Fear and Loathing: Introduction to Volume 20.2

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Australians live in an environment where discourses of fear and loathing pervade our national conversations. This discursiveness operates at a number of levels: it is both individually internalised and articulated in local and national settings. This politics of fear was at its most potent in the months leading to (and following) the 2013 federal election, where Australians’ anxieties about the security of national borders and (latent) fear of the ‘Other’, were fed by politicians seeking political advantage and electoral success. The production of government-authorised materials, aimed at deterring would-be asylum seekers from seeking refuge in Australia, can be read as a low point in this debate. Produced ostensibly for an international market (though played domestically for political effect), the graphic for the campaign (a rickety vessel stranded at sea, pictured below a message from the government to asylum seekers - ‘You Won’t Be Settled In Australia’) alerted the Australian public to a change in policy, and simultaneously appealed to our most base instincts. It was in this climate (of fear and loathing) that the idea for a themed volume of the journal took effect.

This issue of Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies is the product of a ‘Fear and Loathing’ themed conference held at The University of Western Australia on Friday 20th June 2014. Organised by the Limina Editorial Collective, and supported by the Institute of Advanced Studies, the conference sought papers from postgraduate and early career researchers that engaged with the concepts of ‘fear’
and ‘loathing’ in relation to the humanities and social sciences. The Keynote Address for the conference was delivered by Associate Professor Ned Curthoys, new to UWA in 2014, whose presentation, titled ‘Representing “Evil”: Fear, Loathing and Contagion’, reflected on the ‘problem’ of representing evil. Influenced by Hannah Arendt’s theorising on ‘the banality of evil’, Curthoys argued that attempts to identify evil lead to a moralistic discourse, which lends itself to ‘mimetic contagion’ that is, potentially, as dangerous as the alternative.

In drafting the Call for Papers, members of the Editorial Collective hoped to receive submissions that engaged with contemporary and/or historical debates around fear and loathing, and which addressed and/or explored a series of questions: how (or why) does fear materialise, is it contingent on loathing, or can the two exist separately? Presenters (who travelled from around Australia) were encouraged to reflect, in particular, on the discourses of fear and loathing in relation to gender and sexuality, stigma, religion, anthropology, popular culture, narratives of the self and social and immigration policy.

Based on the success of the conference, a Call for Papers was distributed through international academic networks, requesting papers from scholars whose work intersects with the discourses of ‘fear’ and ‘loathing’. The result is an impressive collection of essays, innovative in their approach and, in all instances, contributing new knowledge to their respective fields.

In her article ““Sheilas and Pooftas”: Hyper-Heteromasculinity in 1970s Australian Popular Music Cultures’, Rebecca Hawkings considers the extent to which ideas of ‘Australianness’ and Australian masculinity were shaped by music cultures of the 1970s. She uses the correspondence of a music fan to the Rock Australian Magazine (lamenting the increasing influence of an internationalised disco aesthetic) to frame a discussion of Australian hyper-heteromasculinity, concluding that the popularity of bands such as Skyhooks and The Angels contributed to a queering of the ‘ocker’ identity.

Maja Milatovic provides a close reading of Margaret Walker’s neo-slave narrative Jubilee in order to trace the development of the ‘matrilineal model’ in black women’s literature and black womanhood in her article, ‘Fearless foremothers: matrilineal genealogies, (inter)subjectivity and survival in Margaret Walker’s Jubilee’. She argues for a greater critical engagement with the text (suggesting that it has been marginalised within Walker’s corpus of literature) and uses feminist, postcolonial and trauma theories to consider the impact of intersubjective relationality on enslaved and free black female identity in the Antebellum South.

In ““Ne reprenez, Dames, si j’ay aymé”": Combatting Fear of Oppression in Louise Labé’s Sonnets’ Siobhan Hodge explores the poetry of 16th Century sonneteer Louise Labé. In doing so, she addresses the scholarly debates around the legitimacy of Labé’s authorship, and outlines the ways in which her poetry encodes a (subtle) feminist aesthetic in its use of the masculine Petrarchan form. Hodge proposes that the consistency of poetic voice across the collection of sonnets (particularly with regard to its articulation of themes of romantic and sexual desire, and the fear of oppression) reflects the self-consciousness of Labe’s approach, and a desire to silence critics of her work.
In the volume’s fourth article, Tamlyn Avery follows the evolution of the American Bildungsroman in an article titled, ‘Alienated, Anxious, American: The Crisis of Coming of Age in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and the Late Harlem Bildungsroman’. By offering a close reading of Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (and tracing the pedagogical and experiential education of the titular character), Avery outlines the ways in which the novel uses the form of the Bildungsroman to engage with race politics. She argues that, through the juxtaposition of romantic narration against violent, hypersexual and ‘ebonic’ vernacular, the text attempts to represent an ‘authentic’ America.

With special attention given to diaspora and migrant autobiography, Emily Purvis’ article ‘Self-Insertion and Identity in Tom Cho’s *Look Who’s Morphing*’ looks at how Cho uses metaphor to manipulate conceptualisations of Chinese-Australian identity. Purvis outlines the many ways in which Cho inserts himself into popular cultural narratives arguing that Cho deliberately morphs and manipulates the texts in order to subvert normative constructions of identity.

Jacqueline Boaks opens her article ‘Who’s Afraid of Leadership?’ by questioning the normative understanding of ‘leadership’. Making a distinction between leadership as a managerial buzzword, and leadership as an ethical concept, Boaks examines the ‘case against leadership’, outlining our fears about what leadership is, particularly in relation to legitimacy. With a mixture of popular cultural and ‘real world’ references to perceived leadership ideals, the article considers reasons for why engaging critically with the concept of ‘good’ leadership is necessary. Boaks puts forward her own solution to the problems of normativity that the term ‘leadership’ allows, one that is grounded in virtue ethics and the idea of ‘eudaimonia’ or human flourishing.

In ‘Attention Economy in the Novels of Michel Houellebecq’ Sophie Patrick discusses the misogynistic tendencies of Houellebecq’s male protagonists in four of his novels - *Whatever*, *Atomised*, *Platform*, and *The Possibility of an Island* – in relation to the attention economy. Patrick argues that the projection of loathing by male characters toward female characters is the result of an attention deficit, whereby male characters begin to fear their own lack of market value. By purposefully looking beyond gender, Patrick shows that the vilification of women in modern Western society relates not just to the sexual economy, but to a more pervasive attention economy.

New to *Limina* in 2014, this volume showcases a selection of entries to the first *Limina* Art Prize competition (LiminArt). From the liminal space of dreams, to the dark caverns of the human heart, each work shows how fear and loathing pervade both our conscious and unconscious states, as well as our physical and psychological space. Susan Taylor Suchy’s piece ‘Fear and Loathing in the Heart of Darkness’, explores violence in a dark heart, and is an expression of the artist’s personal account of the creative act itself. Michael Ovens’ work ‘Shadow Boxing’ is a poignant response to recent events in Ukraine, and captures the futility of fighting the government with violence. Francesca Jurate Sasnaitis’ piece ‘The Pleasure of Your Company’ is an intriguing exploration of dream space, one that has the capacity to draw out one’s fears and (potentially) distort the ‘real’. It speaks of a frightening negotiation of sex, love and commitment as found in the liminal space of dreams.
The winner of this year’s Art Prize is by Alejandro Tearney, and is titled ‘Crisis of Self Something’. The piece captures a frightening account of self-revelation, and shows the complex nature of self-creation and self-identity – it speaks directly to the fear and loathing precipitated by this process. In this sense, one is a grotesque amalgam of the biological, the synthetic and the machinic. The medium of digital painting occupies a liminal space between the technological and the biological that also expresses these same sentiments.

The volume also includes a number of book reviews (analyses of critical and creative works) and cultural reviews (theatre, live poetry readings). Our thanks go to Heather Delfs, Ashleigh Prosser (Book Reviews Editors) and Amy Hilhorst (Cultural Reviews Editor), and Charmaine Fernandez (Web Editor) for their roles in facilitating and preparing these works for publication.