University of Glasgow | The Kelvingrove Review

Issue One

Interstitial Spaces: Mapping the In-Between

Contents

Foreword

> 'Interdisciplinary activity, valued today as an important aspect of research, cannot be accomplished by simple confrontations between various specialized branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinary work is not a peaceful operation: it begins effectively when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down - a process made more violent, perhaps, by the jolts of fashion - to the benefit of a new object and a new language, neither of which is in the domain of those branches of knowledge that one calmly sought to confront'.
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> *(Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in Josué V. Harari (ed.) Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism (London: Methuen, 1979), p.73.)*

Planned as a strategic response to *eSharp*'s cross-disciplinary mandate, the inaugural issue of *The Kelvingrove Review*, 'Interstitial Spaces: Mapping the In-Between,' seeks to give form to the space of interdisciplinary research. In reviewing current scholarship that occupies the interstitial domain of interaction, confrontation and transformation, the inaugural edition of *The Kelvingrove Review* argues for the relevance of such work in contemporary academia though some of the reviews presented will question and interrogate the operations involved in such a process. While some of the reviews mark the imbricated fabrics of academic research and reveal the points where traditional academic discourses crack under the strain of permeable, polymorphous research, others highlight potential pitfalls risked in constructing an interdisciplinary approach.

While the aim of 'Interstitial Spaces: Mapping the In-Between' is to bring disciplines closer together, the way the texts address certain issues often reveals productive connections that can only be made by eschewing other possible interactions. For this reason, the reviews have been organized in a way that encourages

creative confrontations, although the nature of interstitial space would be more sufficiently represented using hypertext.

An academic interstice is a space which lies between disciplines but which cannot be adequately contained by any existing disciplinary boundaries, with the exception of saying that it exceeds them. In another sense, however, interstice also signifies a connective tissue, insinuating itself between disciplines and binding them. It is with the latter in mind, that the reviews have been organized leading into one another and transforming each other in the process.

The Editors,

Elizabeth Anderson and Kate Morris

The Creation of the World or Globalization, by Jean-Luc Nancy

Trans. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007. (ISBN: 0-7914-7026-1). 129pp.

Lilian Moncrieff, University of Glasgow

The philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy relates a thinking of experience that shuffles about in the in-between and is in excess of any map. An author committed in his earlier works –*The Inoperative Community* (1982), *The Sense of the World* (1993) and *Being Singular, Plural* (2000) – to the question of what it means to exist in a world with others, Nancy is well known for his portrayal of a unique experiential scene; a being or existence that is singular, but inescapably with others, and a communal existence that is impossible to universalise or unify, in the absence of a 'being-in-common.' Using his philosophical conception of community and experience to probe a sense of the political, Nancy has made significant contributions to debates on politics, globalization, community, social meaning and subjectivities.

The Creation of the World or Globalization, a work recently translated into English, indicates an extended return to these themes. Written against the background of global concerns in the twenty-first century, Nancy is inevitably drawn to the neon-lights that mark the place, or rather, absence of borders in globalization. In this context, the book reframes a question from earlier days; what does it mean to

exist with others in a world whose disparate global parts are increasingly being brought together and unified? If the world is without reason or cause, as it is for Nancy, how does one relate to and participate in global economy? Or, upon what might one base an assessment of social harm or the possibility of political challenge?

Given Nancy's previous work, it is little surprise to find globalization, as an economic phenomenon, broadly condemned in the book. Nancy speaks first of its lack of foundation; globalization comes from and goes towards nothing but more of its capital self. Emphasising the extent to which things do not have to be this way, so to speak, Nancy constructs space for political challenge around the concept of 'creation,' a term he uses to reference ways in which meaning and sense enter the world. In particular, he tempers a loss of certainty that comes with a world without reason or cause by celebrating the extent to which there might exist instead new possibilities for social and political meaning creation.

The point is underscored in a contrast Nancy draws between 'globalization' and an alternative term in French for globality, 'mondialisation' or 'world forming.' On the one hand, where meaning in globalization is typically validated according to each capital potential, the phenomenon denotes for Nancy a process of global unification that is ultimately reductive. The world starts to feel like a smaller place not because of the convenience of international travel, but because of the uniformity that globalization imposes on the totality that is 'being in the world.' By contrast, 'mondialisation' is used by Nancy to reference an ideal or an ethos of

creation, where the horizon upon which meaning is created is always expanding, and new meanings and alternatives are always emerging.

The contrast Nancy thus establishes in his terminology is useful in underscoring problems of imperialism and domination implicit in a world unified by free trade, economic power and globalization. Yet, the conflict between terms is sometimes too simplistic, particularly where the result is reminiscent of a dialectic that seems too familiar and tired. In particular, the notion of an ideal that 'mondialisation' introduces in this context seems to ill-complement Nancy's wider project. This is particularly the case where the notion of 'world-forming' cannot seem to help but cultivate a sense of something more 'real' or more 'authentic' that being 'ought to' demand, a philosophical approach that Nancy otherwise rejects.

Of course, Nancy works to distinguish his project and avoid precisely such pitfalls. Complementing the creative impulse he describes with a necessity that the subject must empty its self in creation, and not wholly invest its self in particular outcomes, the ethos of creation is simultaneously tied to a requirement that it avoid absolution in the articulation of purposes and ends. As such, Nancy steers away from any broad collaboration with a naturalised self or identity politics, and allows the gap or void upon which politics depend to open. Leave behind the identity-ridden trainers; new political spaces thus begin to emerge in the book in which the creation of alternatives begin to feel probabilistic.

Yet, the challenge to globalization in the book still relies on a naturalised ethos of creativity, which is founded in Nancy's words on the 'law of the world' that is the 'law of sharing.' Given what has come before, however, something about the use of 'law' in this context seems to jar. Of course, it might be that the emphasis Nancy places on possibility (and not outcome) permits laws of sharing to comment on or invalidate the ends of globalization, without bringing a unilateral alternative in its place to completion. Yet, for this to be the case, more is required from Nancy in terms of an explanation as to how law might be re-conceptualised as such, or where such a withdrawal from outcome might begin.

There is much to be gained in an appreciation of what Nancy emphasises in the book; possibility, creation, participation, political space, new critical alternatives. In the final section, entitled 'complements,' Nancy brings together these ideas in a commentary on the broader political implications of the book in terms of today's global economic and political situation. In particular, Nancy muses over a general recommendation that politics be redirected away from the attempt to recover popular sovereignty. Instead of speaking louder (the sovereign, the global economy, the multinational cannot listen), Nancy highlights the task of speaking in a way that always leaves something somewhere to be determined still; the possibility of a politics that is non-sovereign. Left at the end of the book thus, with such an exciting and radical proposition, the reader can only hope that in his future work, Nancy will return to fascinate us once again.

Nature's Edge: Boundary Explorations in Ecological Theory and Practice

Edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007. (ISBN: 0-7914-7122-7). 231pp.

Heather MacNeill, University of Glasgow

Where does Nature end and Human begin? How does the rate of human technological development compare to Earth's natural system of evolution? What are our ethical obligations when it comes to genetic engineering? These are only some of the controversial questions addressed in *Nature's Edge,* the new collection of essays compiled by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine. In thirteen insightful and often complicated essays, experts from various fields explore the perceived boundaries between Human and Nature, and the consequences of that perception.

Intriguingly, the chosen title is both clever and relevant to the text as a whole. Rather than the connotations of confinement, exclusion, and separation that the word 'boundary' typically conjures, the shift in emphasis to 'Edge' evokes the ecological definition of the term—the merging place of two ecosystems, the nebulous space between distinct worlds *without* distinct delineations. It is this nebulous space between Human and Nature that each of these authors tries to explore in his or her own unique way.

The writing varies from engaging to unnecessarily dense, but on the whole offers relevant insight into the complications involved in either including or separating humans from Nature. Writing styles differ from essay to essay, and while the collection offers a nice variety, the detriment is to those pieces denser in academic language. Even to an academic, they seem less engaging and points are sometimes lost in the obtuseness. But this is more the exception than the rule.

In one of the first pieces, J. Baird Callicott highlights the controversial argument that humans, being a part of Nature, cannot be separated from all other natural beings. His theory suggests that the tools and technological advancements of humans are no different from the use of tools by primates or birds for survival. The problem with this line of reasoning is that if humans are 'natural', then all that humans do is natural, and therefore acceptable. This is an argument used for quite some time by those who would rather turn a blind eye to the effects of their actions on the environment, and in recent years has become rather taboo.

What saves this suggestion from falling into anti-environmental thinking is the claim Callicott follows up with: what separates humans from Nature are not reason or technology, but cultural evolution. Humans are able to alter their environment drastically, and communicate that information to others in a very short period of time. The developments that humans have made do not correlate to Earth's natural evolution because we do not rely on genetic changes to adapt to new environments. Callicott's argument is keen. What separates humans from all other manipulative

organisms is that the changes we are able to affect far exceed the rate at which Nature is able to compensate. Considering the current debates on global warming and development, accepting this position carries powerful ethical consequences.

Other pieces in the collection are less effective, however. Some do not completely deliver in terms of addressing specific issues, instead leaving the reader to consider independently the vague questions posed. Strachan Donnelly's discussion of Cartesian, Spinozian, and Darwinian thought with regard to animal biotechnology is engaging, but avoids tacit application to the ethical considerations of biotechnology. While informative, it leaves the reader wanting more. The consequences of genetic engineering and animal biotechnology are only briefly touched on, and are related solely to their direct effects on the human species. Omitted is any discussion of the potential effects of such procedures on biological systems as a whole.

Likewise, Jon Jensen's discussion of species divisions offers insight into the possible extensions of protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and prescribes conservation amendments that seem applicable and worthwhile. What it omits is the consideration that the proposed reintroduction discussed is of species to a habitat that no longer exists, or is markedly changed. What is lacking (and possibly much more relevant) is the discussion of species preservation in the absence of ancestral habitats. Reconstructing habitat is not always an option, but what are the alternatives?

What is remarkably impressive about this collection is the balance between essays. Though the pieces do not conflict with one another, they do not necessarily agree either. The positioning of one text against another works to highlight each author's unique viewpoint, then complement it further into an intricate web of practical, philosophical, and conceptual thinking. If Donnelly leaves certain questions regarding ethics unanswered, Brown addresses them later to focus on the flaws in our value systems, which additionally extends the arguments posed by Callicott. The effect is of being forced to reconsider the ideology on which much of Western thought is based, and ultimately questioning some of the foundation blocks of science and economics. This approach is carried throughout the text, moving from the general to the specific: from natural divisions to community values.

In the end, the collection successfully bridges the gap between disciplines while addressing contemporary concerns. Not only is this collection for the genetic and environmental scientist, but for anyone considering public service work—be it a community planner or city official. While a reader may not agree with all that is posited, there is no doubt that each essay raises some red flag for thought that is applicable to each individual's life.

Language, Ecology and Society: A Dialectical Approach, by Jørgen Christian Bang and Jørgen Døør

Eds. Sune Vork Steffensen and Joshua Nash. London: Continuum, 2007.
(ISBN: 0-8264-94315). 232pp.

Mark Godin, University of Glasgow

Context is everything, and everything is context—at least, according to the authors of *Language, Ecology and Society: A Dialectical Approach*. The book looks at language through ecology, which is construed as the whole environment in which language occurs. The authors argue that one can never analyse language neutrally, because words and their meanings do not exist in a vacuum and because communication between people is never achieved apart from their particular situation. This is the starting point of dialectical linguistics, a form of ecolinguistics. Adherents seek to examine the language of any text or utterance with respect to the ideological, social, and biological aspects of its time and place, because everything in the universe is related. Yet, the authors of this book do not stop with linguistic analysis. Having determined that, all of language's environment shapes its meaning, it then follows that language shapes its environment. Therefore, they can use language to address the nature of present-day society and the environmental issues facing the world. Part introduction to a specific method of linguistic analysis, part manual of conflict resolution, and part philosophical manifesto,

Language, Ecology and Society declares that the way that you use language can change the world, and the authors clearly want this to be for the better.

The greatest strength of the book is its insistence that language cannot be abstracted from the environments of the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. This refusal to consider language apart from the world does not let us forget the actual complexity of systems of human discourse and interaction. On the other hand, the interdisciplinarity involved in what really is a kind of linguistic theory of everything opens linguistics to the critical criteria of other disciplines and raises questions about the purpose of the work.

Language, Ecology, and Society consists of three parts. The first part introduces and explains what dialectical linguistics is, describing its history in relation to traditional linguistics and setting forth the key principles by which it pursues the study of language. Whereas traditional linguistics attempts to isolate the semantic values and functions of words without thinking of why they might have been spoken, dialectical linguistics tries to account for the way that conscious and unconscious bias can affect language. The authors write that '[a] linguistic theory, its meaning, sense or truth cannot be separated from its practitioners, or the social praxis in which it is articulated or the discourses in which it is used' (p.48). They strive to practise linguistics in a way that takes the complexity of any human situation into account. The second part of the book demonstrates various techniques of dialectical text analysis. In the third part, the authors use their theory of ecolinguistics to address the current environmental crisis in the world. They proclaim that biological

processes are not the only system involved, for '[i]f we want to change direction we need to reconsider our mental and social patterns as well' (p.171). Here dialectical linguistics turns from a description of these 'mental and social patterns' to a prescriptive account of how the interrelated nature of the entire world could be embraced to repair the world's health.

In order to consider the impact of everything on language use, the book crosses the boundaries of many disciplines. However, while the way that the authors construe language makes this necessary, their kind of interdisciplinarity causes methodological problems. Instead of standing at the borders of various disciplines being informed by the way those disciplines might address similar issues, the authors tend simply to erase those boundaries. A reader may see this in the authors' apparent preference for the term 'trans-disciplinary' to 'inter-disciplinary' (pp.178-9). While an interdisciplinary approach employs the discourses of several disciplines to address an issue, a 'trans-disciplinary' one apparently consists of crossing over subject boundaries primarily with one's own discourse. At times, this causes the authors to be a little careless in their critical interpretations. For instance, look at the construction of their principle of 'core contradictions'—nine polarities or ranges of description of society in which all members of that society are somehow implicated (pp.66-85). One of these core contradictions is ideology, basically referring to what people believe. To exemplify the working of this contradiction, the authors choose to oppose 'Judeo-Christian tradition' with their own dialectical ideology. However, they uncritically use the paradigm of Judeo-Christian ideology presented in the book *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*

by J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames. Bang and Døør simply accept that this worldview is dualistic in terms of God over humanity and humanity over nature, while declaring that their own ideology, which they claim is closer to Buddhism, is about loving friendship, compassion, cheerfulness, and harmony (pp.71-3). Yet the authors do not consider that their own idea of a single monolithic Judeo-Christian ideology is itself a problematic and ideological construction.

Why does such an example matter? It matters because it causes the reader to wonder how careful the authors have been in moving across boundaries into other disciplines. This is not to suggest that the authors should not criticise certain ideologies. But the lack of concern over their portrayal's accuracy demonstrates a certain failure to take into account what other disciplines actually say, even though their linguistics wants to consider the totality of the environment of speech. This also points to the book's identity problem: is it primarily a description of a method for studying language, or is it more a linguistic prescription for changing the world? The last part of the book speaks about replacing 'traditional foundational concepts' with a 'love discourse' and argues that true dialogue can resolve conflicts (pp.177, 185). Such value-laden directives bring this linguistic work into the realm of philosophy and theology. While it is important to realise that language cannot be considered separately from the impact of the world and its impact on the world, it remains possible and necessary to contest the philosophical argument involved in this book's prescription for solving ecological crises. When authors believe that language and ecology cannot be separated from questions of faith and ethics, they

should reach for a discussion more sophisticated and nuanced than it is here.

'Sexing the Text': A conference report

Siobhann Mccafferty, University of Glasgow

The previous review highlighted some of the pitfalls risked in interdisciplinary work, particularly in dealing with the nuances of varying discourses and the dangers of appropriation that can result in methodological confusion. However, the subjects of this report and the related review that follows traverse such boundaries and risks with greater success. In explicating the tangled web of various subject positions, appropriations, textualities and sexualities, the conference papers and related publications successfully underscored the ethical imperative behind such work. Drawing together one of the oldest 'interdisciplines' – women's studies – and contemporary debates on authorship, gender and religion, the 'Sexing the Text' conference proved the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary activity, particularly in terms of ethics – an area of increased scholarly activity, as evidenced by its overt or implied presence in the reviews presented here.

'Sexing the Text' was a one-day conference that took place on 7 December, 2007 at the University of Glasgow, courtesy of the Centre for the Study of Theology, Literature and the Arts and the University of Stirling. The conference remit was the exploration of gendering via text and texting of gender explored via a wide range of

disciplines. The day opened with a plenary session by Bjorn Krondorfer entitled: 'Textual male intimacy and the religious imagination'. Krondorfer introduced Critical Male Studies in Religion as a gender conscious method of interpretation that seeks to address the issues that have arisen when unacknowledged male perspectives are accepted as normative. Specifically, Krondorfer's talk focused on confessiography (self confessional) writing. His representative texts for this were Augustine's Confessions, and the recently published diaries of Perochot; a Jewish policeman in German-occupied Poland. Krondorfer presented a detailed reading of those two texts which convincingly illustrated confessional writing as a particularly gendered form of religious writing which allows uninterrupted monologue for the author, and an implicit moral direction for the reader that draws them to side with the confessor and answer with forgiveness. However, it also is a form of writing that eludes moral agency, displaces the intimate other and hides the particulars of the male body while at the same time enabling intimacy through the act of reading.

Post morning coffee, (and many biscuits), the second session of the day was devoted to short papers presented predominantly by post-graduate students. The papers were given loose thematic groupings and divided into four sections: Sixteenth-Seventeenth Century, chaired by Lynn Robson; Gender and Philosophy, chaired by Pamela Sue Anderson; Gendering male authors of the Twentieth-Twenty-first Century; chaired by Heather Walton; Female Genius, chaired by Alison Jasper and Negotiating Gender, chaired by Eva Lehr.

The Female Genius grouping that I attended was indicative of the diversity of the topic: within the three papers there was a discussion of modernist dance, ritual and the female body, Lithuanian prose in the work of Zemaite and gendered construction in Caribbean literature. Other papers throughout the groupings were well received, and the small groups were conducive to good discussion. My only criticism of the session was of scheduling all the short papers in one time slot was ill-advised. Given the range of topics it would have been wise to give participants the option of attending more than one group of papers.

Following lunch, the first session was a papers' panel entitled: 'Perspectives on the gendering of texts'. Heather Walton began the session by examining the character of Elizabeth Costello in the works of John Coetzee, Costello being a recurring character whose persona has been described as an act of authorial ventriloquism which raised many points with regards to the right of the author to assume any gender as per need.

Hugh Pyper's paper took as his starting point the result of an analysis of the journal *Literature and Theology* which noted that male contributors generally did not write about women – an exception being himself. From that fact he contributed an interesting discussion of the particularities of his bookshelves and what male writers can learn from female writers. The final paper in the session was Lynn Robson's on murder pamphlets, focussing on a Seventeenth Century pamphlet; 'The arraignment and burning of Margaret Ferne-Seede.' Robson presented a discussion of the press and its presentation of

crime and female murderers, particularly in relation to notions of providence and election in Calvinism.

The final session of the day was a collection of responses in the wake of Heather Walton's two recently published books: *Literature, Theology and Feminism* and *Imagining Theology*. Ward Blanton, Alison Jasper and Elaine Graham gave a series of reactions and respects to author and texts both which helped to establish a picture of Walton as an academic and of her books. The new texts were well received by all the speakers and more than one was quick to request a cessation of proliferation lest the rest of us be put to shame. On that note, a more in depth review of the books follows.

Literature, Theology and Feminism, by Heather Walton.

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. (ISBN: 0-7190-6090-8). 212pp.

Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God, by Heather Walton.

London: T & T Clark, 2007. (ISBN: 0-5670-3173-0). 152pp.

Elizabeth Anderson, University of Glasgow

Throughout her writing, Heather Walton is interested in uneasy communion, rather than synthesis. She does not collapse differences into undifferentiated merging, but rather articulates tensions – erotic, epistemic, linguistic. *Literature, Theology and Feminism* and *Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God* both address the interdisciplinary field of theology and literature. In the preface of *Imagining*, Walton identifies her ongoing interest in examining the borderlands between theology and literature, an interest that will quickly become evident to a reader of her work. Her approach to this interdisciplinary project is refreshing – insisting on the distinctions between the disciplines of theology and literature, she examines the way they have contested each other and also how they 'surprise themselves in an amorous embrace' (p.xi). By interrogating how the disciplines have been gendered in relation to each other (theology as masculine and literature as feminine) by theologians, literary critics and interdisciplinary scholars, Walton opens up space for a new understanding of the relationship between theology and literature.

She suggests that creative writing challenges and provokes theology, but also evades serving the political purposes of theologians, feminist and otherwise.

The beginning of both books involves an analysis of a number of strategies for understanding the relationship between theology and literature which proceeds to considerations of the ways religious feminists have used literature in their work. The conclusion of *Literature* and most of *Imagining* is taken up with Walton's own literary/theological readings where her essays deal with different genres: popular culture in 'Gender of Cyborg', autobiography in 'Extreme Faith' and 'Sex in the War' and preaching in 'Sheba'.

In *Literature*, Walton provides an invaluable resource in her outline and critique of several key writers who pioneered and developed the field of feminist literature and theology: Carol Christ, Alicia Ostriker, Katie Cannon and Kathleen Sands. Her primary criticism of previous work of religious feminists is that it limits the role of literature. The corrective Walton suggests involves establishing a critical framework with the help of poststructuralism. The key concern of *Literature* is engaging with feminist poststructuralists – Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous. Walton defines poststructuralism as

> [T]he pre-eminent discourse of alterity in our time [...] held by many to be a means through which the sacred is reinhabiting the cultural order. (p.77)

She argues that despite being neglected in recent scholarship, the work of women poststructuralists is a significant resource for

religious feminists writing about literature. Feminist post-structuralism opens a space for radical alterity in feminist literary theology which challenges received wisdom and the patterns of reading developed by previous work in the field.

One of the greatest differences between Walton's work and others in the field (aside from her emphasis on feminist poststructuralism) is her insistence on the importance of literary form. She takes issue with feminist scholarship's use of 'writing' as a term synonymous with 'literature,' however, her own use of genre is not always thoroughly examined. She writes about the constuctedness and fictionality of literature, but doesn't consider that other forms, whilst not necessarily fictional, are still constructed (to be fair, neither do the scholars she criticizes). She does not discuss the differences between poetry and fiction if both are literature, nor does she address literary criticism's attention to diverse forms such as the essay, autobiography and biography. I would suggest that the definition of literature as fiction is more contestable than Walton indicates. Walton herself uses the autobiographical writing (journals) of Elizabeth Smart and Etty Hillesum. While she does distinguish between Smart's journals and novels in terms of form, she does not engage with issues of genre in her work on Hillesum, nor does she draw upon the considerable body of work on the genre of autobiography. However, Walton's challenge is an important one, and her own difficulty in engaging with the terms she has set out underlines the need for further work in this area.

Of the theorists she discusses in *Literature*, Walton finds Cixous's work – both theoretical and creative – the most compelling

and also the most neglected by Anglo-American feminists. Cixous's movement between genres makes her work difficult to assimilate. Yet as a poet/theorist that does not avoid the ethical and political questions addressed to creative writing while simultaneously engaging with the sacred, Cixous provides

> A precious resource to those of us who are seeking an encounter with literature that deepens our sense of wonder and strangeness and pain – rather than one that confirms us in our convictions and comforts us in our sorrows. (p.146)

Unlike Kristeva and Irigaray, Cixous devotes much of her theoretical writing to literature, including women writers such as Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, Russian poet Akhmatova, and Dutch writer, Etty Hillesum (Irigaray has been criticised for writing about women medieval mystics, while neglecting the writings of such mystics). Walton's reading of Cixous leads to her subsequent work on Etty Hillesum in *Imagining Theology*. She writes that both Cixous and Hillesum eschew innocence for faith in the face of pain, consider bodies as 'material systems of knowledge', and mark out a new terrain of the sacred, far beyond traditional boundaries (*Literature* p. 148).

One of Walton's abiding concerns is the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. She takes on political, ethical concerns arising in the work of literary criticism and academic work more broadly. She addresses this concern most explicitly in the chapter 'Fireflies and the Art Candle' in *Imagining Theology*:

> I think it is best to admit quite frankly that choosing writing is a dreadful decision that is always made with an awareness

> of unfulfilled responsibilities and the neglect of other calls and obligations. I would also describe it as an act of love and faith in the possibility that following our desires might, inadvertently, lead us to a place where love, politics and mystery are reunited. (p.61)

Walton's evident desire to address the ethical implications of literary work, to raise the ambivalence in such endeavours, if not resolve the tensions, explains her interest in the work of writers such as Cixous and Hillesum. In keeping with Walton's understanding of theology and literature as amorous partners, she has no interest in maintaining literary innocence or gaining political absolution:

> Cixous chooses metaphors of desire and temptation to convey her sense that placing faith in writing is never a straightforward good. It always entails a fall from innocence. (*Imagining* p.61)

Walton argues that just as theology and literature need each other, so do literature and politics:

> Politics does not have the strength it needs alone to transform the world . . . politics needs the Somewhere Else of writing to partner and provoke it. (*Imagining* p.62)

I find Walton's incisive analysis of the ambivalence of literature and its vulnerability in the face of alterity the most valuable of her many contributions in these two volumes.

Literature, Theology and Feminism and *Imagining Theology* mark an important intervention in the field of literature and theology by challenging both male scholars and religious feminists to consider the work of feminist poststructuralists. These books will be useful to

scholars in both disciplines, as well as those who occupy the margins between them. Walton provokes debate, raising more questions than she answers and giving due weight to criticisms of the thinkers and writers she champions. At times the reader may wish she would nail her colours more firmly to the mast, however, her style is clearly a deliberate strategy in the service of opening up a wider field of scholarship. Her questioning, provocative stance is more encouraging to other writers in the field than a clearly delineated and defended position would be. Walton is clearly happier in the uncomfortable tents in the wilderness than in more formally fortified territory. Walton urges religious feminists to broaden our reading practices, to read a diverse range of texts with a diversity of strategies, 'to leave home and walk around in the wild places exploring all that can be experienced there' (*Literature* p.169).

Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive, by Jacques Derrida

Trans. Beverley Bie Brahic. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
(ISBN: 0-7486-2129-6). 96pp.

Neil Davidson, University of Glasgow

This book is the translation of a lecture given to mark the inauguration of the Hélène Cixous archive in the Bibliothèque National de France. It comes in a series from Edinburgh University Press on the Frontiers of Theory edited by Martin McQuillan who provides a clear and concise foreword. Also from the Frontiers Series is Cixous's *Dream I Tell You* (2006, originally *Rêve je te dis* 2003) and along with her other recent publication *Manhattan: Lettres de la préhistoire* (2002) are the main texts cited in Derrida's essay. Among the themes of the book are literature, the archive, genius, dreams, hospitality, absolute otherness, the irreducible monstrosity of an oeuvre and its irreconcilable position in relation to the library project or system, as it stands.

Those familiar with Derrida's writing will recognise his insistent worrying away at the concept and more importantly the act of (the) institution, in this case the Library. With signature playfulness he performs brilliantly on Cixous's themes, themselves negotiations of categorisation, the distinction between fact and fiction, her positioning of genre within genre all the while revealing

poetry as her writing's lifeblood. Ultimately, Derrida argues that the gift of Cixous's archive and especially her dream writings to the library must transform the library and that this gift insists on a new way of reading her oeuvre.

Her archive, Derrida argues, will give the Bibliothèque National de France (BNF) an unconscious through the donation of her dream writings to the library. Some of these are collected in the aforementioned *Dream I Tell You*. Like the unconscious:

> Cixous goes on to tell us what she won't be telling us; she declares to customs the secrets she will not be revealing to the customs agents of the curious, the librarians, the critics and general readers. A veteran Freudian, she tosses this challenge to interpretation, to let dreams interpret themselves. (p.28)

As soon as an asymmetry appears Derrida is there niggling at it. Here, Derrida takes another shot at the concept of the gift, arguing that to know what one gives is to undermine the status of the gift as gift. The unknowable extent of Cixous's oeuvre, especially in light of her transformation of the French language from the inside, renders the acceptance of the gift an uneconomical one. Derrida invokes set theory to argue this case and perhaps pre-empts Badiou. For Derrida, the BNF doesn't know what it is taking on with Cixous's archive, otherwise how could they possibly accept it in good conscience? Cixous's literary 'corpus remains immeasurably vaster than the library supposed to hold it' again questioning the oeuvre's place in the archive and working to reposition literature and its place in the archive once again (p.72).

In both Derrida's *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius* and Cixous's *Manhattan.Lettres de la préhistoire,* we are lead to a moment of 'pre-history' in the instance of their first meeting in 'Yale University's Tombstone of a library' (p.73). This meeting is an enigma appearing towards the end of Derrida's essay where he signals a willingness to put at least this limit on the archive: he avows that he was there and can confirm the meeting. This pre-history came before the writing of Cixous's work, which is being given to another library, thus parenthesising it in one sense. As Cixous once said on the matter of translation, Derrida's placing of the word *certes*, an anagram of *secret*, throughout the text (and symptomatic of the secrets of literature) acts like a way marker 'like a trail of white stones' (p.91). Such a path of certainty and secrecy traces the course of the essay, between inaugural act (writing and giving) and the seemingly impossible task of doing justice to such a corpus of writing.

> That this Omnipotence-other deprives us, in the name of literature, of the right or the power to choose between literature and non-literature, between fiction and documentary, is a new state of affairs in the world and the history of humanity. The consequences are mind-boggling (p.56).

Of course these are not new themes in Derrida's own corpus, and the Derrida archive in California is as implicated in these peregrinations as much as that of Cixous, leaving us in no doubt as to the ramifications of this posthumous translation on the legacies concerned. All this raises a question of a more mundane nature for the humanities in general. How can or should we archive things that resist the archival process as it is instituted? Is not the archival process

a creative and metamorphic one rather than a preservative, capturing and totalising one? Certainly it should be and in placing Cixous's oeuvre at the forefront of this problematic Derrida at once stakes out the place where shelter should be provided for it and proposes the form it should take; a new centre for reading and learning to read, and learning how to learn to read so that we can encounter the work in its Omnipotence-otherness.

Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa

Ed. Annie E. Coombes. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.
(ISBN: 0-7190-7168-2). 288pp.

Alana M. Vincent, University of Glasgow

The cultural history of colonized nations is necessarily complex, constructed in the space between indigenous and settler cultures. As such, attempts at representing these cultures in public discourse are uniquely complex. This is the argument Annie E. Coombes puts forth in her introduction to the latest volume in Manchester University Press's 'Studies in Imperialism' series. This collection brings together thirteen essays and seven works of art focused on the tensions between and within the cultures of the four former Dominions listed in the book's subtitle. The book is especially valuable in the interdisciplinary approach it takes, with selections that demonstrate equal concern for the historical details of negotiations over public space and for the aesthetic results of such negotiations. While it is especially valuable to those within the disciplines of history and museum studies, scholars with a general interest in (post) colonialism will find the volume useful as well.

I should note at the outset that I have reservations about the use of the word 'settler', which, to my ear, implies the first human presence in *terra nullius*, rather than the colonialization of an already

existent nation. While Coombes is at pains to point out that 'the term "settler" has about it a deceptively benign and domesticated ring which masks the violence of colonial encounters that produced and perpetrated consistently discriminatory and genocidal regimes against the indigenous peoples of these regions,' she offers no satisfactory explanation for the choice of this particular term (p.2). The repeated use of 'settler' throughout the essays in the book makes the violence of the colonial encounters discussed more palatable, rather than altering or undermining the domestic connotations of the word itself. This is not by any means a fatal flaw, but neither should it pass unremarked.

The book is divided into four sections, preceded by the editor's introduction and six pages devoted to artwork. These pages reveal both the greatest strength and greatest weakness of the volume. By opening the book with images, rather than words, Coombes signals a re-negotiation of the traditional boundaries of scholarship, permitting both the personal voice and visual media to have a place in the discussion. Unfortunately, the success of this section is hampered by the book's poor production values. The paper is too thin and the print quality too grainy to do justice to the images. Given the strong emphasis placed on visual culture, both in this section and in the later essays, one wishes that the publisher had seen fit to provide at least six pages of colour printing. If the inclusion of the 'Artists' Pages' is as important to the material that follows as the editor's introduction asserts—I am inclined to agree that it is—then it ought to have warranted the expense involved in doing it properly.

The first section of essays is focused on the historical and institutional relationship between aboriginal and European 'settler' culture. Coombes chooses to open with an essay by Gillian Whitlock about the history of child removal programs in Australia and Canada, and recent attempts at 'reconciliation' in both nations. It is probable that many readers from the United Kingdom will be unaware of these programs, in which aboriginal children were removed from their homes, often without the consent of their parents, and placed in residential schools (in Canada) or various other institutions intended to aid cultural assimilation (in Australia). With the current governments of both nations still refusing to issue a formal apology to the survivors, this remains an intensely fraught political issue. Whitlock carefully and clearly examines not only the multiplicity of specific narratives available to aboriginal and European-descended residents of both countries, but also the meta-issues of the relationship between different kinds of narrative (particularly testimonial and memoir) and the work of reconciliation. Beginning with this essay lends a sense of immediacy to the book, which carries over into the following two chapters on race relations in South Africa during the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries.

The second section of essays is, in many ways, the heart of the book. The essays in this section focus on the construction of national identity narratives that incorporate both European and aboriginal cultural histories. These five chapters are particularly concerned with the physical sites of such negotiations: museum exhibits and public monuments. Of particular interest is Christine Boyanoski's essay on the 1924 *British Empire Exhibition*, which is unique in the volume for putting all four of the countries under

investigation side by side. Boyanoski demonstrates not only the significance of visual culture to the interpretation of a society—a point also made in the other chapters in this section—but also the importance of the visual arts in establishing the existence and legitimacy of a national culture.

The third and fourth sections return to considerations of more overtly political interactions between 'settlers' and indigenous communities. It is in these last five chapters that the concept of the volume becomes strained. As is typical with edited collections, not every essay fits neatly into the theme of the book. Deborah Bird Rose's chapter, 'New world poetics of place: along the Oregon Trail and in the National Museum of Australia', is an especially egregious departure from the geographic boundaries that define the scope of the rest of the book, focusing mostly on the Oregon Trail, with only a short section on the National Museum of Australia. Nevertheless, it is an instructive exercise in spatial hermeneutics. On the whole, the volume is well balanced, thoughtfully edited, and timely.

A Principality of Its Own: 40 Years of Visual Arts at the Americas Society

Eds. José Luis Falconi and Gabriela Rangel. New York: Americas Society and Harvard University Press, 2006. (ISBN: 1-879128-31-4). 301pp.

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> I would go as far as to say that in New York, the Americas Society has become, through the dignity and legitimacy bestowed on it by its cultural programs, an island of the Americas within the island of Manhattan - Luis Pérez Oramas (p.45)

Here, rather than depicting a microcosm drowning in Anglo-American academia, overwhelmed by middleclass curatorial practice, or dwarfed by canonical institutions, Pérez Oramas illustrates a small cultural centre for a wide geopolitical periphery. This is but one example of many such assessments in a book which celebrates the Americas Society (formerly the Center for Inter-American Relations; CIAR) for its own unique voice.

Following a previous publication edited by Ilona Katzew and titled *A Hemispheric Venture: Thirty Five Years of Culture at the Americas Society 1965-2000*, *A Principality of Its Own*, whilst partly a necessary updating, contributes fresh perspectives to the CIAR-AS on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. This time there is a distinctive urgency at work concerning geopolitics, which is underlined in the book's stated function as a companion piece to their exhibition

Beyond Geography: Forty Years of Visual Arts at the Americas Society, which ran from July to September, 2005.

The book is divided into three parts; 'Institutional History'; 'Moments, Media, and Themes'; and 'Memoirs and Critiques', the first two sections are clearly demarcated in their content, while the third tends to collapse back into the first. However, as is the aim of the institution, the essays offer a rich diversity of topics. Moving away from other polemical stances on the Americas, for instance John Pilger's recent documentary *The War on Democracy* (2007), this book consists of a more various (indeed, I would argue, more *democratic*) compilation of viewpoints. The collection of essays presents a balanced account of the achievements and failures of this particular institution's past. Indeed the book *primarily* reads as a combined history of the Center, and somewhat *secondly* as a reference book on the various artists' works and practices housed within it.

Located at 680 Park Avenue, the Visual Arts is but one department in the complex organisation of the Americas Society with its variety of commitments and responsibilities. A case study of any single institution inevitably throws up its own internal contradictions, particularly when it is funded by a wealthy elite that deals with so-called marginal groups. The attempted parenting by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) as cultural overlord is referenced throughout and foregrounds the characteristically controversial relationship. This is perhaps due to David Rockefeller's involvement with both institutions. Do the visual arts of the Americas really need to be patronised or is the maintaining of an 'alternative space', as the

Center's founding director Stanton Caitlin advocated, more important (p.85)? What they do need is a platform from which to speak in the global village of today, and, as this book notes, it is contentious as to whether the Americas Society has successfully and consistently offered such a stage.

The book includes a helpful exhibition timeline which, as the editors point out, functions as a handy 'research tool' particularly for art historians and curators. *The Fashion Show Poetry Event* by Eduardo Costa, Hannah Weiner and John Perreault (1969) and *Minucode* by Marta Minujín (1968) are the recurring exemplars of success in the Americas Society's exhibition history, perhaps due to the diversity of audiences/participants which the Center holds so dear, as well as their tacit critique of the New York art scene. However, for the most part the writers stand wary of focusing on too canonical a reading of Latin America particularly where the familiar Mexican muralists, such as Diego Rivera, are concerned. "Dissemination" is the key word in this book as it attempts to deliver to public knowledge more peripheral artists from a wide historical span. However, as Nicolás Guagnini points out, conventional art historical narratives, such as the avant-garde/neo-avant-garde transition, are neither temporally nor geographically always fully appropriate terms (p.188).

Canada is potentially included under the 'Americas' rubric, but in my opinion fails to find sufficient representation in this volume, drifting away from view and ultimately left out as a rather undeserved thorn in the side. Does the Americas Society look north, south or inside of its own context to find content suitable for

exhibition? At times the book seems to be documenting a misdirection, but whether this is the fault of the authors or the Centre is difficult to determine. Identity politics become a central issue, especially when they influence whether or not a particular artist or a type of art gets shown in the Center. As Mary Schneider Enriquez points out in relation to Felix Gonzáles-Torres and Gabriel Orozco, aside from the artists' names as immediate identifiers of "Hispanic ancestry," the works themselves do not necessarily 'suggest their origins'(p.255). Schneider Enriquez is raising a problem of classification, one that is symptomatic of the topic of peripheral representation. She asks if by labelling do we not further 'reinforce the difference and perpetual place of the artist thus categorized' (p. 255)? In some ways the book as a whole, combined with the very 'alternative space' of the Americas Society, will continue to perpetuate certain stereotypes because of their very existence. On the other hand the opening of spaces in which to enunciate its own principality is surely the far more urgent side of the debate.

The authors show repeated evidence of thorough research, having plumed the Americas Society's archives, 'the unsystematized layers of micro-histories[,…] the negligible scraps of bureaucracy [that] escape customary public scrutiny' (p.14). By now in academia I think it is possible to argue for an accumulation of such 'micro-histories', just as Pérez Oramas points out 'there are as many Americas as there are Europes' (p.48). This book functions as a glittering example of this methodology.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people for their help in conceptualizing and realizing *The Kelvingrove Review*: Marc Alexander, Bridget Fowler, Willy Maley, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Chris Berry, Alison Phipps, all the *eSharp* board members, all of the reviewers and our fellow students who expressed interest in participating in this project. We hope that *The Kelvingrove Review* will continue to provide a forum for such enthusiastic scholarship.