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Emerging Research in Australian Studies

Special Issue

What exactly are or counts as Australian studies? Usually, the answer will read something like research related to the continent of Australia; however, beyond this basic assumption, not much else is certain. It would be presumptuous to try and compress the manifoldness, the intricacies and the dynamics of Australian studies into a few sentences. Instead of providing an unwieldy and unrewarding definition in the space of this editorial, we have opted for appending five textual examples of what current investigations in Australian studies look like.

This special issue took shape in response to 'Emerging Research in Australian Studies' (ERAS), a virtual workshop for early career researchers (ECR) that took place on 16th and 17th September 2022 and was organised by Thomas Batchelor, Leonie John, David Kern, Christina Ringel and Friederike Zahn (in alphabetical order; all associated with the Centre for Australian Studies at the University of Cologne). The general aim was to provide a forum for exchanging thoughts among peers, for sharing research, for giving and receiving constructive feedback, and for generating new ideas. This aim was closely linked to the intention of creating an explicitly accessible, appreciative and stimulating space to experiment with inchoate ideas and build interdisciplinary networks. ERAS featured an impressive disciplinary range, including contributions from literary and cultural studies, linguistics, geography, history and anthropology. It was also a connective event, with close to half of the attendees from overseas and presenters from many different universities coming together. The panel presentations were framed by several pre-recorded talks, two keynotes from emerging scholars Bettina Charlotte Burger and Stef Spronck, and a writer's talk by African Australian scholar-writer Eugen Bacon.

As both organisers and editors, we consider the workshop to have been a great success, judging from the talks to which we listened, the interactions we witnessed, and the feedback we received. Towards the end of the two days, a number of participants expressed their interest in sharing their research with a bigger audience. All contributions resulting from the ensuing internal call for papers were doubly peer reviewed.

The broad focus of this special issue mirrors that of the workshop, allowing early career researchers to define Australian studies through their work, rather than the other way around. The special issue comprises five contributions, ranging from a focus on memories and the past, to the (fictional and actual) present, to other worlds and potential future(s). The articles attest to complex nexuses, particularly the ongoing relevance of colonial histories and shifting identities, by highlighting specific aspects of Australian history, language and literature.

Louise Thatcher takes an investigation of 'coloured' maritime deserters as a starting point for reconsidering the usefulness of the terminology of migration, introducing a mobility framework as an alternative way of putting seafarers and their lives in perspective. Such a change of perspective allows her to demonstrate the complex interactions between restrictive forces of racially-specific employment contracts and immigration laws on the one hand, and self-directed or even resistant forms mobility on the other hand. Thatcher concludes that "[t]he archives of desertion show traces of people who enacted 'unruly mobilities' on various scales", thereby indicating a certain degree of autonomy and proving the insufficiency of laws to prevent undesired mobility.

Peri Sipahi investigates the dynamics, ambiguities and interrelations of necrologies and necographies depicted in Tara June Winch's 'The Yield'. Drawing particularly on the work of Dan Hicks, she demonstrates how death and loss become entangled with questions of materiality, alterity, complicity and (Indigenous) authenticity. The museum is shown to function as an agent of empire chronopolitics, creating ruptures and facilitating processes of othering. Sipahi argues that the struggle for restitution is closely linked to the question of land rights, concluding that reclaiming family history enables the main character to reclaim a (limited) form of sovereignty.

Katharina Frödrich scrutinises an episode from the *Lingthusiasm* podcast, focussing on one of the most widely-discussed linguistic features of Australian English: the phenomenon of uptalk. In addition to attesting several communicative functions which have been assigned to this phenomenon previously, she showcases how the intonation pattern is used to convey humour or irony in her data set. Having accepted the challenge of undertaking a linguistic investigation in the midst of COVID-19, Frödrich convincingly argues for novel avenues of (digital) data collection processes that are relevant beyond global pandemics and lockdowns.

Lucas Mattila closely examines representations of violence and conflict in Alan Baxter's slasher-horror novella 'The Roo'. Reading the text for *Stimmung*, Mattila argues that Baxter establishes competing cycles of violence which, together with elements of genre play and performative efficiency, generate attunement and presence, and yield the novella's potential for affective reader engagement. He concludes that 'The Roo' "presents [violence] in an over-the-top manner in order to trivialize, parody, and normalize it", but also to indicate convergences between domestic abuse and rural dispossession, which can both be understood as forms of slow violence.

Bettina Charlotte Burger provides a preliminary overview of contemporary queer Australian speculative fiction, showcasing how this versatile genre "is employed to experiment with new genders, or new ways of viewing one's own identity and sexuality." Collectively, these texts dispute normativities associated with sexuality and gender. Burger suggests that speculative fiction offers queer writers – similar to other marginalised writers – the possibility to inscribe queer people and their lives in worlds that are accepting or else grant them sufficient agency to flourish regardless of repressive or dismissive circumstances. They point out that these authors tend to experiment with depictions

of societal structures that influence interpersonal relationships. These fictional societies assume different positions towards gender expressions and sexualities, and attach various meanings to them. Burger concludes with a plea for further research into the perpetually evolving and multiplying representation of queerness in Australian speculative fiction.

Jointly considered, the articles in this special issue display astonishing synergies and coherences. They highlight the disruptive forces of violence and racism, the importance of community and relationships, the dynamics of identities and belonging, as well various connections between social, cultural and political spheres. In sum, then, the five authors featured in this special issue attest to the productivity and versatility of Australian studies, and to its refusal to be pressed into neat categories. This is precisely our hope for the future: That the discipline (if it can be called that) remains uncontainable and creative beyond bounds.

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The Guest Editors

