Think Forward, Look Back: An Introduction to Volume 21.1

Colleen Harmer
The University of Western Australia

Speaking at the 2015 Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Conference in Melbourne, Professor Meaghan Morris stated in her keynote address that ‘liminal space is a threshold space’. And, indeed, these words reflect the nature of this volume of Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies. As a celebration of our 20 years as an academic journal, it marks simultaneously the past, present and future of new academic research in cultural and historical studies in Australia and abroad; it is in this sense a threshold.

Many of the articles in this volume are written in response to the 2015 Limina conference theme ‘Think Forward, Look Back’.1 In the process of preparing for the conference I came across an old, worn box in the Limina office, which, as it turns out, is the Limina archive. To my great pleasure it contained among other things the original proposal from 1995 for a ‘History Postgraduate Journal’ whose purpose and function are stated as follows:

As research students, we see the potential benefits of developing our ideas through publication. An in-house journal would be a valuable “stepping stone”, providing a greater number of students with the experience of submitting work for publication and responding to editorial feedback... All those familiar with the isolation of postgraduate study will recognise the benefits that would accrue to the postgraduate body and department as a whole from this united effort. We believe the enthusiasm generated by such an effort would permeate the entire department, benefiting students at all levels.

I wondered as I read through this proposal whether this group of determined postgraduates would have thought the enthusiasm generated by their efforts would have permeated the UWA Arts community so thoroughly that the journal would still be thriving 20 years later.

One can see in the archives a specific Limina ethos develop, so that by 2001 it is clear that Limina is adamantly opposed to feeding back into the

---

1 This is the first of two volumes put together in response to the conference. The second round of articles is due for publication in February 2016.
academic machine the (institutional) rhetoric of old. Instead, Limina attempts to break down barriers, or as the editorial collective once wrote: ‘Limina arose out of the frustration with the limitations of academic publishing. [We are] dedicated to breaking these artificial barriers. Limina embodies the cutting-edge of research’. Elsewhere they write that ‘Limina is eclectic and we hope, liminal’. Not much has changed from these early iterations of the Limina ethos. We still attempt to break down barriers and seek out the in-between to discover what is beyond, adding our own brand of creativity to the interdisciplinary academic community.

Lachlan Dudley’s article ‘Hearing the Past: Sounds, Noises and Silences in Port Jackson c.1788-1792’ demonstrates just such innovative and creative inquiry. Linking the history of colonial Australia with the use of sound (such as trumpet fan-fare, read-aloud proclamations etc.) as expressions of colonisation, his article contributes to the growing body of research around acoustic colonial literature.

Theresa Miller re-reads narratives of care in her article ‘Rethinking Care: Disability and Care in Dinah Mulock Craik’s The Little Lame Prince and his Travelling Cloak’. Care in this article is resituated as part of an interdependent relationship between the disabled and the care-giver. In this way, Miller attempts to challenge not only the cultural myth of independence, but also the traditional notion of care as ‘women’s work’.

The challenge to normative discourses is carried forward in Raihan Sharif’s article ‘White Gaze Saving Brown Queers: Homonationalism and Imperialist Islamophobia’. Here, Sharif explores the way western countries use global gay discourse to marginalise queer Muslim asylum seekers who occupy the liminal space between legitimate and illegitimate asylum. The rubrics of provable persecution used by western countries to assess asylum seekers, he argues, reinforce Islamophobic ideologies.

In selecting the papers for this volume our aim was to uphold the Limina tradition of creative engagement and the promotion of resistance to traditional disciplinary boundaries. It is for this reason we thought it necessary to open submissions to creative writing, and this, we hope, will be an enduring practice. Indeed, the first of these creative pieces to appear in Limina is Francesca Jurate Sasnaitis’ piece ‘SUMMERLANDS’ along with its exegesis exploring the interface between image and text. As part of a novel Sasnaitis is writing for her PhD thesis, ‘SUMMERLANDS’ introduces the main characters of the novel, exploring the tensions developing between two Lithuanian families who share a holiday house on the Summerlands Estate.

The volume also includes a number of book reviews as well as cultural reviews. The reviews offer commentaries on a wide range of topics from John Frow’s latest book on values to Adrienne Truscott’s one-woman fringe comedy ‘Asking for it’. I encourage you, reader, to explore the numerous reviews at your leisure for they are often humorous and witty.
We see in all the articles in this volume a rigorous approach to issues of research, context and theoretical debate, and a promise to invigorate the academic community with an enthusiasm for new, innovative and creative engagement. *Limina* is part of a larger cultural studies project aimed at creating history from below, and as such publishes works showing that history, culture and the social cannot be separated. Indeed, as E.H Carr has so eloquently argued, history ‘is a social process, in which individuals are engaged as social beings; and the imaginary antithesis between society and the individual is no more than a red herring drawn across our path to confuse our thinking’. ² We hope the sentiment of Carr’s words carries through in this volume of the journal for each article present here is an act of inquiry that carries with it great social value and sheds light on the academic engagement of the future. The collective, the authors and the reviewers all have a part to play in (re)writing history for the future; I would like to thank all of you for helping create history. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Annie Demosthenous (Submissions Editor), Heather Delfs (Book Reviews Editor), Sebastian Sharp (Cultural Reviews Editor) and Sian Tomkinson (Web Editor) for their efforts.