

NewMac 2009 – The Macquarie-Newcastle Postgraduate Research Symposium

Saturday the 21st of February 2009

ABSTRACTS

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Michael Austin , English Department - Macquarie University

A Pistol-Shot in a Concert: Australia's New Political Fiction

The volatile field of literary production in Australia has recently, in response to what is considered by a left-liberal consensus of writers to be a reprehensible period in Australia's governmental history, borne witness to a reemergence of a political literature. The dissemination of political information through literature, especially fiction, represents a reorientation of Australian letters - a new movement toward, and a new understanding of the writer as an engaged critic of his or her society as a whole.

What are the conditions of possibility for this new practice of Australian political fiction? What are the constitutive and productive forces that underlie this new literary form? How does narrative function in the creation and dissemination of political ideas within the Australian public sphere? What influence does this novelistic politics have on the consciousness of its readership? This paper seeks to address these questions through an analysis of two recent instances of this new paradigm of political fiction in which the individual is situated within an increasingly despotic national security regime: Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006) and Manfred Jurgensen's *The American Brother* (2007).

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Francesca Bell, Humanities and Social Science – University of Newcastle

Fairy Tale Architectures and the Collective Memory Palace

My presentation discusses the ways in which fairy tale may be viewed as specific allegory for human psychological conflict and construction of personality. Ideas focused on include:

- The nature of emotion as providing our feeling of being, and our means of interpreting information: the latest neurobiological research into memory, language and cognition.
- Body-environment dependence of thought and memory.
- Metaphor, the nature of 'consciousness' and personality: building the individual memory palace and that of what we may call the 'collective'.
- The human disavowal of creatureliness, and of the human body as primary reality.

I will then explore fairy tales

- as informers of signature, but often repressed, emotional experiences;
- as *memes*, continually reinterpreted and reinvented by prevailing cultural ethea, yet retaining a vigorous, central, deep-seated life in the collective memory of mankind.

What underlies the starkness of fairy tale structure? Why does it often seem unyielding and thorny, with elements of brutishness? Cultural signs and symbols of humanness serve as guides through a primal 'inhuman' landscape. Happy endings make accessible fairy tale's preoccupation with the unthinkable and taboo.

My conclusions seek to show how fairy tale informs us subversively about our conflicted humanity, and how current multi-disciplinary research in science and humanities is providing notably similar insights into human psychology.

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Jennifer Cheng – Macquarie University

Information, Migration and Media: Representations of 'Germanness' and 'Turkishness' on German television

Recent changes to Germany's citizenship and migration policies denote a shift away from the traditional *jus sanguinis* understanding of 'Germanness'. The 2000 citizenship reform allowed for the first time elements of *jus soli*, allowing German-born children of migrants to acquire German citizenship automatically if certain conditions are met. The abolition of privileges afforded to the descendants of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe also indicates a movement from a blood based understanding of being German.

However, though the technical parameters of becoming German have changed, very little appears to have changed in the understanding of 'Germanness' in German popular culture. Using two German television programs as examples, this paper will show how the information about 'Germanness' transmitted to viewers confirms the exclusion of young people of Turkish origin from the German nation.

Türkisch für Anfänger (Turkish for Beginners) is multi award-winning soap opera targeted at the 13 to 20 year old age group. *Schauen, was geht: Jungsein auf Türkisch* (Check Out What's Happening: Being Young the Turkish Way) is a documentary on the lives of young people of Turkish background growing up in Munich. Both shows fail to break stereotypes and subscribe unfailingly to the *jus sanguinis* view of both 'Germanness' and 'Turkishness'. The message the directors, writers and narrators of the programs impart to the audience is not that identity in Germany is ambiguous and subject to change. Rather, the audience is left with a clear view of what constitutes 'German' and what constitutes 'Turkish'. The implications of this transmission of information about 'Germanness' and 'Turkishness' for a country still grappling with the idea of being a migration country are discussed .

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Joyleen Christensen, Film Department – University of Newcastle

"If It Looks Like A Duck...": The Creation, Dissemination, And Interpretation Of Celebrity Persona In The Hong Kong Entertainment Industry.

This paper investigates the mechanics of the creation, dissemination, and interpretation of contemporary celebrity persona in one of the most star-based entertainment industries in the world. Using two brief case studies of the creation of star persona in Western entertainment industries as a foundation, I will examine how celebrity personas have traditionally been manufactured for public consumption as well as how this process has been modified for the unique demands of the Hong Kong entertainment audience. Although the primary focus of this research is an examination of the very public relationship between individuals (namely: the star and the fan), this paper will also briefly consider the role of the fan academic-as-fan in order to gauge the effect of acknowledged bias in academic discourse surrounding individual celebrities.

As Ien Ang observes in *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (1991), theorising the reception of popular culture is complicated through the inherent difficulty of gauging the effects of popular culture upon audiences when this interaction typically occurs on a very personal, intimate scale. For a long time the implicit imposed distance between observer and the observed appeared to be unavoidable - in fact, the availability of data on audience responses to media and popular culture actually appeared to be diminishing as audiences now had access to a host of new technologies, such as DVDs, cable television and downloadable content, that made it easier for individuals to experience even more cultural products within the privacy of their own homes. At the same time, however, other technological advancements have triggered an astronomical growth in the 'publication' of personal experiences in readily-accessible forms, such as online blogs, which provide researchers with immediate access to the hitherto private experiences and opinions of individuals from all backgrounds all across the world.

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Andrew Dunstall, Modern History & Philosophy - Macquarie University

Digital Dust: The Historian and the Archive

Research in an archive is, many would argue, a foundational experience for an historian. But what is an archive, and what determines its boundaries? In particular, how does technological change, such as the massive digitisation of archives currently underway, change the way that history not only is pursued as a discipline, but in its very meaning?

This paper undertakes to explore through several avenues these questions relating to the experience of the historian, philosophical concepts and figures of the archive, and its relation to the future and technological change. Taking cues from Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, and the work of social historian Carolyn Steedman, I consider the ways in which archives are subject to change on the one hand, and are insulated from change on the other, and whether or not the experience of the historian in the archive is unique. This leads me to consider the various 'archival' technologies that are abundant in everyday life in the 21st century, and what impact they might have on how we understand time, history, and the future.

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Sally Fitzpatrick, Creative Writing - University of Newcastle

Chinese Cosmology and the Landscape of Grief.

The expression of grief is important in any society, and much can be learned about societies by the study of the way they grieve. My memoir, entitled "The Qing Ming

Thing”, a personal narrative of grief, involves a cosmological journey into China and the ancient philosophy, rituals and symbolism of Taoism. In the story, the richness of life is restored by weaving together aspects of Chinese language, literature, history, geography and people forming a landscape which can carry the pain of loss and the imprint of memory.

The parallel experiences of “lost” and “found” form the two major strands of the narrative which are linked together into a connection like a splice joining two ends of unravelled rope. This image of broken connection evokes a deeper meaning of grief as an underlying unconscious drive in which violent disconnection is breached by a natural process of growth despite the loss of hope. The trope of the “journey”, the following of trails into time, both the future and the past, the delivering power of a river and the linking of ferries and bridges in the present informs the work providing the connective tissue vital to recovery and to the story.

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Leeanne Giacometti, English Literature - Macquarie University

Information as Power: Witchcraft Accusations and Representations of Witches in Early Modern England

In this paper I will use my current research into the representations of witchcraft in early modern England to examine the way information can be used as a tool in social control. This will be achieved by looking at informers, those who accused ‘witches’, and also the greater discourses that enabled this informing to occur. Part of this is how pamphlets, drama and other forms of literature interact with witch-beliefs and how this in turn affects the form and substance of witchcraft accusations. It was ‘lewd’ women, or those who were on the boundaries of social systems, such as widows, scolds, ‘shrews’, unwed mothers and adulteresses, who commonly appeared as the accused in court, and were almost exclusively represented in contemporary literature and pamphlets. ‘Witches’ were also accused because they claimed to have access to illicit knowledge and therefore power, either through the devil, his demons, fairies or other supernatural sources. In a culture in which appearances and a person’s ‘good name’ were an important part of daily social interactions, an accusation of witchcraft was a powerful tool. Part of the trial for witchcraft, particularly in places where torture was used, was to gain more information from the accused ‘witch’ relating to ‘her’ activities and any other ‘witches’ she might be aware of. Witch-beliefs and the methods used to prosecute witches varied throughout England, but there are many similarities, particularly in secondary representations. These representations of witches, particularly in trial pamphlets, act as a warning to women; play nice with your neighbours, remember your place in society, and you won’t need to worry about being called a ‘witch’.

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Lucas Graham, Sociology & Anthropology - University of Newcastle

Whether for reasons of fulfilling statutory obligations or to demonstrate good corporate citizenship or, indeed, genuine inclusion, the engagement of the local community in ‘community consultation’ associated with proposed developments seems commonplace in Australia in the 21st century. It could be argued that, primarily, a robust consultative process relies on an open and honest exchange of information. Yet almost as common

as consultative activities it would seem is the occurrence of community objection and outrage sparked by such activities.

Whilst there might be many and varied explanations of community responses, this paper concentrates on the extent to which the information provided during the process of community consultation might contribute to adversarial community responses. More specifically, what are the impacts of scientific and technical information provided as part of consultative processes and do we ever reach a point of too much information?

Touching upon the work of Callon, Latour and Law, as well as an Actor Network theory framework, this paper also provides a small empirical example of how information is 'translated' during the consultative process from subject matter expert to community representative and then on to the wider community. The paper also raises questions in relation to the influence of technical information upon community's feelings of risk, threat and uncertainty.

Finally, a point for debate is raised that suggests information overload is a self-perpetuating consequence of community adversarial responses and not the necessarily the cause.

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Susan Green: Macquarie University, English Literature

Metaphors of Thought in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*

My paper will explore the ways that Ian McEwan, in his 2005 novel *Saturday*, has harnessed the conceptual power of metaphor to present a particular model of the mind. By analysing McEwan's use of figurative language I will suggest that his construction of metaphors of thought influences the ways we interpret the novel, and that his linguistic choices act as gatekeepers of information by encoding meaning about the mind.

The hero of *Saturday* is a neurosurgeon, an expert on the brain, and a self-professed reductionist. Ironically, he can see no meaning in novels, nor in literature generally. He is not receptive to literature's open-ended, non-scientific ways of disseminating meaning, literature's suggestive ways of looking at the world. And yet when trying to conceive of the mind and understand the nature of his own thoughts, he utilises figurative language which is traditionally the province of literature. I will examine the ways that McEwan's metaphors of thought operate together as the primary means for understanding what thought and the mind are, forming a pattern of meaning making, and guiding our interpretations. My investigation will be interdisciplinary in approach, combining literary analysis with insights from the growing field of cognitive science.

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Julie Mundy-Taylor, Department of English - University of Newcastle.

Information as meaning-making: how children use a "sense of story" to understand narrative and information.

Children begin to acquire language from birth. Surrounded by people who express themselves, and more importantly, who relay information, or meaning-making, in narrative, children also learn narrative skills in order to communicate their own needs.

Children begin by recounting personal experiences and as their narrative skills develop, they are more readily able to interpret information in this format.

This paper is based on an action-based project conducted as part of a doctoral study, and is concerned with children's acquisition of the ability to identify, appreciate and engage with that subset of narrative known as story. The majority of child participants reported verbally that they had never listened to a storyteller. On further discussion, this was revealed to often be a lack of identification of storytelling as displayed by their teachers, peers or family members when they shared a traditional or personal tale. When children are able to comprehend the art of storytelling, their engagement with stories is enhanced.

Storytellers and academics such as Applebee, Mandler, Roney, Stadler and Ward, and Farrell have used the terms "sense of story", "story schema" and "story sequencing" to describe the level of understanding that is required to completely comprehend and engage with a story. It was clear from the beginning of the project that the children's 'sense of story' was undeveloped, and it is this growing ability to make meaning of stories and information that was observed throughout the course of the project, and that will be the focus of this paper.

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Rosemary Parsons, SCMP - Macquarie University

Between the Director and the Spectator : Decision-Making and Devising Theatre

Chris Baldwin (2002), a devised theatre practitioner and co-editor of a practical guide to devising theatre, lists the devising director's responsibilities as building a production and performance team, timetabling, compiling documentation of the rehearsal process and, crucially, fulfilling the role of spectator as the devised show is developed and rehearsed. Described by Baldwin as "at the centre of the rehearsal fulcrum" (p. 13), the director's role is clearly assigned with an operation of power despite insinuations that it is one of "enabling" rather than "authority", as in the case of text-based theatre. When compared to the tactics of discipline outlined by Michel Foucault (1977) – including spatial and temporal organization, partitioning, rank and analysis – the responsibilities of the devising director in Chris Baldwin's account may be reconfigured as "enabling" through discipline, with the persistent rhetoric of devising's potential to democratize theatre practice masking complex operations of power that retain striking similarities to the practices of text-based theatre production that devising was initially intended to subvert.

The primary holder of information concerning the devising group and the creative process (including preliminary research and rehearsal notes), the director thus fulfills an analytic role that is given added weight by its temporary function as "potential spectator". In this paper I will examine devising theatre as a process of decision making, and the role of the director in presenting and "enabling" the decisions that are made in the rehearsal room, and the implications for the final devised production.

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Maryanne Rydderch, Ancient History, University of Newcastle

DECODING THE DETAIL: Reconsidering Evidence for a Fascinating Informer

Who is one of the world's most fascinating informers? Who interpreted divine prophetic wisdom and disseminated it to all who sought guidance at Apollo's most famous oracular temple? The Pythia of Delphi is that informer. For centuries women were chosen, for varying periods of their lives, to speak for the god, to be the Pythia. Unfortunately, evidence for the extraordinary experience shared by these women comes to us exclusively through the minds of men. Men are the 'gatekeepers' who have transferred information to us.

The aim of this paper is to decode the detail contained in a selection of texts constructed by eight ancient men from 5th century BCE – 2nd century CE. The decoding is premised on the argument that the ancients' belief in Apollo's magnanimity and the Pythia's expression of that divine generosity was an empirical reality at Delphi and recognized as such throughout the Greek world. Decoding the detail continues with a critical analysis of modern interpretations of these texts, seeking clues to possible influences on four imminent Delphic scholars. My paper will conclude by offering a more balanced and empathetic analysis of the evidence for the Pythia at Delphi. The fantastic and enduring images of the hysterical Pythia need to be exposed as the work of the uninformed. Detail provided by the informed, encourages the idea that the Pythia and others recognized the power inherent in her position. Why has it been so difficult to address that idea?

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Roberta Simpson, Department of Sociology – Macquarie University

The Artist as Intermediary

The contemporary artist functions as an intermediary between specialised fields and the wider public domain. In a society where increasingly knowledge is held in elite fields of expertise the artwork provides a forum for the dissemination and consideration of ideas, fears and experiences evoked by changing and shifting parameters of information.

In an environment awash with ideas, information and concepts the options of subject matter for the artist are limitless. The contemporary artist may choose at will a subject to explore – to praise or vilify, to make serious or to make fun of, to respond with intellect or to lightly skim the surface. The viewers, and wider public may respond with delight, dismay or disinterest, and success may be marked by fame, or in some cases, infamy.

But the artist who explores the ideas of science, is rarely a scientist, the war artist of today, is not a soldier, and the landscape painter is not a geologist. How then does the artist, as a lay person in the worlds they investigate, collect information and knowledge, form ideas, and communicate them through the alternate domain of the arts?

A work of art is a site for communication and dissemination of ideas. It opens a discussion between the artist and the viewer. The intentions of the visual artist are to express that which cannot be written or spoken, rather to engage the viewer with a visceral response. Artist and viewer join together as outsiders to consider the chosen subject.

For the artist (amateur or professional) this joint process of discovery and expression

is a constructive element that he or she uses to interpret and interact with society and so can function as an expositor of social and cultural inquiry.

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Penny Spirou, Department of Contemporary Music Studies – Macquarie University

Cinematic Perspective: Decoding and Interpreting the Life Story of Hector Lavoe from the Musical Biopic, *El Cantante* (2006)

Stemming from the long tradition of biographical writing, cinema has communicated history by means of re-enactments of the lives of significant public figures through time (Landy, 1996). It can be argued that film biographies or 'biopics' possess a more personal, graphic and emotional vividness as opposed to professional historians chronicling the subject's life work (Tibbetts, 2005). The musical biopic in particular is a biographical film that focuses on individuals such as musicians, composers, singers and performer/entertainers and has had resurgence in contemporary cinema since 2000 with films such as *Walk the Line* (2005), *Ray* (2004), *De-Lovely* (2004), *I'm Not There* (2007) and *Beyond the Sea* (2004) released in Hollywood alone. Rather than exploring the musical individual's life history through one linear narrative, films in the twenty-first century have become more complex, connecting past and present, merging truth and fiction, to create multilayered perspectives on one life.

El Cantante (2006) is a contemporary musical biopic that represents the life story of Puerto Rican singer Hector Lavoe from the 1960s through to his untimely death in 1993. The film is narrated from the perspective of Lavoe's wife Puchi (Nilda Georgina Perez) which, according to the film, is based on an actual interview with Puchi after Lavoe's death. Through decoding and interpreting Lavoe's life story through the film, this paper will argue that *El Cantante*, amongst contemporary Hollywood musical biopics, is a self-reflexive film in terms of how the biopic represents multiple perspectives of the salsa singer. The film creators acknowledge and audio-visually reflect that *El Cantante* is a dramatic, not an accurate portrayal of Hector Lavoe's life.

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Jennifer Strong – University of Newcastle

Different Voices: Decolonising Information in Health

In his book on modern social work theory Payne (1997 p. 31) addresses ambiguity of understanding. He sees social work as looking at alternative views of an argument and understanding the complexity of the discourse of a phenomenon. Royal (2002) describes differing origins of basic spiritual belief systems such as those between Eastern - an internalised concept of the "divine within"; Western - an externalised concept of God in Heaven, where the world is created by God but is not God; and indigenous - where God is in the world, deserts, forests and seas. This must give rise to ambiguity of understanding because it is not only a difference in language but one of conceptualisation. Moren (1994) in Payne (1997, p.2) "sees social work as a process of making visible new possibilities of interpretation and action." The spirituality of a person ties in with their identity and ways of experiencing the world. This has implications for creation, interpretation and dissemination of health services.

This paper is based on research into spirituality within families in child and family health. The dominant discourse in an Australian health setting is based on a Western medical model. In a colonised country where first peoples are often rendered invisible this model has the potential to alienate indigenous clients. Indigenous inclusive research identifies an interface between indigenous and western culture, which provides an exciting opportunity for growth and change in the creation, dissemination and interpretation of information. The paper aims to provide a glimpse of decolonising of information in health.

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Lonqing Wang, Department of International Communication – Macquarie University

The Cross-Strait Relations: A Perspective of International Communication

Is information power? Different disciplines and research subjects may formulate different interpretations. As for the communication process across the Taiwan Strait, there is little doubt that information is disseminated as a sort of soft power, of which both the disseminator and receiver take advantage to its own ends.

Since the end of WWII, the Taiwan Strait has always been perceived as one of the focal points in the Asian-Pacific region and the world as a whole, not only because of the geopolitical significance it boasts, but more importantly due to its correlation with both China and Taiwan, the two major actors in the international arena and also two rivals in the emerging Greater China area. Their complicated and potentially explosive inter-relationship has been termed as *the Cross-Strait relations*, which refers to the interactions between China and Taiwan since 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing and the Chinese Kuomintang Party's government took the refuge in Taipei under the formal name of the Republic of China (ROC).

From the perspective of international communication, the Cross-Strait relations have been fundamentally transformed by the media and communication over the past 60 years. Based on a brief historical review, this paper proposes to examine the Cross-Strait relations through the conceptual analysis of international communication, which identifies the media's impact as the instrument of psychological warfare, propaganda and public diplomacy across the Taiwan Strait, with profound implications for peace, prosperity and security of the contemporary world.