

Panel: "Humanities Old and New"

Truth and Beauty in Our Times

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In the few years since this Academy published K.K. Ruthven's Beyond the Disciplines --The New Humanities in 1992, making a contrast between "new" and "old" humanities has become a routine feature of debate about higher education in Australia.<sup>1</sup> With success has come an expansion and a blurring of the field of reference this contrast can be used to organise; especially in the media, Ruthven's clear, positive questions about the future of disciplinarity jostle for space with other claims, some of them polemical and of doubtful pertinence to academic real life. For example, Tony Coady is quite right to query the novelty of those political and ethical concerns now so often designated "new", as though no-one thought seriously about colonialism, racism or gender relations before the 1970s-- and as though today's multidisciplinary "studies" programs were not deeply reliant on the work of historians, philosophers, anthropologists and social theorists operating in disciplinary forms and contexts.

Has the phrase "new humanities" lost all value because its contents and meaning may vary? I don't think so: the vicissitudes to which the term itself is subject occur in conditions it can help us to clarify, and I want to focus on some of the changes in the academic working world which make our topic --"Humanities Old and New"--make sense. First, though, let me briefly declare my own position vis à vis those humanist ideals--let me call them Truth and Beauty--which critics less careful than Tony Coady accuse my own new field, Cultural Studies, of abandoning.

It seems obvious to me that the pursuit of truth and the critique of beauty (more exactly, aesthetic value) are foundational for the new humanities as for the old. The former renew the projects of the latter under the pressure

of worldly conditions in which heritage is contested between, as Rhys Jones succinctly put it, the “indigenous”, the “born here” and the “merely arrived here” of any historical space; the new humanities are “postcolonial” in at least this sense, which accepts continuity with, and responsibility for, the past as it shapes the present. Certainly, this acceptance leads some practitioners to represent their work as rupturing, subverting, transgressing, even abolishing particular intellectual legacies-- entire disciplines, in some instances. But revolutionary dreams are no more new to the humanities than “crisis” and critique, and, hard as it may be for polemicists to accept, no consensus binds the new humanities to a particular theory of history or a single model of change.

Take “beauty” in Cultural Studies: while it is the case that the field abounds in heated debates about taste and canon-formation, some questioning the very idea of value and the pertinence to contemporary cultural economies of a modern aesthetic vocation to “discriminate” and “judge”, it is also the case that these debates have lately given rise to major reinterpretations of old problems of value (for example, Tony Bennett’s Culture: A Reformer’s Science, Steven Connor’s Theory and Cultural Value, John Frow’s Cultural Studies and Cultural Value), and to powerful new readings of their modern history--among them Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic and John Guillory’s Cultural Capital<sup>2</sup>. In my own research on “action adventure” in mid-twentieth century Australian popular fiction and in globalised media culture, questions of value and their history are inescapable--not least because much basic mapping of the genre itself remains to be done<sup>3</sup>. When attempting to map it, however, we find ourselves ridiculed for making the very value judgments which Cultural Studies is presumed to refuse: “how much junk do you have to read” (I once read in a “quality” magazine) “before you know that it’s junk?” I find this question philistine, and my answer is: “a lot”. It’s called scholarship, this business of getting to

know your materials before you begin to assess them, and there is nothing new about it.

What is relatively new is the context of overproduction in which we go about our business. On the literary side of the humanities, many of our concepts and customs of analysis were formed in the eighteenth century; they are older than our disciplines, and may carry an assumption that “culture is rare”-- that cultural products (in the aesthetic sense) are comparatively scarce, or in finite supply, and that cultural practices may be localised and considered relatively stable<sup>4</sup>. Some of the most challenging issues in Cultural Studies arise from the reality gap between this assumption and the world we live and work in. At the most vulgar level of our own professional practice, serious difficulties arise when undertaking a genre study in conditions where it is no longer possible to “keep up” with all the pertinent scholarly literature pouring out in English alone from universities around the world--and where even the best funded, most mobile scholars have no hope of surveying more than a fraction of their potential primary source material.<sup>5</sup>

I probably can read most of the Australian adventure narratives published from the 1920s to the 1950s. However, as part of the same project on popular historiographies I also study transnationally produced martial arts movies. Hundreds, perhaps thousands have been made each year since the early 1970s; no deposit libraries keep track of fly-by-night, direct-to-video production around the world, and even the celebrated Hong Kong film industry is only now supporting an archival interest in its past. There is a structured arbitrariness to the sample of films I encounter which I need to be able to account for. In doing so, I have to frame questions which depart from the literary formalist traditions in which I was trained; my “sample” may tell me more about the judgments made by distributors about Australian tastes than the potentials of the genre I’m concerned with. The emphasis on industry, reception and “circulation” studies in work on popular culture is

sometimes an ideologically motivated gesture, but it is also a practical response to particular kinds of objects and the conditions of their amenability to study.

However, the real fun begins when we do bring questions of “quality” to bear on this vast field of production and on the multiple networks of distribution and consumption in which cultural products, including “literature”, circulate today. The problem is not that we cannot make critical judgments in this field; we can and we do. The problem is that it is no longer clear what the point of such criticism might be, or for whom our judgements themselves have value; we no longer make them in a context of rarity where (to caricature the recent past of literary English) a small group of specialised critics regulates the aesthetic training of a somewhat larger social elite who define the national culture. We work within a proliferation, not a collapse, of critical standards; in the technologically expanding and networked field of culture, fans and deregulated critical subcultures are, as the pop song has it, “doing it for themselves”. Some work in Cultural Studies revels in this loss of aesthetic “point”. The best work addresses the problem.

Truth is a trickier topic, not least because attacks on the supposed subjectivism of new humanities research sometimes mask the repetition of old and never-settled quarrels between the arts and the social sciences; an empiricist historian and a Leavisite literary critic were no more certain of agreeing about what constitutes objectivity, for example, than a literary post-structuralist is likely to concur with an audience ethnographer about the evidential status of a text. However, given that the old humanities never did assume agreement about what constitutes facts and evidence, I think it fair to say that the pursuit of truth, too, is now beset by anxieties about “point”, insofar as it is conducted in the midst of competition between rival institutions and differing modes of authority over the production and distribution of knowledge. Scholarly truth has been “relativised” far more

radically in the past two decades by the expansion of the media, the growth of information industries, the proliferation of identity-based social movements and the corporatisation of universities than by the half-baked postmodernist sneering that Tony Coady describes. I heartily agree with him about the foolishness of simple cultural relativism<sup>6</sup>. However, while I cannot deny its popularity in some zones of the new humanities--especially those close to the “artworld”, a cultural economy not primarily driven by academic imperatives and with its own institutional base--the very ease and familiarity with which Tony exposes the absurdities of SCR suggests that these are not distinctive to the humanities after “theory”. What needs to be explained is rather their popularity and, in some contexts, the respectability of SCR at present. What satisfactions and rewards are being derived institutionally from such a “philosophy”, and why are many academic environments increasingly prepared to tolerate, incite and sometimes, through journal and book refereeing procedures, enforce it?

While I have no confident answer to these questions I believe that useful ways of dealing with them, as with the problems posed to aesthetic criticism by an expanding “cultural” field, are more likely to emerge from truth-seeking, pointed analyses of the conflict of authorities and the frictional mixing of knowledges occurring around us--the sort of work that the books on cultural value I list above undertake--than from polemics against sundry bad habits of humanists new or old. For these polemics themselves have largely proved impervious to facts, to evidence, to reasonable argument; seeking “truth” about the claims and practices of semiotics, post-structuralism, critical theory or Cultural Studies has rarely been their object. Having been dragged in to them now for exactly twenty-five years (I gave my first defence of structuralism at Sydney University a quarter of a century ago), I can attest that little has changed in their form or content over that time, although the scale on which they occur is much enlarged. Once, quarrels over “theory”

occurred in English or French department seminars attracting fifteen people. Today, conflicts of the faculties involving Law and Science as well as the humanities are splashed all over the newspapers and repeatedly aired on radio. Yet new arguments are rare, and there is little carry-over from one quarrel to another; each instance begins again from zero. Forty years after the publication of Roland Barthes' Mythologies, thirty years after Derrida's Grammatology, in the midst of an explosion of international and multi-lingual work in cultural theory, people sneer at "Paris fashion" as though they've scored a scathing point.<sup>7</sup>

Let me end this brief position statement on a personal note. Having done my fair share of defences over all these years, I am truly amazed by the need of both the academy and the media not only to install but to maintain a figure of barbarism at the gates of "our cultural heritage". It is as though we fear our collegiality might depend on the persistence of this figure; what could we talk about, how would we communicate, what interests might we share without "culture wars" to keep us in touch? I often hear it said that Cultural Studies produces nothing of substance; some say the field is painfully self-reflexive, others dredge up Dr Johnson to stone their own absurd claim that "there is nothing outside the text". The serious way of responding to this is with facts (roughly one in four books published in Cultural Studies are about the definition of the field itself, not bad for a new, rapidly evolving academic project), and, of course, with argument: if we can agree, for example, that "textuality has no 'outside'" is not the same proposition as "there is nothing outside the text", then it is possible to discuss the former-- a Derridean claim which many Cultural Studies practitioners do not, in fact, accept. I cannot help remarking, however, that there is far more interest in the scandal of whether Cultural Studies does or does not have "clothes" than there is in the substance of actual instances of Cultural Studies research. This is my third panel on the new humanities for an

Academy Symposium. Between the first panel and this one, I have in fact spent most of my time as an ARC Senior Fellow on the life and the works of Ernestine Hill. I have never been asked to present that research at a gathering such as this.

However, just as the authority of the critic is not restored by raging that standards have “collapsed”, so these somewhat plaintive observations of mine arise in a practical context which cannot be changed by sighing. As the pace of academic publishing speeds up (more directly in response to industrial pressures than to a vocational longing for truth), problems of desire and capacity to know about ‘actual instances’ are arising at a level of intensity which threatens the coherence of debate. Take those three books out of four which are not meta-essays in Cultural Studies. One might be a historical study of sexuality in ancient Rome, another a policy analysis of broadcasting regimes in South-East Asia, the third a volume of cross-cultural essays on melodrama. In an ideal world the fourth, self-reflexive publication would explain what the first three have in common and why they contribute more distinctively to Cultural Studies than to Classics, Communication, and English. The reality is more fuzzy, though not chaotic; most likely, one of the first three books will reject the disciplinary program of the fourth while the other two criticise each other’s methodologies. The emergence of a shared debate about theory and method across different areas ensures that Cultural Studies is not a pell-mell accumulation of studies on the principle that “anything goes”. However, since few people equally want to read about the first three topics, or have time to do so if we did, it is the fourth which will most broadly attract attention. In interdisciplinary contexts of debate, it may appear to be all there is. In the media, panics about “cultural relativism” and “social constructionism”--positions which are hotly contested within new humanities scholarship rather than characteristic of it --generally do duty for the lot.

As the years pass, I'm beginning to think that these so-called panics in fact give people a sense of stability; having emotional rather than referential force, they supply that "coherence" which is threatened by diversification and unrelenting change. Now, we may well live in a world in which even scholars are no longer greatly troubled by discussing books they haven't read, but my point bears rather on the difficulty of knowing how to situate and assess the books one reads. We rightly expect a degree of generalisation from talk in the public domain, but this becomes hard to achieve as differing maps of "what's going on" proliferate. Recently, I read a paper on Anthropology and Cultural Studies which ignored the Cultural Studies being written by anthropologists (Fred Chiu, Judith Farquhar and Lisa Rofel came to mind). Different maps, however, are not only disciplinary in genesis. My sense of Cultural Studies is much more directly shaped by those debates in the U.S. and across East Asia which inflect my own narrow reading in Anthropology than it is by the British Cultural Studies work on "the popular" which other critics and practitioners--some living, of course, in the U.S, Japan or Taiwan--take to be central. Such dispersal and diversity of scholarship in fact has the potential to expand, rather than limit, our capacity for sociable generalisation. Its complexity can be daunting, however, for those disposed by training or temperament to order the world through great grids of emphatic polemic.

Thus far I have been having a bet each way, on the one hand downplaying the novelty of the new humanities while on the other emphasising new contexts of academic production and exchange. This is an ordinary effect of the genre of our panel; any restaging, even in miniature, of la querelle des anciens et des modernes necessarily involves an affirmation of continuity as well as an invitation to bring something novel to the tradition of the new. So, in an only semi-frivolous spirit of sociability, I will offer in my turn a "mapping" of the differences between old and new humanities.

My map is not directly of disciplinary or philosophical positions but of working conditions and conduct. The humanist of old, let's say, is a calm, leisurely creature. He (in my imagination) thinks it reasonable to ask a colleague to prepare a paper on an interesting topic at a month or two's notice, and for him it goes without saying that the colleague will be happy to "write it up". He is courteous and somewhat circumspect in his professional relations; he develops deep intellectual friendships over many years and values community, expecting regard from worthy opponents as well as like-minded souls. Teaching, at most, a few hours a week, he may cultivate incompetence in practical matters. The precision he values is scholarly in kind: he thinks carefully, he studies a problem slowly, and he takes whatever time it takes to solve it satisfactorily. Over many years he develops a deep core of knowledge, which in his maturity he may draw on as a stock of wisdom useful to a wide range of human affairs--whether or not those in charge of affairs are chaps he went to school with. Nevertheless, he values modesty and "wears his learning lightly"; he does not have to aim to be a "public intellectual" (pretentious term), but does his public duty as a teacher and a scholar in a civil, accommodating way.

The new humanist is a different beast--a stressed, hysterical camel, back forever being broken by yet another last straw. Given only six months notice to write a paper, she throws a tantrum. Taking a seventy hour working week for granted and hoping to hold it to that, she flames total strangers by email without a second thought. By the same token, she is capable of instant intimacy. Her professional relationships are largely instrumental; for her, "community" is a matter of alliance-building with a struggle for survival in mind. Intellectual adversaries are enemies in the battle for resources; "no respect" is the way to approach them. Sometimes, though, she has moments of intense personal communion with other academics at airports. (The effect is rarely lasting, and both are embarrassed when next they meet). Her current

research depends on what is fundable through a system of competitive grants; her footnotes are artfully political compositions. While she may be motivated by a deeply layered curiosity which keeps her asking the same questions throughout her working life, she accumulates “interests”, “skills” and “contacts” rather than knowledge, cultivating flexibility rather than depth. But she is a public intellectual because she can deal with the media, where an aptitude for instant intimacy counts.

This is not (I feel obliged to say) a self-portrait; I refuse to work seventy hours a week, and I try to be polite by email. Nor is it a portrait à clef of anyone I know. It is my idea of the “human face” of the new humanities seen in a very bad light, and I do worry sometimes about seeing this face in the mirror. I’ve sketched it, however, to highlight those mundane but devastating changes in the organisation of everyday life in universities which really are redefining the humanities in a fundamental way, and will require new responses if we wish to maintain our heritage. My research fills my dreams with apocalyptic images, and there are times when I see our future in old kung fu pedagogy films. Picture this: twenty or thirty years from now, a handful of universities world-wide teach the disciplines of Arts and Humanities in the traditional, cumulative way. They are as hard to get into as Shaolin Temple: money and brilliance alone do not suffice to gain entry and supplicants linger at the gates in the rain, undergoing privations and enduring esoteric tests of aptitude in the hope that the Abbott will relent and let them in. Outside the walls are the badlands -- Cultural Studies. The name survives, but the critical mission of the founders is as distant a memory as the “society” they belonged to. Out here, students learn a little ethics, a little rhetoric, a lot of self-shaping; streetfighting skills to improve their chances of survival in a pitiless economy.

This is a histrionic vision, but one no less plausible than the lurid murder stories (“the killing of history”, for example) taken seriously in some

quarters as accounts of the Basic Instinct of new humanities scholarship, or the soap opera thesis popular in the press that the twisted desires and shallow personalities of self-seeking, power-hungry baby-boomers have brought a fine education system low<sup>8</sup>. Mine at least allows us to recognise that many prominent new humanists are firmly ensconced in Shaolin Temple while others do their best in “the thirty-sixth chamber” outside; the division between old and new that should concern us is more significantly economic than generational or ideological in form. However, Carolyn Steedman’s important essay on the history of Cultural Studies in Britain, “Culture, Cultural Studies and the Historians”, suggests that a study of the evidence provided by the educational policy archive can provide a less dramatic but more realistic approach to the future as well as to present controversies.<sup>9</sup>

Steedman’s essay is particularly interesting as an account by an empirically trained historian (who greatly values her training) of the shift away from a culture of “facts and evidence” and towards a culture of “theory” across the humanities in Britain. When she discusses the decline of History’s influence not only in the academy but in “the commonplace and secular world of which the academy is a part” (noting with a certain melancholy that historians, too, are taking part in “the abandonment of time in favour of ‘the culture concept’”)<sup>10</sup>, she situates this change in a historical context: the expansion of education in Britain after the Second World War. To explain it, she examines the relationship between policies and their practical effects (increasing enrolments, shrinking resources), curriculum changes, and the emergence of the cheap, democratic pedagogies associated with “studies” programs. This history grounds her own theoretical discussion of whether History as an enterprise may be dated, or at least undergoing fundamental change; her own worries about method derive not from the errors of her colleagues but from the ways in which constraints of time and money have eroded the slow, costly practice of archival research on which the modern

discipline of History is founded.<sup>11</sup> In a similar way, as a specialist in nineteenth century Britain she sees "a very odd" account of the past arising from interdisciplinary courses, but she sees this account as shaped by an institutional need to base history on a reading of mass-produced and easily photocopied texts: prose fictions and government reports, for example, rather than the poetry vital to nineteenth century readers but commercially unsaleable today.

Like Bruce Robbins in Secular Vocations and Bill Readings in The University in Ruins-- both literary critics who also see the dilemmas confronting the humanities historically as institutional in form--Steedman shares the complexity of her worries with the reader rather than, in the furious manner of a Russell Jacoby or a Keith Windschuttle, flying a standard around which angry academics can rally with uncertain practical intent<sup>12</sup>. Such worrying is more constructive than expressive, because it looks for solutions. While Steedman's history pours as much cold water on fantasies of Cultural Studies as an "extra-mural" anti-disciplinary force as it does on rumours that the rule of Reason is overthrown by rabid fashion victims, it does this to establish a practical understanding of the problems that confront us and what kinds of response they enable. In this respect, of course, her essay is exemplary Cultural Studies as practised by a historian.

Having cultivated a certain incompetence over the years myself, I'm glad that others at this Symposium have talked about pedagogy and curriculum development in Australia. So I shall end with a few remarks about something I know, academic publishing and the practical role of "theory" as a lingua franca for the new humanities<sup>13</sup>.

We all know that it is becoming hard even for established scholars, whether "old" or "new" in formation and conviction, to publish serious work in this country (assuming they can fund it in the first place). While not all disciplines are equally afflicted at present, it is now very hard for young

academics to get a start, and almost impossible if their work takes what publishers consider excessive marketing risks. Risk today is as much a matter of content and mode of address as of formal or conceptual development; for example, it can be “risky” for Cultural Studies scholars in Australia to choose their topics or address their readers in overly local (“parochial”) terms. While we continue to hear complaints about the “repellent” and “hermetic” qualities of new humanist prose, the fact is that it is far easier to publish a densely-written work of cultural theory than it is to find an outlet for more vernacular writings, or for studies that engage in detail with Australian cultural formations.

Why? The practical reasons for this are usually ignored by those who lament the inaccessibility of contemporary critical culture. For years now, we have heard tirades about the jargon-ridden works proliferating in bookshops which scare general readers away. In fact, most such works are published in the United States (not in France) by academics from many different countries and disciplines, and they proliferate because they sell to a globally distributed readership. On the whole, beautifully written, truth-seeking studies of (say) photography in Sydney at the turn of the century or Australian mid-century travel writing do not so sell--that is, across national as well as disciplinary boundaries--unless they find a way to address a mixed international readership with no initial interest in their topic. “Theory”, in practice, is the mode of that address.

For Cultural Studies, there is a peculiar irony in the emergence of this new form of general reading. On the one hand, Cultural Studies itself is becoming an international and comparative practice, and the emergence of cultural theory as a changing and contested common language has been accompanied an explosion of interdisciplinary projects, cross-cultural dialogues and even inter-communal alliances (for example, those involving indigenous peoples' movements and, more recently, queer politics in the

Asian-Pacific region) barely thinkable thirty years ago; participating in this, Cultural Studies is part of a broad movement towards an effectively “post-colonial” world in the futurist sense of that term.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Cultural Studies profoundly depends on paying attention to socially specific relationships, to precise institutional contexts and to concrete modes of cultural action. Yet the economic and geopolitical changes enabling its expansion are also those pressuring publishers to insist that Cultural Studies be written for an international market--by which they mean, in practice, “U.S. readers”, or rather their marketing department's image of what American readers will read.

One immediate result is a profusion of textbooks, readers, and anthologies that often tend, however useful they may be, to consolidate particular versions of a Cultural Studies past, or to impose a safely metropolitan agenda for future research. Another result is precisely the production of a moralising genre of “theory”-- socially groundless, history-free, weighed down by a mass of references to a world composed of other theoretical writings -- which cannot engage with the cultural differences it endlessly invokes. Closely linked to these developments is a real decline in material support for Cultural Studies scholarship that interacts with innovative empirical work in marginalised (“hard-to-sell”) zones of history, textual analysis, and social research. With their relentlessly increasing emphasis on “international refereed journals”, Australian research funding arrangements in fact exacerbate these tendencies; as well as being new, most refereed journals in Cultural Studies are now owned by commercial publishers (Routledge, Sage, Carfax), and are subject in various ways to the pressures I’ve just described.

The good news is that Australia is not the only country where scholars face these problems. A transnational publisher’s representative once told me that among the Western “English-speaking” economies, only the U.S. now

has a domestic market large enough to sustain a national mode of address, let alone to export what would elsewhere be deemed parochial research. India also has such a domestic market for books in English. However, for scholars doing Cultural Studies there and in many Asian countries, where the corporatisation of universities is proceeding apace, complicated issues arise about when and what to publish in a national or regional language, and when and how to respond to the pressures and incentives of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “global English”<sup>15</sup>-- a cultural economy quite as powerful in its production and distribution of academic goods (and corporatised universities) as it is in its effects on popular cultures.

New understandings of our own cultural heritage develop in these conditions, as scholars with no formal “expertise” in each other’s languages and traditions begin more frequently to share experiences and to discuss common problems as well as cultural differences. One rarely acknowledged legacy of the moment of “theory” (the worst of which is now, I believe, largely behind us) has been the formation of a large, heterogeneous, transnational scholarly community which has a capacity and indeed a commitment to rethink the conditions in which community-formation is possible, and sometimes impossible, for diverse human beings. Those who worry intensely about the strains of particularism and authoritarian identity politics which do run through some work in Cultural Studies often miss another development: the growing influence of cross-cultural and comparative work on translation, on the one hand, and on traditions of cosmopolitanism on the other.<sup>16</sup>

Increasingly sustained by experiments in institution-building--new refereed journals, for example, to overcome the intellectual blockages produced by the economy of “global English”--this work provides, in its everyday practicality as well as its incorrigible philosophical and political diversity, scant support for simple cultural relativism. This is the context in which my own encounters with the work some of the political philosophers whom Tony Coady

mentions--Anthony Appiah, Charles Taylor, Iris Marion Young--have occurred.

Given that most “old” humanities work in Australia is fully caught up in the new humanities economy, I suggest our own discussions might usefully move on to matters of institution-building and, to be blunt, professional self-preservation. No doubt I am biased towards reconciliation by my own research need to see old humanities disciplines and knowledges survive; the best genre study I can refer to in my work on popular cinema is Men, Women and Chainsaws, a book about horror films by the medievalist Carol Clover. However, if we are to continue to enjoy both frameworks and opportunities to debate the pros and cons of relativism, more translation and cosmopolitanism between different traditions of Australian humanist scholarship would seem to be advisable.

My thanks to Tony Coady for his generosity in providing me with a copy of his paper.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond the Disciplines --The New Humanities ed. by K.K. Ruthven (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Tony Bennett, Culture: A Reformer’s Science (Sydney and London: Allen & Unwin and Sage Publications, 1998); Steven Connor, Theory and Cultural Value (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); John Frow, Cultural Studies and Cultural Value (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); John Guillory, Cultural Capital: The Problem of

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Literary Canon Formation (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> I discuss the problem of evaluating “ephemera” in “Panorama: The Live, The Dead and The Living” in Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture ed. by Paul Foss (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), pp. 160-187.

<sup>4</sup> See Ian Hunter, “Setting Limits to Culture” in Nation, Culture, Text: Australian cultural and media studies ed. by Graeme Turner (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) pp. 140-63. Hunter’s understanding of “rarity” is different from the gloss I give his phrase; he argues that culture is produced by specific institutional practices and should not be conflated with “politics”, “society” and so on. However, I would argue that his more complex usage presupposes the assumptions I am discussing here.

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting account of academic anxiety before the overwhelming number of books in the world today, see Neil Hertz, The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Meaghan Morris, “A Question of Cultural Studies”, The Humanities and a Creative Nation: Jubilee Essays ed. by Deryck M. Schreuder (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1995), pp. 137-159.

<sup>7</sup> For a history of the conviction that “French fashion” is dangerous see David Simpson, Romanticism, Nationalism and the Revolt against Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Keith Windschuttle, The Killing of History: How a discipline is being murdered by literary critics and social theorists (Sydney: Macleay Press, 1994). Columnist P.P. McGuinness has specialised over the years in the second genre of explanation, but there are traces of it in the serious argument of Jean Curthoys, Feminist Amnesia (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Steedman, “Culture, Cultural Studies, and the Historians” in Cultural Studies ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 613-22.

<sup>10</sup> Steedman, p. 620.

<sup>11</sup> See Steedman’s lyrical account of archival research in Past Tenses: Essays on writing, autobiography and history (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Bill Readings, The University in Ruins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Bruce Robbins, Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture (London: Verso, 1993); Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Windschuttle, The Killing of History.

<sup>13</sup> The following paragraphs draw extensively on an editorial written with Stephen Muecke for The UTS Review: Cultural Studies and New Writing 1:1 (1995).

<sup>14</sup> See Kuan-Hsing Chen, “Introduction: The decolonization question” in Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies ed. by Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.1-53.

<sup>15</sup> Personal conversation.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Naoki Sakai, Translation and Subjectivity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) and Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).