



Editors' Introduction

» STEPHEN GARTON & ELIZABETH WEBBY

HA **Humanities Australia** provides a snapshot of the richness and variety of current work in a range of humanities disciplines, with a focus on the ways in which such scholarship can open up new avenues for investigating the human condition and the complex cultural forms through which we come to understand ourselves and the world around us. It is not a formal academic journal (in the sense of being

interdisciplinary teams to tackle the pressing questions of the day. Doctors and scientists talk of translational research that will create a chain of inquiry and experiment going from 'bench top to bedside'. But we know that the translation research chain actually extends much further – out into the wider society, negotiating human habits and behaviours, and on through social and cultural practices into

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peer reviewed and refereed) but rather offers both Fellows of the Academy, and members of the wider community, a selection of interesting essays — many published elsewhere in more extended forms — which illuminate the exciting research being undertaken in many areas of the humanities. We hope that these samples of what humanists offer will encourage readers to engage further with fields that are new to them.

The journal also seeks to demonstrate the importance of the humanities in understanding human culture, past and present. Contemporary discussion in research policy holds that the big breakthroughs of the future will be produced by researchers from diverse fields coming together in large

legislative chambers, and back again in the form of policies, laws and regulations. The history of technological and scientific advance is littered with inventions, therapies and innovations that were stillborn because they ran counter to how people in particular cultures and regions understood the world. If our innovation culture is to prosper, it needs to be embedded in a deep understanding of humanity and cultural differences. This is why the humanities are fundamental to human progress.

In this first issue of *Humanities Australia* we bring together articles of remarkable breadth and depth, on topics ranging all the way from ancient Manichaean iconography to Twitter and contemporary social networking. This new journal is timely. In 2009, the

(above)
Academy Secretariat,
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SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN
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Academy celebrated its fortieth anniversary and Graeme Davison provides an insightful account of the debates and efforts that led to its establishment. The year 2009 was also noteworthy as the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin, and the sesquicentenary of the publication of his *On the Origin of Species*. So we include an article by Iain McCalman exploring the importance of voyages to Australia in the evolution of the theory of natural selection. Last year was also marked

the law adapt to changing circumstances.

Majella Franzmann's essay on women in Manichaean iconography, a shortened version of her Trendall Lecture (delivered in 2007), challenges conventional stereotypes of women in ancient religions. Through a sensitive analysis of a range of Manichaean texts, Franzmann uncovers complex and contradictory representations of women, some of which situate female spirituality in a far more positive light than previously imagined.

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by the tragedy of the devastating Victorian bushfires. Tom Griffiths places these events in a larger historical context, illuminating the broader environmental and human settlement patterns that have shaped such traumatic events over the last century. Moving into a very different area of scholarship, Antonia Finnane provides a fascinating insight into the ways dress and custom came to represent cultural difference: a means of delineating the shifting cultural borders between 'barbarians' and 'Chinese' in China since the Han dynasty.

Understanding other cultures is an integral part of humanities research. Peter Høj, in his 2009 Louis Triebel Lecture, outlines, with great insight, the perils of monolingualism and the significance of multilingualism in ensuring that future generations of Australians can function effectively in a global world. Values are also integral to understanding how cultures work, and Michael Kirby argues forcefully for the importance of a principle of diversity in the appointment of judges to final national courts. For Kirby, national courts, in facing challenging cases of major social significance, are better equipped to deal with complex legal issues and ensure that the law keeps abreast of community attitudes if judges reflect a diversity of views, rather than the experience and world view of a single social stratum. This is a cogent plea for the central role of judicial values in the administration of justice and the importance of appointment processes that foster a diversity of views and values: only through such means can

In a similar vein, although on a vastly different subject, Kate Crawford, the Academy's Crawford Medallist for 2008, analyses contemporary social network media, in such sites as Twitter, questioning some of the current stereotypes of users as socially alienated and the content as banal. Crawford investigates social media as marking a fundamental cultural shift from talk to listening as the primary mode of social bonding in contemporary culture. We are also delighted to feature a new poem by distinguished writer John Tranter, written during a recent residency in Italy.

These brief summaries cannot, of course, do justice to the richness of the research and interpretation in these essays. Nor does this selection of articles encompass the full range of disciplines in the Academy or humanities more generally. They do, however, offer excellent samples of humanities scholarship and the profound insights such work can offer into human cultures. ¶

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