward move that is preventing Sikkim from becoming a forward-moving state. However the Sikkimese themselves are overly reliant on the State Government for their livelihood, for the Government is the largest employer in the state and a high proportion of the educated people in Sikkim work in highly sought-after government jobs. In 1995, Ludwig Schaefer, writing about the battle to stop the Rathong Chu dam in Sikkim, noted:

the government employs practically every educated soul, none of whom dares express his opinion for fear of losing his sinecure. As a result there are no independent thinkers, no intellectual circles and only a few isolated individuals capable of openly analyzing and expressing a critical opinion for the benefit of the state's development.

When the ruling SDF party rose to power it beat an incumbent party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad, with a pro-development agenda, determined to dam the Rathong River in West Sikkim. In 1994 the people of Sikkim voted with their feet to stop years of corruption and fear-mongering by the then ruling party. In 1995 Schaeffer wrote that 'Sikkim is well-known for the high level of corruption which plagues its administration and political parties'.

The current State Government has been in power 15 years and has a majority that increased at the 2009 election. It would take a tidal change in opinion for a change in government to occur, however in being forced to address the protest it was also forced to confront the robustness of the democracy it holds stewardship

of. Both sides have a clearly enunciated protest and anti-protest narrative. The activists' narrative points to the impact of the projects on culture, environment, ownership, tradition and religion, often verified by their folklore.

The Government's anti-protest narrative rarely directly addresses the Lepchas' narrative. Instead it repeatedly states that it will 'preserve the sanctity of Dzongu'²³, at the same time accusing the Lepcha activists of threatening democracy and peace and tranquillity in Sikkim. In September 2008, the Central Government named the Sikkim State Government, 'Safest Small State in India'. Its reputation in New Delhi is one the State Government is understandably very protective of. But to its consternation there is another Sikkimese voice being heard in Delhi, that of the Lepcha protestors who, represented by ACT, have made several visits to the capital in their attempt to communicate directly with the Centre.

After years of talking into silence, the voice of the Lepcha protestors is being heard outside the strip of bitumen that fronts Bhutia-Lepcha House in Gangtok. Medha Patkar's support brought further access to powerful NGOs and offered ACT a powerful and influential voice in government circles in New Delhi. The visibility of the West Bengal Lepchas, heightened by their number and strong, uncensored voice (for unlike Sikkimese supporters they do not have to worry about losing a government job) added an extra layer of muscle to the bones of ACT's protest. These bones have been picked over, stripped bare, kicked and criticised and in the case of Dawa, Tenzing and Ongchuk Lepcha, actually starved of sustenance. But they are morally strong bones, uncompromising and determined to see their Dzongu remain the sacred homeland that is the life-force of identity for Lepchas everywhere. They are also democratic bones, for their journey for all its difficulties has been conducted within the constitutional rights they hold as the indigenous people of Sikkim and citizens of India.

Postscript

On 17 September 2009 ACT and the Sikkim State Government took the first step to resolve the impasse surrounding the dams. ACT called off its relay hunger strike, which had endured for 915 days following an offer of talks by the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling. At a press conference on 13 October 2009 Chamling said to ACT: 'Let us sit together and talk. Let us search for solutions and not focus on problems only. Whatever the State Government can do to pacify your concerns, we will do,' then he added incongruously, 'the State Government is leaving no stone unturned in developing Dzongu and other parts of North Sikkim'.

23 This assurance is repeated frequently in the media and correspondence between the Government and the activists.

Acknowledging the importance of the sacred in political discourse in Sikkim, he announced that he would build a monastery inside a massive rock in North Sikkim, an offer derided by the Lepcha activists.

Mr Chamling also congratulated the ACT for 'the democratic mode of protest to raise the concerns attached with the mega power projects in Dzongu' (Hindu Business Line).

Despite the Chief Minister's seemingly magnanimous offer at the press conference in October 2008 he has not (nor has anyone in his government) responded to a letter from ACT the following month which set out issues to be discussed and requested a meeting.²⁴ The Chief Minister was the chief guest at the Lepcha Namsong Festival (New Year) held in Dzongu in December 2009 and he used that occasion to reiterate his Government's commitment to developing Dzongu for hydro-power.

As at February 2010, there had been no further mention of the monastery in the rock.

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Cultural Flows in Murray River Country

JESSICA K. WEIR

Extract (pp.119–129) from *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners*, by Jessica K. Weir. Published by Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2009 (ISBN 978 0 85575 677 2). See <www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/welcome.html>

We need to be open to an ecological dialogue to facilitate the flow of ideas and the creation of new knowledge for understanding our relationships with the rivers and our responses to river destruction—otherwise the moderns will continue to deplete, destroy and then depart elsewhere (a powerful phrase used by Grinde & Johansen) to begin their destructive cycle again. Indeed, the federal government has dedicated \$20 million to a task force assessing the Northern Territory’s tropical rivers for large-scale agricultural expansion, partly in response to the devastation of agricultural land in the Murray–Darling Basin. Up north, the alarmed traditional owners are saying ‘We don’t want another Murray’ (John Daly quoted in Hancock). The task force has been created to avoid the mistakes of the Murray by investing in scientific expertise and a range of community consultation. However, it depends on what the ‘mistakes’ are perceived to be.

Cultural flows as a force of life

The traditional owners speak about cultural flows as a way to return fresh water to the parched river ecologies. This water is described as rejuvenating life-sustaining connectivities. Yorta Yorta man Lee Joachim says that cultural flows will be different for each Indigenous nation and for individuals as well. Instead of just one understanding, the meaning of the cultural flow is particular to country and the people of that country. For Lee cultural flows are:

a full flood that maintains all of the area, and is not just limited to a roadside or to a levy bank. It is actually flowing right throughout the system and ensuring that life is continuing within the system that it is supposed to nurture. [25 June 2004]

This flow would threaten homes, infrastructure, human lives, and livestock: ways of living designed around the containment of river water. But Lee has a counter-apocalyptic vision of the flood: the revitalisation of life. Lee positions the life brought by the river as more fundamental than all the other lives that are sustained in the river country, because Lee regards the river as central to

ensuring the continuance of all that other life. Lee identifies the importance of what the river is doing. By attributing this agency to the river, Lee is arguing for the cessation of the 'management' of current natural resource management. Instead, cultural flows is a management that connects with and supports life and that sustains one's own life through connectivity. Indeed, Lee sees that the river is so resilient it can heal itself. The river can adapt to all the violence that has happened, and respond with new energy to continue to live and support life.

Lee has shown us how the language of connectivity is the language of cultural flows. All life is connected and other beings have agency. Humans are not dominating a separate and inferior nature. As Henry Atkinson has also said: 'Cultural flows are a natural flow which allows everything to grow. Cultural flows include your history and your culture' (Wagga Wagga, MLDRIN joint meeting with the CAC, 13 July 2005).

Henry brings our attention to how history and culture are also rehydrated with cultural flows. In connectivity, country, life, culture and history are all intertwined. Again, Henry reveals to us how the arguments of the traditional owners pivot in connectivity. For Henry and Lee, their vision of cultural flows is about returning water in a variable way that supports the immense wetlands and river red gum forests of their Yorta Yorta heartland.

Out on the plains in western New South Wales, Mary Pappin spoke about her desire for the return of the floods that used to come and go: 'whether it just be the mouth of a little creek that floods up every now and then, traditionally that is where the resource would be growing after the flowing down into that area' [22 July 2004].

Mary knows that water is a variable presence. The plants that germinate after the flows come through are part of her inheritance, and she has intergenerational responsibilities to make sure these plants continue to live. Today the plants are absent, but their seeds may be surviving, waiting in the soil to germinate with the next floodwaters. Mary's intimate knowledge of that presence, and her motivation to argue for those plants, is what she offers to cultural flows.

In central New South Wales, Wiradjuri Elder Tony Peachey grew up near the Macquarie River. Peachey says that the Macquarie used to have a good flow going at certain times of the year. However, since the dams, the weirs, the reservoirs, the pumps and the pipes, this flow has 'gradually dissipated': 'So unless you get that freshwater in to flush it out, the river itself just gets sick. That's as simple as it is; because the flows aren't there' [29 October 2004].

For Peachey, cultural flows are a flush of freshwater that enable the river to restore its own health, arresting the build up of weeds and the blue-green algae

that multiply in still, nutrient-polluted water (Wagga Wagga, MLDRIN joint meeting with CAC, 13 July 2005). From his experience, Peachey knows that freshwater and river health go hand in hand.

Further south in the Coorong, the Ngarrindjeri people are distressed about salt levels in the water. With reduced freshwater flows from upstream, the shallow water in the Coorong has become saltier than seawater. This rupture of connectivity has diminished the life that previously thrived in the mixture of fresh and saltwater. Here, the Ngarrindjeri women can no longer find freshwater reeds and must head over to the Murray and the lakes next to the Murray to get the right reeds for basket weaving (Corowa). Again, in this context, cultural flows are talked about as a return of the now-absent fresh water that sustained life. As Ngarrindjeri Elder Matt Rigney has said, ‘Cultural flows—it’s about the regeneration of life’ (Wagga Wagga, MLDRIN joint meeting with CAC, 13 July 2005). Matt is interested in how cultural flows take care of ‘our nurseries’:

What we talk about in terms of our nurseries are our swamps and wetlands. [Other] people see that as waste areas. Those waste areas are not viewed by those who are not in the know or don’t want to be in the know, that they are the future ecosystems for our waterways.

The nurseries are where young lives are nurtured in the richly complex wetlands. Matt argues that the people who do not link freshwater ecologies with the future health of the rivers are either ignorant or are complicit in river destruction. The latter group diverts their attention away from the destruction that surrounds them in order to continue the activities that generate the destruction. Matt identifies the way in which many people regard wetlands as wastelands until they can be physically transformed into a ‘useful’ dam and paddock instead of a ‘useless’ messy swampy bog.

Matt has also talked about cultural flows in relation to taking care of the black swan. Matt is against current water management practices that send water down the river in the middle of summer when the black swans need that water to breed in the winter. This is a personal matter for him, as the black swan is one of his *ngatjis*—a Ngarrindjeri word for a kinship relationship with nature, known as a totem in other literature (see Rose et al. 10; Bell 199). Ngarrindjeri people inherit *ngatjis* from their parents, and they can be any of the local animals and insects. Matt has to care for the swan as a brother or sister. The swan is family. These are ethical relationships of interspecies kinship. Similar totemic systems across Australia, and around the world, provide Indigenous people with an intergenerational foundation for respectful and intimate relationships with nature.

Back upstream in the riverine plains, on the Edwards River anabranch of the Murray, Jeanette Crew talks about cultural flows as a caring agency. Jeanette said that when MLDRIN people speak about cultural flows they are:

probably talking about cultural flows in terms of the availability of traditional foods and maybe looking after special sites, for instance, Bunyip holes, as you know are in the bottom of the river. If there is not enough water there for the Bunyip then perhaps it won't survive. [26 June 2004]

Jeanette links the physicality of the deep pools in the rivers to the survival of the Bunyip. The Bunyip is a mythical creature believed in by both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. Such creatures, and all the stories and sites of creative ancestral activity, are relationships that connect country with the Dreaming. In another example from South Australia where high cliffs line the Murray, Ngarrindjeri Elder Agnes Rigney told me how the 'monster type creature' the Mulyewongk lives in caves in the cliffs next to the river (see also Bell 38). The cave is near where the old Swan Reach mission used to be. When the old people went upstream fishing, they would always cross the river to the other side to avoid the cave. I asked Agnes if people still kept away from this spot:

Oh yes ... That spot is still there on the river ... it is beautiful, it is white sand and the grass is just green. It is like a white beach, and the water then used to be clear, green, clear. You could see to the bottom of it back in them days, and it was a most beautiful spot and it was a forbidden one too. [21 July 2004]

The beauty and danger of these places is now covered by a slow flow of muddy regulated water that obliterates life. Ecological destruction destroys not just the plants and animals and their habitat, but the sentience of these places as well. Their ability to inspire fear and beauty is replaced with a bland utilitarian landscape, although the power of the Mulyewongk keeps on and the place is avoided by those in the know. Country continues. Agnes puts the past and the future together at the same time in the same place. She is using the language of continuity with country.

By turning the Murray River into a channel for consumptive water flows, the intricate intimacies of these places have been evened out, and the life of country has been diminished. This utilitarian role of the Murray is now failing the moderns. River destruction is the result of a model of water management based on water as a resource for exploitation; however, for the MLDRIN delegates

cultural flows are not anti-development. Rather, in keeping with their holistic knowledge traditions, cultural flows include economic concerns. As Henry has said:

When we are talking about a cultural flow, we mean the flow of water in the river system is completely natural, going with the season, and that cultural flow belongs to the Indigenous people, so they can get the benefit from the river system whether it is economic or to benefit the environment. In other words for the traditional owners of country to be able to use the water in any way they see fit. It is for looking after country the way the country should be looked after, in a natural way. [7 August 2004]

This is a different way of speaking about the river as an economic resource. A healthy river has economic and environmental benefits, but it is the natural river on which all this depends. There is no denied dependency here: the river country comes first. The rivers' seasons and cycles are to be respected, and in turn economic needs will be provided for as part of the reciprocal relationship.

In all these expressions of cultural flows the traditional owners do not just seek the return of water to country. At stake is their own agency as part of the cultural flow. This is part of their authority to speak and care for country. Thus, this cultural flow is also an expression of the ongoing responsibilities of traditional owners to their country; it is part of their active practice to care for country. Steven Ross has said that cultural flows will be the tangible realisation of the political activity of MLDRIN (pers. comm. 16 February 2006). When realised, they will be part of the political strength of the traditional owners, as the flows will recognise and recharge their identity and authority. A flow of water managed by government denies this meaning. As Wiradjuri Elder Ramsay Freeman asks rhetorically: 'What is the good of having Indigenous people in the country if someone else can come along and tell them what they should be doing in their own country?' [27 June 2004].

In having 'their own' cultural flow, the traditional owners also wish to reduce the fraught and time-consuming exercise of translating what they want to do with the water and why they want to do it.

The traditional owners have developed the language of cultural flows to directly appeal to the importance of connections, countering knowledge that segregates and isolates. It is an evocative term, embedding culture and water together with movement through time and place. Importantly, the flow of water is uneven. Cultural flows recognise variability, and thus they leave and return. This is an ecological restoration approach that is not creating separated reserved lands or

'spaces for nature'. The territory of water is everywhere and everything. And within this territory the fresh water has its own agency and resilience in river restoration.

Cultural flows as a modern compromise

The traditional owners interpret cultural flows in the context of modern water management and water scarcity. Indeed, they would not need to make arguments about cultural flows if it was not for the excesses of modern water management. However, the modern water negotiation tables set a number of obstacles for the traditional owners in their translation task. When making arguments about cultural flows into this context, the MLDRIN delegates start speaking in reductionist terms, becoming trapped in modernity's language and also trapped by their own use of the term 'cultural'.

The traditional owners have coined the term 'cultural flows' to speak to policy-makers accustomed to the terminology of environmental flows. Ecologists have had some successes in arguing for environmental flows to restore river health. Initially environmental flows were envisaged as a one-off release of water from a dam. Today, environmental flows are described in policy as an ongoing responsibility for government to manage water as closely as possible to natural river hydrology (Thoms et al. 353; see also, MDBMC 23). Hydrologists, geomorphologists and ecologists now research how these planned water releases relate to river hydraulics, the speed of the river flow and habitat (Dyer et al. 7; Thoms et al. 365).

In the rhetoric of modern water management, the government draws on the expertise of scientists to determine the best-practice management of the rivers. The traditional owners insert themselves into this space by using the word 'culture', and thus make a point about having different concerns that are not encompassed by 'universal' science. They assert their distinct Indigenous identity and political status with culture. Further, the delegates direct attention to the influence of culture in their knowledge frameworks; in contrast, this is something that is absent from policy literature on water and natural resource management. However, by lobbying for culture the traditional owners risk buying into the modern baggage that comes with this term. Indigenous people are stereotyped by modern knowledge as cultural beings: they are not rational thinkers, they are not capable of objectivity, they do not 'use' ecological resources, and they do not have economic agency. As the aluminium smelter proponents in *Onus v Alcoa* argued, their interests in country are 'entirely intellectual or emotional'. But all people have culture, westerners included. Indeed, the traditional owners have to emphasise cultural diversity because

their experience of the modern universals is that they are not actually universal at all. Furthermore, that they are partial, fragmented and driven by linear trajectories of progress.

Because of the problems with the word 'culture', the MLDRIN delegates sometimes substitute the phrase 'Indigenous water allocations' for cultural flows. This language does not come with the trappings of primitivism, but it is also less evocative of the rivers. Indeed, it evokes the storage and control of water, and thus offers implicit support for the conceptual foundations of modern water management.

On the MLDRIN website the following information about 'Indigenous water allocations' is posted (MLDRIN; see also Ross):

MLDRIN has as its core objective in the coming years the establishment and implementation of Indigenous Water Allocations. This water would be used for a cultural purpose; this means a water allocation would be used for whatever purpose the recipient Indigenous Nation deems culturally appropriate.

Through a negotiation process with each other and with the relevant jurisdiction, the traditional owners would decide where and when water would be released. The water could be used for cultural economic purposes such as to water a native food source or medicinal plant source, enable breeding of native animals through appropriate flooding of wetlands or other floodplain ecological system or send water to an important spiritual or cultural site.

An Indigenous Water Allocation will support the continuation of our cultural practices and could have significant environmental outcomes.

In this text, it is argued that an Indigenous water allocation *is* cultural, and culture is defined as whatever the traditional owners think is culturally appropriate. This is a tricky negotiation: appealing to the 'cultural box' within natural resource management, and then asserting that this box is unlimited. The formal language that identifies and translates culture reduces the arguments made earlier about the regeneration of life in the river country and weakens the vivid passion of the delegates when they speak more freely about cultural flows.

The language switches the MLDRIN delegates make between 'Indigenous water allocations' and 'cultural flows' is evidence of how influential modern water management thinking filters into the delegates' own thinking in their engagements with governments. But these language switches are also political. Politics is an inextricable component of the negotiations, and thus different language is used. This is illustrated by MLDRIN's strategic plan. The delegates developed two versions of their strategic plan: one for themselves and one that

is publicly available. Rhetoric is separate to practice. The delegates use the language of 'allocations', of water as a mute resource, in order to create more space for their own water 'management'. They use the authority of modern language to extend their authority: if humans are directing the allocation of water they can also participate in this activity. But they end up speaking a language that fits more easily within the knowledge framework of modern water management.

The complexity of this translation context, and the difficult choices that the traditional owners are presented with, can be illustrated further by comparing how the traditional owners relate cultural flows to environmental flows. Ancestral beings and cultural living are not part of the matrix examined by the hydrologists, ecologists and geomorphologists when deciding which wetlands to sustain with an environmental flow. Nor do the managers of environmental flows consider the ramifications of whose traditional country will miss out when they decide to water a wetland. Thus the traditional owners cannot rely on environmental flows to be responsive to their relationships with country. Indeed, they are keen to emphasise a distinction between cultural flows and environmental flows to policy-makers. However, articulating this distinction at the water management table is limited when meaning is confounded by modern thinking and political choices to use and subvert that modern thinking.

In July 2005 the MLDRIN delegates met with the CAC in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, to discuss the meaning of cultural flows. At this meeting Steven Ross emphasised a synergy existing between cultural and environmental flows (Wagga Wagga, MLDRIN joint meeting with CAC, 13 July 2005). Matt Rigney agreed and said that the traditional owners needed environmental flows to take care of the birds, animals and fish. The development of environmental flows in government policy marks an important step towards the amodern arguments made by the traditional owners, and the delegates acknowledge this. If the river were flowing well, as it used to, naturally, then the traditional owners would not need to make arguments about cultural flows. But in the context of water scarcity and the dominance of consumptive uses of water in water management, the traditional owners continue to argue for cultural flows. As we have seen with The Living Murray, at this stage environmental flows only have a very limited size and territory. Indeed, as at September 2007 less than 1 per cent of total water currently available in the large storages has been allocated by governments for 'environmental use' (MDBC 4). Mary Pappin has spoken about how she appreciates environmental flows, but remains concerned that these flows are small and selective.

While environmental flows are a recognition by the policy-makers that the river has its own water needs, environmental flows are still a 'human-made' allocation of 'environmental water'. Environmental flows are constrained by the natural

resource management framework that prioritises economic values, perceives ecology and economy as oppositional goals, and presumes that humans are the only ones who have agency to intervene and direct river flows. The ongoing mentality that the river is a competitor for water is evident when environmental flows are illegally diverted by landholders. Dramatic jumps in water prices meant that it became cheaper for irrigators to steal water and pay the fine than to pay for water up front (Jenkin 3). This is also evident in the prioritisation of water allocations during times of water scarcity, when environmental flows are placed second behind consumptive water uses (Connell & Grafton 74–5).

Significantly, another reason why traditional owners are keen to establish a distinction between environmental and cultural flows is the negative effects of environmental flows. Environmental flows are complex undertakings, have had a mixed history of implementation, and are only recently being researched for their effectiveness (Smith 296; Blanch; Harman & Stewardson 113). Environmental flows might ‘top-up’ high flows from unregulated tributaries, to create a larger flooding event (Harman and Stewardson 113). Environmental flows can also be managed to drown out structures such as weirs so that migrating fish can pass (Thoms et al. 351). For the Darling River, the concept of environmental flows has to include the importance of periods of no flow, when the river runs dry (365). If environmental flows are to mimic variability, then it is not a matter of simply releasing water in a steady flow, but storing water for timed strategic releases or pulses. However, a cold environmental flow released from the bottom of a dam would be better described as thermal pollution. In addition to practical complexities in the implementation of environmental flows, the (mis)labelling of water for other purposes as ‘environmental’ contributes to their bad press. The unseasonal movement of water along ephemeral river beds to downstream irrigators, including the flooding of the Barmah–Millewa forest, has been called an environmental flow. Crisis measures to flush water down a river in response to an outbreak of blue-green algae have also been defined as environmental flows (Smith 296).

Both Lee and Henry have had bad experiences with environmental flows in the heartland of their country, the Barmah–Millewa wetlands. ‘Rain rejection flows’ flood this wetland with too many small floods at the wrong time of year, while the higher country is left dry. Henry spoke at the meeting with the CAC about how environmental flows had killed life in his country: ‘The environmental flow denies the Indigenous people access to hunt and gather their natural foods, plants and medicines’ [7 August 2004].

For Henry, environmental flows are a continuation of the destructive mismanagement of his country. Lee pessimistically regards an environmental flow as a flow that only farmers and irrigators gain from, as part of a knowledge framework within which the river is regarded as a resource for human consumption. Indeed,

the Barmah–Millewa wetlands are described by irrigators and river operators as a ‘choke’. Here, the tight twists of the Murray’s path slow down the river’s flow, or, as modern water managers have constructed it, ‘choke’ the delivery of water to downstream irrigators. However, since these interviews with Henry and Lee, a bigger environmental flow was released under The Living Murray to flood the Barmah–Millewa forest. I saw Lee at this time, in Echuca in October 2005. He was happy that a larger flood of water was spreading through the forest, but was still concerned that the flood did not go further into the bush. Lee remains worried about the way the monitoring of environmental flows is focused on fish and/or bird breeding, and not on encompassing all the life of country.

Part of the MLDRIN delegates’ argument for cultural flows relates to their political relationship and responsibilities with country. Mary Pappin made the distinction that environmental flows are controlled by the ‘white man’, and do not take care of country as it should be ‘culturally’. When the traditional owners speak about caring for country, they are speaking about a reciprocal relationship whereby country is also taking care of them. This is an authority they carry to their negotiations over water; however, this communication can become blighted when translated into natural resource management terms. This is evident in what Steven Ross has said about cultural flows (Corowa):

The outcome might be similar to an environmental flow, and it could be used to supplement an environmental flow, but it’s who has control of it, and who has control of the mechanism, and the timing, and where it goes.

For people familiar with connectivity thinking, this comment can be understood in context of responsibilities to country, a management that is not centred on human dominance of an inferior nature. However, Steven’s comment could be easily taken to describe just that, as it would be in a natural resource management context. As MLDRIN executive officer, Steven finds his role as an intermediary involves codifying his language for both sides, the traditional owners and government (pers. comm. October 2007). It is important to remember the highly charged political context of this dialogue. Ramsay Freeman has vividly summed up the difficult situation that the traditional owners face in their strategic engagements with government: ‘You can’t walk along a barbed wire fence with one foot in each paddock’ (pers. comm. October 2007).

Cultural flows are not a cultural copy of environmental flows, one taking care of cultural values, and the other taking care of environmental values. Cultural flows are part of the MLDRIN delegates’ critique of the dominant paradigms in water management today. This is a bigger vision of the cultural flow, which demands a philosophical shift in natural resource management. This bigger vision is perhaps not being communicated by Indigenous water allocations.

In practice, the realisation of cultural flows as a return to how the rivers were is an extremely challenging ambition of the traditional owners. The government has not accepted its own commissioned scientific research that recommends the return of 4000 gigalitres for a chance at restoring river health. The political consequences of reducing water allocations are too much of a challenge for governments. More significantly, with ongoing drought the government is not in a position to act on those recommendations. In September 2006, water storages in the Murray River System totalled 3350 gigalitres, one year later they total 2130 gigalitres (MDBC 3). Parched country meant that there was very little run-off into the storages from the 2007 autumn rains.

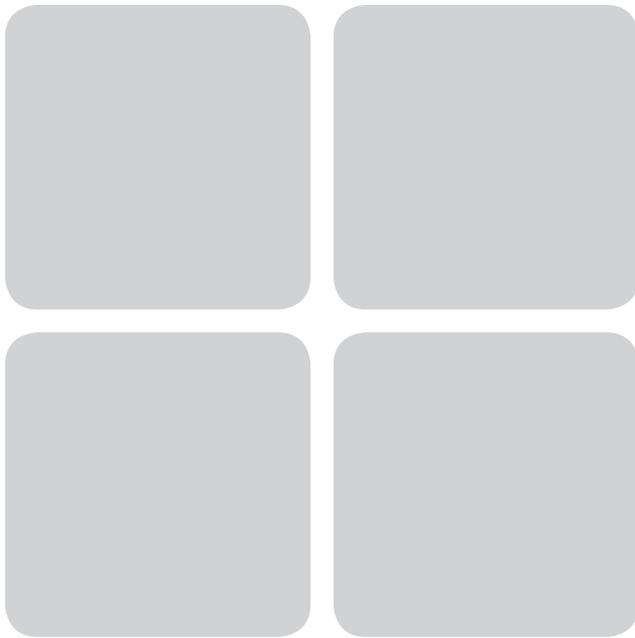
The realisation of any sort of cultural flow is now much more dependent on future rainfall than the negotiation skills of the MLDRIN delegates and the capacity of policy-makers to hear these arguments. If there is rain, and the storage levels rise, then the delegates may get their allocation of water for cultural flows. However, even though the traditional owners wish to recharge connectivity, it is likely that in the short term cultural flows will be realised from within the Murray River System. The cultural flows will have to be planned with respect to size and timing, moved through canals and channels, as regulated by weirs and locks. Pumps and pipes will be needed to breach the ruptured connection between the former wetlands now isolated from the rivers. And the hydrologists, ecologists and geomorphologists will provide valuable technical advice, gleaned from their experience with environmental flows. Hopefully for the traditional owners, and for all of us, even this cultural flow will be part of the many other catalysts that are already contributing to demands for the transformation of water management.

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REVIEWS

Criminals and Publishers

A Swindler's Progress: Nobles and Convicts in the Age of Liberty

By Kirsten McKenzie

UNSW Press, 368pp, \$34.95, 2009

ISBN: 9781742231105

The Celebrated George Barrington: A Spurious Author, The Book Trade, and Botany Bay

By Nathan Garvey

Hordern House, 32799, \$64.00, 2008

ISBN: 9781875567546

Reviewed by Rachael Weaver

A Swindler's Progress and *The Celebrated George Barrington* both follow the fortunes of notorious criminals of the past as a means of exploring aspects of the wider cultural and political forces that surrounded them. This method of using criminal case studies as frames or snapshots for broader scholarly investigations is often a productive and dynamic way of doing cultural history—as shown in earlier examples of this form such as Richard Altick's wonderful book *Deadly Encounters: Two Victorian Sensations* (1984) or Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992). In both Altick's and Walkowitz's books, the stories of a few infamous individuals provide a central narrative thread for tying together a set of broader concerns to do with class, politics, gender, literary production and so on, with each offering densely layered accounts of the worlds being described. For Altick, the widespread press coverage of two violent crimes in the 1860s provides the starting point for an exploration of the British 'age of sensation', while for Walkowitz narratives of sexual danger open the way for an investigation of the cultural landscape of late Victorian London—the setting for the violent crimes of Jack the Ripper in 1888.

Many other examples of this approach to writing criminal histories have followed, investigating cases including the late-nineteenth-century murders of Scottish-born serial killer Thomas Neill Cream, the 1841 murder of Mary Rogers in New York (the story that inspired Poe's 'Mystery of Marie Roget') and the careers of thieves Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild. Kirsten McKenzie and Nathan Garvey both adopt similar strategies, though neither really reflects on

this methodology or their relationship to these earlier works. As well as sharing an approach, they have in common similar timeframes and settings: the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, of London and colonial Australia. The contrasting styles and sense of focus they bring to their material, however, have produced two very different books.

McKenzie's *A Swindler's Progress* opens with a prologue set in colonial New South Wales in 1834, relating the entertaining tale of 'John Dow', a transported convict tried for defrauding the locals by passing himself off as 'Edward, Lord Viscount Lascelles, the eldest son of the Earl of Harewood'. The credulity of the victims and opportunism of the impostor are publicly aired at the trial, with the prisoner remaining firmly attached to his title. This courtroom drama then becomes the departure point for a sweeping exploration of colonial Australian social life, the convict system, and the strange fluidity of class boundaries in a developing culture as well as the contrasting world of the British aristocracy. The narrative of the real Edward Lascelles is what enables McKenzie to trace similarities and connections between these two seemingly very different worlds. Lascelles, a British nobleman whose taste for philandering and unfortunate marriages had seen him cut off from his eminent family, was at the time living in exile and thus 'missing', which may have lent some slight plausibility to 'Dow's' claims. Meanwhile, beneath the surface of the Lascelles' respectability and fortune was a history of shady commerce in the West Indies, of sugar plantations and slavery, which the family was eager to forget.

McKenzie sums up the set of parallels that forms the focus for her book in a somewhat breathless and informal final chapter, writing: 'an impostor had disconcerted an entire society that was itself on the make. And he had chosen as his model a man whose family had reinvented itself no less profoundly than had the colonists of New South Wales. This story of imposture and social opportunism bound together people, places and ideas right across the British imperial world'. As well as tracing a set of transnational links between the fortunes of an obscure convict-impostor and a family of old-time aristocratic arrivistes, she tells many related stories along the way, following the leads offered by the experiences of the twin 'viscounts'. In doing so she shows an impressive breadth of research as well as an obvious passion for the material, right down to a series of amusing asides, such as the tale of an inmate of Port Arthur who during the 1830s attempted escape by hopping away past the guards dressed as a kangaroo.

Although her emphasis is on attempting to use the stories of John Dow and Edward Lascelles to reshape understandings of the British Empire and national frameworks, McKenzie seems most comfortable when writing of colonial Australia, with part three, 'Antipodes', providing what is easily the most compelling set of inter-related narratives with a consistent overall focus on an unstable, rapidly evolving social and political world where the many

possibilities for transforming the self could be exploited by criminals like Dow and legitimate settlers alike. 'Major' James Mudie, the Hunter Valley magistrate and settler at the centre of the Castle Forbes rebellion, an uprising that resulted in the hanging of six assigned convicts, emerges as a fascinating villain in the volatile setting of this third part.

While the earlier sections, 'Arcadia' and 'Ruin and Disgrace', offer engaging narratives of social aspiration and scandal as well as coverage of the West Indian slave trade and the British political system, they sometimes seem distant from the original subject matter and caught up with excessive detail, for example, in the lengthy account of the 1807 Yorkshire election. In some ways the book seems uncertain of its own identity. It is presented in a sensational cover blurb as 'part mystery story, part family saga', and this idea is reiterated in the final chapter, where McKenzie notes 'it became increasingly clear to me that what I was writing needed to be told not as analytic history but as a narrative, and as a mystery story at that'. Yet this is not really played out in the book itself: it is clear from the beginning that Dow is not the 'real' viscount Lascelles, and developing the background for the book is only 'detective work' to the same extent that all research can be. This is notable only in the sense that it seems to highlight a tension between appealing to a general readership and exploring a set of more scholarly concerns—a problem most evident in the first-person final chapter, 'Reflections on a Swindler's Progress'. In some ways this takes the place of a more conventional introduction, with McKenzie describing how she came to the material and offering some general reflections on her methodology and approach. Coming at the end, however, after her tale has already followed the heirs of the Lascelles all the way into the mid-twentieth century, it seems reiterative and anxious, giving voice to ideas that have already emerged in the larger narrative, and not adding sufficient analysis to justify the change of style and pace.

In contrast to McKenzie's seeming ambivalence about writing scholarly histories, Nathan Garvey is fully invested in it, approaching his account of the popular narratives surrounding renowned gentleman-thief George Barrington with an almost forensic concentration and restraint. Originally developed as a doctoral thesis—a fact (unusually) that neither the author nor the publisher has tried to bury—*The Celebrated George Barrington* uses the Irish-born Barrington as a focus for exploring the print cultures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Britain. Barrington first rose to fame in the mid-1870s when tried in London for the theft of a snuffbox from a Russian count at the theatre. Newspapers reporting his trial emphasised his style and elegance as well as his convincing performance of innocence, and Garvey's description of his fall from this initial position of grace to notoriety in the public eye through the contemporary press coverage is well done.

Each time Barrington re-offended his convincing speeches in his own defence were met with increasing cynicism from the judicial system and journalists alike—and Garvey's affection for his subject is obvious in his estimations of Barrington's words as 'brilliant', 'skilful', and 'eloquent'. After being committed to several bouts of hard labour for his crimes, and following a period of exile from London, Barrington was eventually transported to colonial New South Wales in 1895, later going on to become a constable at Parramatta. With Barrington's departure from England came the first publications falsely attributed to his name, with publishers and booksellers drawing on his celebrity to promote works in which he had had no role.

George Barrington is not the subject here so much as the legend associated with his name, as Garvey notes: 'the legend is more readily recoverable, and potentially constitutes a more important subject of inquiry, than a speculation on the details of the 'real' George Barrington's life'. Barrington's relationship to print culture is mapped in three different sections: the first looks at the construction of the Barrington legend through the contemporary press, the second describes the publishing history of the Barrington biographies, and the third examines the texts that exploited his name and reputation. Together they offer an acute sense of the materiality of the Barrington books, their production, circulation, and to some extent their consumption as well as conveying a vivid sense of the opportunistic nature of the book trade.

Compared with the far-reaching scope of McKenzie's *A Swindler's Progress*, Garvey's book stays close to its primary subject matter. While this makes for a very focused narrative, the reader may sometimes be left wishing to explore some of the by-ways the story promises to open up: for example the details of Barrington's life in fiction are passed over with a brief mention, and although eighteenth-century biography is described as a form, few names are mentioned or specific cases offered in comparison with the Barrington books. As a work of excavation it can seem ungenerous to its predecessors, describing Barrington as having been 'all but forgotten in recent years' despite a 2001 biography by Sheila Box and multiple works by Suzanne Rickard including *George Barrington's Voyage to Botany Bay* (2001), an edited edition of a Barrington book with a 65 page introduction. Both are acknowledged, though mainly in footnotes, and then mainly to point out minor factual errors. But this kind of possessiveness is perhaps understandable in such an obsessive bibliographic project. Most of all, *The Celebrated George Barrington* is an extraordinary research feat, its annotated bibliography giving order to the tangled archive of Barrington publications as well as showing how his celebrity emerged from the print culture of his time. It's hard to imagine someone setting out to write another scholarly work on Barrington now—but if they did, Garvey's book would provide the ultimate research tool.

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Reading Between the (colonial) Lines

Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson

Edited by N.J.B. Plomley

Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and Quintus Publishing,
1180pp, \$99.00, 2008

ISBN 978-0-9775572-2-6

Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission

Edited by Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls

Quintus Publishing, 238pp, \$34.95, 2008

ISBN 978-0-9775572-5-7

Reviewed by Christine McPaul

In *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission*, Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls have compiled a collection of fifteen essays to commemorate the republication of N.J.B. Plomley's *Friendly Mission* containing George Augustus Robinson's journals in Van Diemen's Land between 1829-34. The new edition of *Friendly Mission* has an expanded index as well as material previously omitted from the 1966 edition including portions of the 'Bruny Island Mission 1829'.

Reading Robinson provides Indigenous and non-Indigenous responses to *Friendly Mission*, and asks for a reconsideration of it as a problematic but foundational colonial artefact. The essays draw attention to *Friendly Mission's* importance in the Australian and imperial archives as one of the few primary sources enabling insight into Indigenous culture and colonial administration in Van Diemen's Land. They also point to its troubling resonances with the 'painful and traumatic pasts' of Indigenous people in Tasmania (14).

Robinson's continuing but controversial relevance to scholarship is highlighted throughout *Reading Robinson*. In their introductory essay, Johnston and Rolls note that Robinson's journal was recognised by his contemporaries (16), something also identified by Patrick Brantlinger in his essay 'King Billy's Bones: Colonial Knowledge Production in Nineteenth-Century Tasmania', where he describes how James Bonwick, who also wrote extensively on colonial affairs and engagement with Indigenous people in the mid-nineteenth century, used Robinson's work as a reference point (47).

Essays by Rebe Taylor, Ian McFarlane, John Connor and Lyndall Ryan continue this theme. Taylor's critique of the influential mid-twentieth century archaeologist Rhys Jones identifies the interplay between archaeological evidence and changing social attitudes about Indigenous Tasmanians, and shows how Robinson's journal has been used selectively to support particular interpretations of Indigenous culture and history (117-18). McFarlane suggests *Friendly Mission* offers a counterpoint to other more limited source material from the early nineteenth century such as the records of the Van Diemen's Land Company (127). His reassessment of the Cape Grim massacre is supported by an analysis of witness and participant accounts in Robinson's journal (129-140). McFarlane draws attention to *Friendly Mission's* usefulness to researchers, arguing that it opens avenues of inquiry and points to potential archival documents that might otherwise remain unexamined (127-28). A similar position is adopted by Connor who contends that *Friendly Mission* is significant as a reference document for military historians interested in 'an understanding of the bravery, brutality and tragedy of the Tasmanian frontier war' (171). Ryan further explores the malleability of Robinson's journal as a source document for contemporary writers through her analysis of works by Vivienne Rae-Ellis, Cassandra Pybus, Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle. She concludes by expressing surprise that Robinson 'who risked his life to save Tasmanian Aborigines from extermination by the settlers and gave us so much information about their dispossession should be held in such contempt by historians today' (158).

Sharon Dennis, whose essay is one of three under the banner of 'Community Voices', offers a counterpoint to this view and draws attention to the discursive privilege afforded to Robinson's account of colonial history in Van Diemen's Land. She argues that while *Friendly Mission* is considered to be a 'benchmark' the work is offensive to Indigenous people because it diminishes their subjectivity, and 'should not be rewarded or heralded as the keeper of stories of Aboriginal people in Tasmania' (182). Rodney Dillon adopts a similar position, suggesting in his essay that Robinson's journal is 'a soft representation of history' used by 'white people' who wish to 'ignore the slaughter of families and race' (145). He questions the title *Friendly Mission*, since in his view, Robinson was part of the barbarity and violence of the 'invasion of Tasmania' and was in no way 'friendly' (145). Wendy Aitken addresses the question of identity in the context of her own Indigenous heritage. Her contemplative piece draws attention to the way discourses about Robinson and about Indigenous Tasmanians continue to be constructed, posing challenges to her lived experience. She writes about how confronting and humiliating it was to be told in her primary school history class that 'the story [about Indigenous Tasmanians] ended with the death of Trukanini, "the last Tasmanian"' (95). Similar conundrums have been highlighted by Gillian Cowlshaw, who noted the potential social anxiety experienced by young

Indigenous Australians in Bourke when they attempted to assert identities based on their own circumstances rather than the dominant culture's social constructions of them (Cowlshaw 5, 19-20), a finding underscored by Aitken's story of social dislocation and confusion in the classroom. Aitken rejects the interpretation of history she was taught, and the privilege afforded Robinson, in favour of her own experience and Indigenous identity. Aitken's alternative view of Indigenous Tasmanians enables her playfully to suggest that Robinson's journal may in fact have contained portions which were a 'first hand account' written by those Indigenous people who accompanied him (96).

Three essays in this collection seek to situate Robinson in an international context, locating his actions and writings within a global imperial framework. Alan Lester points to the British imperial endeavours in Cape Town and in the Caribbean as precedents for what he describes as Robinson's humanitarianism in Van Diemen's Land (29). He suggests that the ultimate failure of Robinson's protectorate in Van Diemen's Land was part of a wider failure of humanitarianism across the British Empire (41). Elizabeth Elbourne also compares the Cape Colony and Van Diemen's Land in the context of an economy of imperialism that permitted the growth of a colonial elite who defined the 'imagined purpose' of both colonies (78, 89-90). Like Lester, Elbourne points to the importance of the British House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) as a pivotal moment in imperial history that led to the establishment of the Van Diemen's Land Protectorate and ultimately to Robinson's ascendancy (90).

For some contributors Robinson's character and personality are integral to an appreciation of his work. Cassandra Pybus suggests that Robinson's predecessor, Gilbert Robertson, was deemed both problematic and controversial by the colonial governor, Arthur, whereas Robinson was viewed as more amenable and pragmatic (97). Pybus describes him as a self interested, ambitious, aggrandising, avaricious and complicated personality (103-107). In contrast, Henry Reynolds notes Robinson's curiosity and humanity, seeking to locate Robinson 'in his cultural milieu' and to 'see him as a man of his time', something he suggests other twentieth century writers have overlooked (162). Reynolds argues that Robinson was a free thinker, either unconcerned with, or philosophically opposed to, many of the social attitudes espoused by other settlers (162-63). Robinson's shortcomings are noted as well by Reynolds with an unflattering portrait of him as a thin-skinned, 'ambitious, self educated settler who travelled to the far antipodes to advance himself' and was more concerned with status than race (166-67). Despite this, Reynolds sees Robinson as both an actor and witness to events in colonial Tasmania (169).

Reading Robinson redresses the paucity of critical analysis given previously to *Friendly Mission* and identifies it as a significant document that continues to evoke both interest and emotion. According to Johnston and Rolls, *Friendly*

Mission stirs guilt, curiosity, anger, resistance, engagement and fascination in those who read it and as such remains a 'vibrant social artefact' (21). Although *Friendly Mission* is evidently partial, problematic, racially complex, and limited by the shortcomings of Robinson's character and social position, it remains, as the essays in *Reading Robinson* demonstrate, integral to contemporary debates across diverse areas of scholarship and society.

Christine McPaul was awarded her PhD from the Australian National University in 2009 and is currently School Visitor within the School of Cultural Inquiry at the Australian National University. Her research projects centre on the cultural history of non-Indigenous responses to corroboree. Christine has published recently in AHR while her earlier articles on Australian Women's Self Representation, and on the performativity of Helen Demidenko-Darville appeared in Australian Literary Studies and Southerly respectively.

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Cute and Monstrous Others

Queering the Non/Human

Edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird

Ashgate, 412pp, £60.00, 2008

ISBN: 978-0-7546-7128-2

Reviewed by Jennifer Hamilton

Queering the Non/Human is a daunting text, a heavy and hard-covered, three hundred and eighty-four page, fifteen-chapter tome that requires a preface, forward and introduction to conceptually position itself. The cover image is of a smiling embryonic salamander, which you later discover is actually dead. Regardless, *Queering the Non/Human* is an engaging and vibrant volume and the cute, dead salamander actually contributes to this. This project aims to queerly remake the world, a decidedly practical impulse despite the rigorously theoretical foundations of all the chapters. The project of 'queering the non/human' is primarily queer in that many of the essays focus on alternative paths for and manifestations of desire, identity or sexuality. But, like all good queer writing, the chapter essays draw on a broad range of intellectual traditions within the humanities and social sciences, such as feminism, post-colonialism, environmental studies, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, history and science studies, as well as philosophical and new media theories.

Donna Haraway's work on 'companion species' is established as a cornerstone of this broad conceptual project. Haraway provides the foreword to *Queering the Non/Human*, 'Companion Species, Mis-recognition, and Queer Worlding', in which she revisits ideas that first surfaced in *The Companion Species Manifesto: dogs, people and significant otherness* (2003). In this manifesto, Haraway outlined a way of thinking laterally about relations between human and dog. Back then she exclaimed, 'dogs are not surrogates for theory ... they are here to live with' (5). That is, dogs are not metaphors for something else; dogs are material beings, partners in our existence just as we are partners in theirs. This practical, embodied and non-hierarchical manifesto constitutes the premise of the editors' vision. Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird then draw this notion into concert with queer theory. The focus is on the ways in which the human is *always already* entangled with the nonhuman—'Non/Human'—and the potential of such relations to queerly remake, reorient and reform our vision of the world.

While this volume does not focus on human subjectivity, Giffney and Hird recognise the organising feature of this volume as the problem of the human subject and the effective fictions that surround it. According to Giffney and Hird, the volume works to tease out 'the trace of the nonhuman in every figuration of the Human. ... [This] also means being cognisant of the exclusive and excluding economy of discourses surrounding what it means to be, live, act or occupy the category of the Human' (3). The exclusive fiction of the Human, the privileges and rights that Humans get over Others (human, superhuman, animal), is configured here as unstable from the outset.

'Queer' is a performative term within this volume, generative of the relations between human and nonhuman. To quote the editors, 'while there may be reluctance to say what queer 'is', there are ... assumptions circulating about what queer does' (5). While a long list of verbs follows this broad definition of queer, essentially what queer 'does' in this volume is facilitate a multitude of surprising relations. The individual chapter essays splinter off from these complex critical foundations, undoing and remaking the category of the Human in concert with a raft of perverse, scary, delightful, monstrous, cute, violent and cuddly Others. The topics range from incest, ideality, apocalypse, monsters, vampires, antichrists, dogs, werewolves and starfish to glowing green bunnies.

In this review it is impossible to summarise all of the contributions, as valuable as many of them are. I have selected some highlights in order to demonstrate the way in which, even though diverse, such topics articulate queer as a central theme. In chapter one, 'How Queer Can you Go? Theory, Normality, Normativity', Clare Colebrook revisits ideality within the context of queer discourse. Queer theory has generally focussed on undoing the idealist fantasies of Plato and Kant by focussing on materiality or the embodiment of politics, desire and pleasure. Colebrook's lucid use of Gilles Deleuze's reversal of Platonic idealism enables her to argue that 'theory is the intuition of our lived and actual reality ... as a becoming-clear or identifiable Idea' (25). That is, theory is not detached from material reality but rather is the way in which the relationship between materiality and ideality is made legible. This strategically positioned first chapter unapologetically engages with the frequent and tiresome accusations that queer theory is too abstract. Colebrook argues that if we understand idealism in this Deleuzian way we actually expand queer theory's practical possibilities. The capacity for subjects and objects to 'enter into relations where the mode of relation cannot be determined in advance' (30) helps to consolidate the queer potential of such idealism. These relations do not follow a strict hegemonic order; the relations mapped in this book are surprising and dynamic. Many chapters that follow Colebrook's prove this point by putting unlikely things into relationship with each other.

These queer linkages are prominent within the chapters on antichrists and vampires. For example, in Chapter 4, 'Queering the Beast: The Antichrists' Gay Wedding', Erin Runions investigates the way in which the figure of the antichrist manifests within contemporary political rhetoric in America. She investigates how this figure is 'politically malicious (and) homosexualised' (79) and how it is attached to political figures like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Her argument links up the scriptural ambiguities of the antichrist with the definitive way in which the antichrist is written into contemporary consciousness. The fluidity of the antichrist, its raw sexuality, is where Runions sees its queer potential: 'antichristic desire confuses identity, transgresses borders and confounds telos. It is polymorphously perverse' (102). In this perversity she finds a crack in the façade of extreme conservatism, and the subversive potential in what is otherwise entirely homophobic right-wing propaganda. Likewise in Chapter 6, Robert Azzarello engages with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in order to link queer theory to environmentalism by interrogating the 'intense play between the human, the natural, and the sexual' (152-3). This transgressive play of desire and blood lust, written at the very end of the nineteenth century, destabilises the ontological status of both Human and Nature at a time when the categories were becoming more clearly defined. Subsequently, Azzarello opens up space to think about ecology without reifying the category of Nature as distinct from the Human.

As well as linking unlikely themes, *Queering the Non/Human* rehearses different positions on similar subjects. For example, there are two very different chapters that engage with *echinoderms*, the starfish (Chapter 11) and the brittlestar (Chapter 13). First, Myra J. Hird's 'Lessons from a Starfish' is a personal and conversational engagement with the Antony and the Johnston's song 'Cripple and the Starfish'. Hird fuses the lyrics of the song, about cutting off limbs and watching them regrow, and Johnson's own queer identity into a theoretical discussion about transsexuality and regeneration. Secondly, Karen Barad's chapter 'Queer causation and the ethics of mattering' in part explores the discovery that brittlestars 'don't *have* eyes; they *are* eyes'. Once thought to be entirely blind, the brittlestar is now understood as a complete 'visualising system'. This creature does not have a brain but exhibits the capacity to respond to danger and to survive. Barad lifts off from here to draw an ethical distinction between responses to such a discovery: 'it is fair to say that the excitement surrounding this finding ... has more to do with its potential applications than pure amazement at the ingenuity of this creature's bodily know-how' (322). Barad's interest in this extraordinary bodily know-how challenges the notion that the human mind is the apex of knowledge and intelligence. In turn she critiques the way in which corporations harness such nonhuman know-how for the human project. While the results of both chapters are radically different,

both Hird and Barad exemplify the impulse to understand ‘companion species’; these echinoderms are definitely not ‘surrogates for theory,’ but instead ‘they are here to live with’ (5).

Most of the chapters are remarkably lucid but some chapters are too ambitious and fall short of resolving their argument. Noreen Giffney’s ‘Queer Apocal(o)ptic/ism: The Death Drive and the Human’ is an example of this. Giffney sets up a new conceptual term ‘apocal(o)ptic/ism’ which fuses three grand concepts ‘the optic or the gaze (desire), the Panopticon or self-surveillance (normativity) and apocalypticism (cathartic change)’ (57). She also engages in a close reading of the figure of the child in Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. This project is loaded with potential but there are too many ideas to be properly finessed in such a short space. Although the essay does not resolve itself, it should be acknowledged that Giffney genuinely does open up possibilities for future re-engagement with these ideas by positing such bold linkages in the first place.

This volume marks a significant contribution to the field of queer theory as well as other discourses such as animal studies, science studies, feminism and cultural theory. The volume promotes a way of thinking about the world that, as the series editor Michael O’Rourke summarises, ‘clears a space for an openness without anticipation or prescription, for surprise, for wonder, for love, for happiness, for a world in which our very uncertainty about what it means to be human comes to be understood as definitive of the human condition’ (xix). While *Queering the Non/Human* celebrates the wonders of ‘significant otherness’ it also remains mindful of the serious political, social, environmental, sociological, legal and rhetorical obstacles that endure. It is the theoretical openness in the face of such obstacles that makes *Queering the Non/Human* such a dynamic and compelling volume.

Jennifer Hamilton is a PhD Candidate in the School of English, Media and Performing Arts at UNSW. Her thesis is an ecocritical exploration of storms as a dramatic device in Shakespeare. In 2009 she won a UNSW prize for research into Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability.

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