

Looking Back: Inspiration to Move On

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In this issue of *Coolabah* we proudly present a new collection of essays which once again sprang from a conference jointly organised by the Centre of Australian Studies at the University of Barcelona, Spain, and the Centre for Peace and Social Justice, Southern Cross University, Australia. Convened under the appealing catchphrase “Looking Back to Look Forwards,” the conference was celebrated at the University of Barcelona from 10 to 14 December 2012, and brought together a good number of academics, writers and artists. During five not-so-cold December days we discussed a multiplicity of issues related to time, variously connected to its tricks, its virtues, its warnings, and its inescapable consequences. As on other occasions, the wealth of conversations responded to the resonant interdisciplinarity which characterizes the annual conferences organized by these two committed institutions. We would like to praise here the inexhaustible energy Susan Ballyn and Baden Offord invest in putting together these events, so endearing while remaining rigorously academic. Martin Renes, co-director of the Centre for Australian Studies and co-editor of the present volume, deserves to be mentioned along with them. His craft in juggling with shifting panels and timetable changes due to tricks of the weather, funding surprises or flight scheduling is admirable. Sincere thanks to the three of them.

We live in a period when space, and a whole set of cognate or related terms such as place and displacement, location and dislocation, home and exile, travel and movement, territory and deterritorialization, locality and glocality, and the like, seem to have taken hold of our lives. Those who are neither migrants nor diasporic nor exiles nor refugees nor immediate descendants of such peoples are becoming increasingly uncommon. At both experiential and theoretical levels, as Doreen Massey (2005) has emphasized, space is becoming more and more of an arena for research and reflection. *Coolabah* issue n. 11, edited by Bill Lloyd and Ray Norman, and significantly entitled *Placescape, Placemaking, Placemaking, Placemaking... Geography and Cultural Production*, testifies to this turn in Cultural Studies, occurring, perhaps, at the expense of the simultaneous axis of time. And this is what makes a conference with a title like “Looking Back to Look Forwards” all the more relevant. Necessary even. Precisely because of the overwhelming importance attached in our days to the spatial, we need to recall the great impact that time has on our lives. Time reveals our destinies: as individuals, as members of small-scale communities such as family or neighbourhood, and as members of

bigger collectives such as ethnic or national ones. Time definitely looms large in our human existence. History and memory are two ways of framing time which enable us to take stock of who we are at each of these levels. We could never think of such a crucial concept as identity without examining the temporal dimension, which tells us a great deal about ourselves. It tells us much about who we are at present because it reminds us of who we were in the past and, importantly, allows us to determine who we want to become in the future. Hence the necessity to look back in order to look forwards. Also, to repeat an old truism echoed among critics such as Rey Chow (1998), knowing about history is a means of not repeating past errors.

As on previous occasions, given the thematic variety of the articles, we have decided to present them in alphabetical order, following authors' surnames. Readers may rehearse several possibilities of cross-arrangements, since topics such as colonialism and postcoloniality, oppression, cultural and educational politics, memory and history, aboriginality, and others, can be traced in several pieces. We leave it to them to arrange the menu following their own preferences. A possible way of arrangement, however, is proposed here, which may help the readers' choice, or just boldly lead them through the collection.

It often happens in Cultural Studies journal issues that most of the articles are about literature. This *Coolabah* issue is no exception. In "The Rhetoric of Inferiority of African Slaves in John Fawcett's *Obi; or, Three-Fingered Jack* (1800) Re-evaluated in Charlie Haffner's *Amistad Kata-Kata* (1987)," Ulrich Pallua looks backwards to discuss slave narratives and a contemporary revision. Maria Grau Perejoan's pattern in "The grass that they cut and trample and dig out and sprouts roots again": The Spiritual Baptist Church in Earl Lovelace's *The Wine of Astonishment*" is different but not altogether dissimilar, in that she analyses a narrative that challenges colonial predicaments in some unfortunate ways stretching into post-colonial times. On her part, in "Beyond Nation? Ludwig Leichhardt's Transnationalism," Katrina Schlunke offers, through the figure of this colonial Prussian explorer of northern Australia, an examination of what "Australian" meant in the past, means now and could mean in the future. Without leaving Australia or literature, John Ryan's "Memory: The Theatre of the Past" discusses Gail Jones's novel *Sixty Lights*, and links once again the past with the present. Still on Pacific waters, Yasue Arimitsu's "Nation, Identity, and Subjectivity in Globalizing Literature" takes us to Japan exploring transnational identities in authors and works, while in "Pacific Studies: Quo Vadis?" Anne Holden Rønning delves into transnational concerns in a paper focusing on New Zealand literatures which nonetheless extends to the politics of reading and teaching on European soil. Back in Australia, the global and transnational dimensions remain in Catalina Ribas Segura's "Language and Bilingualism in Antigone Kefala's *Alexia* (1995) and *The Island* (2002)," where she discusses the nuanced work of this Greek-Australian author. And from one multicultural nation to another, a swift geographic loop takes us to the other side of the Pacific with Kathleen Hoyos' "Canadian Multiculturalism, Same as it ever Was?" where once again literature is deployed to unpack social matters of relevance. The literature block closes with Maricel Oró Piqueras's "Memory Revisited in Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*", which takes us to British territories of memory highlighting the crucial role of time in the (trans)formation of identities, while Bill Phillips and Marlene Mendoza's piece "The Dead Walk" analyses the deep implications of the figure of the zombie in literature and media.

Two articles on Aboriginal culture open the next, miscellaneous block, which to begin with also brings us back to Australia. Mitchell Rolls' "The Northern Territory Intervention: The Symbolic Value of 'Authentic' Indigeneity and Impoverishment, and the Interests of the (Progressive)

Liberal Left” audaciously explores issues such as authenticity and authority in Indigenous communities, and Virginia Watson’s “Colonialism’s Past and Present: Performing History at a Gold Rush Theme Park,” in its turn, describes a construction of the past that erases any trace of Indigeneity. Moving on to more theoretical stances, Eloise Hummell’s “Standing the Test of Time – Barth and Ethnicity” develops a nuanced analysis of the notion of ethnicity, crucial in the area of Cultural Studies and instrumental to understand the contemporary world. Two pieces on education close the list of articles. In “The World of Bullying: An Overview and a Reflexion,” Gerard Matinez Criado offers a factual account of this unfortunately worldwide reality. Finally, Alfredo Martínez Expósito’s “Vested Interests: the Place of Spanish in Australian Academia” is an exploration of the situation of Spanish Studies in the island continent that echoes the connections between Spain and Australia which the UB Centre for Australian Studies represents. To these fourteen articles add three appetizing extras: the presentation “Applying a Strait Bat to Living,” by Nufarm food expert Francesc Llauradó, also part of the conference, and two book reviews. One of them, by Paloma Fresno, assesses a recent study of Yvonne du Fresne’s fiction. In the other one, as a beautiful closure, John Barnes courageously appraises two massive critical collections on the works of Henry Lawson.

A special issue of *Coolabah* (n. 9, 2012) and the “Looking Back to Look Forwards” conference were dedicated to the memory of Bruce Bennett, and we would like to dedicate these pages to him as well. A few days before this introduction was written, Nelson Mandela passed away. The organising committee of the forthcoming CEA-CPSJ congress, “Watershed,” to be celebrated in January 2014, has decided to dedicate this event to his memory. May Nelson Mandela’s life and deeds inspire us to look creatively and generously forwards.

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