

Identity Anecdotes

*Translation
and Media Culture*

Meaghan Morris

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In memory of
DONALD HORNE
1921–2005

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* * * * *

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Introduction

Inside and outside and identity is a great bother. And how once you know that the buyer is there can you go on knowing that the buyer is not there. Of course when he is not there there is no bother.

Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*¹

More than twenty years ago, the editor of a US feminist film theory journal, *Camera Obscura*, asked me for an essay discussing my 'national identity' in relation to feminism in Australia. A working film critic at the time, with a Master's degree in Paris well behind me, I was startled: I had not met many Americans, had never visited the United States or thought of doing so, and while I wrote for a variety of Australian publications, some distributed internationally through social movement circuits, I had written just twice for the vast elsewhere that we called 'overseas' (and then for people in places I knew). No doubt because of the fear that addressing a void induced in me, I was also earnestly shocked that this question of national identity should arise in raw form to position me as an informant to feminists who had spent years deconstructing the question of 'woman' and identity in cinema. Why should 'Australian' identity seem easy?

Taking the tough way out, I began an essay called 'Identity Anecdotes' (1984) with a sentence from Gertrude Stein ('Inside and outside and identity is a great bother'); with two diverging definitions of anecdote, one British ('narrative of *detached* incident'), the other Australian ('short narrative of a *particular* incident'); an obscure story about a British feminist (whom I later learned was Canadian) asking me, 'why does Australia matter?'; and a parodically clipped declaration that:

National identity occurs in an encounter with cultural difference when and only when that difference cannot be represented to the satisfaction of all concerned: or alternatively, the 'Australian' is that which irrupts as anecdotal in a theoretically rigorous exchange.²

Looking back, embarrassed as I am by the fuss I made over Janet Bergstrom's kind invitation, this hyper-precise formulation still strikes me as a true rendering of the *situation* of a scholar who writes internationally from, and ultimately for or to a place (it needn't be a nation) deemed unimportant or eccentric within a given economy of intellectual exchange. 'Marginal' is too plaintive a term for this situation, which offers full involvement in that economy at the simple cost of setting aside certain knowledges and concerns, which are localized *by* this transaction – only to emerge, in hapless moments of communicative failure, as floundering non-sequiturs, obscure phrasings, flares of irritation, or quaint stories and jokes. In these conditions (unlike those of trying to cross a border, seeking asylum or being conscripted for war), nationality becomes occasional; sometimes, it just happens.

For most of the English-using academic world today, this is part of what it means to acquire a discipline. In the early 1980s, I did not think about such things and my immediate inspiration for trying out an enunciative model of identity as 'occurring' in a dialogue was an essay on 'Antipodality' by Paul Taylor, then a brilliant young art critic, editor and entrepreneur whose impatience with the nationalist cowering and feminist piety of Australian critical culture in the 1970s was, while disturbing, the most liberating force on my horizon.³ With the uneasy pomposity of someone being needled by pressures they do not understand while striving to seem to control them (the neo-liberal revolution was, in Deleuze and Guattari's scary phrase, 'knocking on the door' at this time), I went on from my reading of Taylor to offer, on the one hand, a caustic feminist critique of 'the meditation on national identity [as] one of the great genres of Australian speculative fiction', and, on the other, a prickly Australia-centred account of second-wave feminism and the depoliticizing impact within it of an emerging 'multinational spectacle' of academic feminist theory.

Having contributed a little to the latter myself by co-editing *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy* (1979), a volume of translations and essays which *Camera Obscura* suggested I foreground for non-Australian readers,⁴ I could only refuse to describe the theory phenomenon as, in the parlance of the day, an 'import' ('a trope', I claimed, which worked to reaffirm 'the enigmatic otherness of Australia itself'). Arguing rather that we should turn away from this simple imaginary of nation-based trade, I directed attention instead to 'matters of institutional politics and money', or what would now be called cultural policy:

If cultural imperialism remains an issue in Australia, it is not because some Australian writers produce Gallicized prose or resort to un-Australian epistemologies, but because particular institutions – galleries, the music industry, universities, cinema distribution and exhibition chains, publishing companies – have a long history of confining Australian activities to a mimetic mode, and continue to monitor the limits – and the identity – of acceptably 'Australian' production.⁵

Today, with a multinational archive on the internet and American inflections of European thought installed in university courses world-wide, it is hard to convey the ferocity with which 'foreign' and 'imported' ideas were fought over in the 1970s and even the 1980s, although the word 'French' can still carry – in journalistic contexts, especially – a rancorous whiff of the past. Ambivalent myself about the academically American, rather than philosophically French, ambience of the new world then forming in bookshops, I declined the transnationally civil gesture of starting from Foucault (an American thing to do), and tucked away near the end of my essay the story of how the Australian export success of *Power, Truth, Strategy* over-stretched the unpaid labour distributing the book, inducing the collapse of the Gay Liberation-inspired collective that produced it. This deadpan economic response to the question of my interest in Foucault allowed me to end by returning to Gertrude Stein for the expanded quotation cited above, reframing the question of identity as a bother created by the pressure of a 'buyer', in Stein's words – or, in mine, of an emerging international *market* for talk about identity.

I should have been more grateful. Written between 1988 and 1999, the essays on nationality, translation and 'speech institutions' collected in this volume all proceed from that sketch for a *pragmatics* of identity and a *rhetoric* of critical practice written for Janet Bergstrom. Indeed, with one exception all of the chapters were initiated by other people or responded to an invitation; the exception is Chapter 10, 'The Scully Protocol', which I offered to a literary magazine in a rare burst of motivation after reading a Sydney newspaper editorial about the structuralist menace of 1996. It is also fair to say that I regarded each one of these essays as a *bother* – distractions into sidelines of professional theory and public controversy, dragging me away from the book about history in popular culture that I was struggling with in those years. In fact, this writing 'on the side' – for a general public in some cases and an expanding transnational academy of friends in others – helped me in practice to understand why so many appeals to history at this time (whether in tourism, action cinema or televised national politics) were trying to *manage* a profound transformation of the relations between professional, public and popular cultural spheres of national life.⁶ For this was the period in which 'globalization' not only became a key issue in public debate but also began to reshape the institutional contexts – journalistic, cinematic and televisual as well as academic – in which this issue could be formulated and discussed.

Let me draw a contrast starkly. In 1983, when 'Identity Anecdotes' was written by a freelance journalist and part-time lecturer on an Olivetti manual typewriter, my work had to assume a primarily Australian readership, and there were plenty of places to publish; some even paid a hundred dollars for a thousand words. Life was vivid but relatively insular: Australia could still seem a remote sort of place, and its 'gadfly' critics flitting between media and teaching jobs

looked eccentric to visitors who saw the research university as a scholar's natural home.⁷ Today, the paying small magazines and journals are mostly gone, along with the plentiful part-time teaching, replaced for a new generation by the grueling labour of serial casualization. While bloggers can write as they please for those with the means to read them, an export-driven federal research funding policy – together with what Lindsay Waters aptly calls the 'outsourcing' by universities of their assessment procedures to international corporations bulk-producing refereed journals and books⁸ – inexorably pressures Australian critics who seek an academic base to sell their work in the first instance to trans-Atlantic readers *as a condition* of its publication and thus, in the fullness of time, its distribution to Australians. As the corporatization of universities spreads to countries where English is a language of education but not of most people's everyday lives (as in Hong Kong, where I now work as an academic), that eccentric gadfly condition is rephrased as 'multi-tasking' and looks more like a global norm.

Reductive as it certainly is, this contrast helps me to foreground some of the institutional changes that transformed the vocation of criticism as I was writing this book. One rapidly visible outcome of the disciplining of Australian research publication in the funding-starved 1990s, for example, was a growing number of scholars with no time and few incentives to experience live exposure to non-academic publics. I learned rhetoric in a world where you had to get up in front of an audience, look people in the eye and engage them or they would heckle; my first 'talk' on sexual politics was given in the early 1970s to a crowd of trade unionists and communists, in the company of a brave comrade (Barry Prothero) sporting a beard, high heels and a Chanel suit.⁹ Two decades later, as US-style graduate schools appeared across the country, the riotous 'public forum' culture that once infused even academic conferences gave way to one in which speech becomes intransitive, an inefficient delivery system for draft publications – as tense heads hunch down over densely written papers and mutter them aloud at high speed for an exactly apportioned time.

This professionalization (though I prefer 'Taylorization') of the humanities prompted rising indignation in media columns, mostly content to blame 'jargon' and 'theory' rather than examine the redistribution of resources and the labour force replacement policies that were actually transforming higher education. However, new technologies and regulatory frameworks were also transforming the media as well. Even before use of the internet became widespread, satellite broadcasting from 1986 began to 'nationalize' as well as globalize a once-varied Australian media ecology, in which provincial or state-based TV and largely local newspaper and radio zones had thrived.¹⁰ At the same time, the near-instantaneity of the new media intensified a long-entrenched cultural habit (traceable in the racial exclusion debates of the Australian colonies in the late nineteenth

century¹¹) whereby journalists convert hot news stories from the United States into hysterically pre-emptive frames for interpreting events that have not happened or could not happen elsewhere but which are thereby cast as imminent; the political correctness furore of the late twentieth century was a classic of its kind. In between these developments, Australian cultural institutions arguably became more powerful in their capacity to produce a national life, and yet also less visible in their structural particularity and material operations.

These mundane developments alter everything. Translation, in Naoki Sakai's sense of a 'heterolingual' effort to address an essentially mixed audience (whether within one language or between two or more) becomes an inescapable condition of practice, whether one is sweating to get an article about Rugby League past American referees; doing a broadcast about race relations in a country town, which can be heard by people who live there as well as by your colleagues; or just trying to persuade your mother that universities do not sack 'politically incorrect' staff for saying *ladies* rather than *women*. In turn, the pervasiveness of this effort reshapes our research agendas. Thus, in 1984 I could dismiss 'identity politics' in the American sense as I understood it then; today, the archive created by those politics is not only canonical for any cultural critic anywhere who wants to publish in English ('has the author made use of the relevant literature on the topic?', the refereeing question goes) but is also, as more journalists graduate from media and cultural studies courses, common currency in public debates *about* identity-related issues.

A unifying concern of this book, then, is how to sustain a critical relation to what is often (in my view) locally a phantom identity politics, industrially generated, from a position that cannot exist outside the sphere of influence of such politics and the global academic networks (and markets) in which they circulate, thereby helping to instil new elements of identity in us all. As I argue in Chapter 2, this situation requires embracing a critical *proximity* to our objects of study rather than seeking a distance from them. Each chapter at some point uses a more or less (often much less) personal anecdote as an allegory of this 'proximity', a term I use not only in the sense of establishing a position of nearness to a problem or an object but also in the sense of translatively trying to *touch* (address) a mixed audience; as any journalist knows, anecdotes *work* to make contact and catch people's attention, although they can fail in their nudging, insinuating mission.

Accordingly, the broad themes of the volume are, first, a critique of 'identity' understood as an institutionally productive circuit of demand and, second, an argument for a translatable (rather than narrowly trans-national) practice of cultural work that can attend to institutional differences, moving, when need be, from one institution and/or speech situation to another. Such a practice involves thinking

identity itself a matter of address; that is, as produced by desire and, undoubtedly, history, in an encounter with others which always involves a third party – not the discursive third person that so much analysis of ‘othering’ has closely attended to, but rather a medium or, more exactly here, a speech institution (such as the school, the media, or the family) which encourages particular ways of talking or writing, plays a role in deciding what ‘resists’ translation, and constrains what people can say. Any translator knows inadequacy or failure, but if translation is always impossible and indispensable my interest leans toward the latter as the more unpredictable, mysterious and pressing condition of practice.

Since these themes are afterthoughts or outcomes of the work of compiling this book, I can best clarify my interest in translation as a cross-institutional practice by first explaining my logic of organization. While this is a book which is very much marked by change, the chapters are not arranged in their order of composition. Chronology would be misleading in ways that matter to me. The oldest text is Chapter 2, ‘Panorama: the Live, the Dead and the Living’, a ‘discontinuous’ reading of *Australia Live* (a desperately continuous, four-hour, satellite-dependent media event held to mark the Bicentennial of January 1, 1988),¹² and the most recent is Chapter 11, “‘Please Explain?’: Ignorance, Poverty and the Past’, a close reading of a few moments from a 1997 *60 Minutes* special report on Pauline Hanson, then a rising star of right wing populist and racist politics. Since the former ends with a tribute to the successful critical campaign waged in proximity to the Bicentennial by Aboriginal and other protest groups, while the latter analyses a failure by media professionals to address the backlash led by Hanson, chronology may suggest a pessimistic story of a golden age of experimental cultural politics falling to the wave of ‘paranoid nationalism’ that swept through many countries in the past decade or so.¹³ In that before/after narrative, the awful moment of transition in Australia (others will come to mind elsewhere) is the election of Prime Minister John Howard in 1996.

If that story has descriptive and emotional force for me as a citizen of a certain age, it is not the one I am telling here. This is a book about some ordinary effects of neo-liberal globalization in concrete contexts of institutional practice, and about new problems and *possibilities* that emerge with those effects. The significant transition at issue here occurred in 1986–1988, as economic liberalization began working in tandem with new communications technology to transform Australian society in ways that had locally distinctive implications while none the less installing transnationally disciplined regularities – a process sketched for the un-heroic context of academic publishing by the first chapter, ‘Afterthoughts on Australianism’. It follows that ‘Panorama’ is not about the end of an era but marks the beginning of a long aftermath by investigating something new and strange: a national cultural event, even (for some currents of feeling) a

culturally nationalist event, designed for global media coverage and pitched to international investors and tourists.

Here, the national is neither opposed to nor displaced by the local and the transnational. While any nation has material foundations and frames of practice (economic, legal, institutional) that keep it going, these are not formed in isolation and all nations are shaped relationally by other forces and processes at work on varying scales; as Lauren Berlant points out, 'it is precisely under transnational conditions that the nation becomes a more intense object of concern and struggle'.¹⁴ In this perspective, the politics of opposition to colonialism, racism and patriarchal narratives of nation arise in the same historical conditions as the reactionary lines of flight mobilized by the likes of Hanson, and then captured and normalized by the third force of government. Divergent as they are, all these politics (each incorporating elements of protest and mainstreaming) work to create continuity with organizations and principles inherited from the past; all are confronting the social consequences of the same 'new' economy (as we call the regrouping and expansion of capitalism); and all make use of new technologies to reach out to strangers and *move* them to their side. In other words, all these politics are potentials of the present and, as I see it, the balance of power and popularity between them is no less open to contestation than it was twenty years ago.

Rather than composing a narrative, then, the chapters are grouped into three parts respectively developing rhetorical, theoretical and institutional aspects of the argument I want to make. The first part, 'Rhetoric and Nationality', focuses on the *work* of translation involved in the bother of producing identity for discourse markets. Here, Australia matters as a minor field of globalizing experiment – created by the world-girdling British imperialism of the late eighteenth century, made national during phobia-ridden battles about free trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – in which cultural industries have been dealing with an export imperative from a weak position for more than thirty years. Looking at some of the changes that the pressure of imagining an outside buyer has wrought on media projections of history and nationality, I see much of this change as a good thing and examine ways in which Aboriginal groups, in particular, have at times been able to utilize that pressure to further their political struggles and transform historiographical practices. Next, the readings in the second part, 'Translation in Cultural Theory', render explicit the *models* of translation I find useful for understanding the conditions of social and linguistic heterogeneity in which cultural politics must work. Taking up in practice the argument that such heterogeneity operates within as well as between so-called national languages, the third part, 'Institutionally Speaking', follows some of the issues discussed in the first two parts through to their scandalizing uptake in media polemics, their translation as 'culture wars'; taking part in those polemics,

I also try to draw out the *constraints* on translation that operate in and between diverse institutional speech situations, and the benefits as well as the costs of working with those constraints.

If these broad divisions between rhetoric, theory and institution tell the reader something about the emphases (and critical genres) to expect in each section, they do not operate neatly within or between chapters and all three aspects are worked on throughout the book as a whole. For example, the first four chapters trace ways in which the historical 'depth' of nationally formative experiences of colonialism and racism is marked in popular culture, whether in formulaic turns of phrase, in the knowing or humorous use of a stereotype, in the editing of a scene of terror in one film or the colours saturating the *mise en scène* of another; perhaps unreadable or invisible to 'buyers' indifferent to the history invoked, these markings are no less powerfully capable of moving (in social as well as affective directions) those who see them and sense their involvement. This capacity of phrases, clichés and images to mobilize historical knowledges and act with temporal force is a theme of my critique in Chapter 2 of Fredric Jameson's theory of postmodernism, and a key issue for my reading in Chapter 5 of David Harvey's influential uptake of that theory; then, in Chapter 11, I discuss the price of ignoring this capacity paid by a journalist trying, in the context of a nationally televised debate, to use a display of cosmopolitan cultural 'attitude' against the popular historical *affect* mobilized by a phrase-savvy politician.

Several threads of this kind run though the book. However, the point of an anecdote for me is not only the wider conversations in which it plays a part but also the import of the incident it narrates. For a quick definition of anecdote, I still prefer 'short narrative of particular incident' (*Macquarie Dictionary*) to 'narrative of a detached incident' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*) because the latter suggests that an incident has been separated, like a stray button or a lost tooth, from a prior and larger whole. An ideal of epic or the nineteenth century novel probably moulds this definition, making it unhelpful for thinking about varieties of narrative and their powers in media-saturated conditions. In contrast to this pathos of the fragment is the pointed, energetic brevity of the *singular*: one particular incident may well be detached from a larger narrative, but another will initiate a longer narration, link two or more stories and arguments together, or enable (as is most often the case in this book) the elaboration of another, non-narrative discourse. The point of an anecdote depends on its content as well as its telling and the contexts in which it is told and taken up; a pointless anecdote is one in which nothing works to give the incident itself a meaning or a resonance for us. For this reason the idea of detachability better applies to the 'case study' than to the incident at the heart of an anecdote, at least as the former is used in a literary analysis which subjects all its materials (whether ethnographic

data, film texts, personal experience or a media event) to the primary task of illuminating the works of Freud, Marx, Heidegger, Lacan, Derrida or Foucault.

Before talking particulars, I should stress that while much of my material is Australian in an obvious but, I hope, meticulously situated way, this is not a book about 'being Australian'. I can imagine writing something like that, although I might not find a buyer unless my book were a lyrical memoir or a 'my hard life in the back-blocks' expatriate autobiography; a British publisher once told me that the words 'Australia' and 'Canada' can kill an academic book in any market, even Australia and Canada (and, true or not, the prediction is self-fulfilling). Nevertheless, *this* book is about transnationally circulating problems of identity production. Chief amongst these for culturally engaged academics in many places around the world is how to balance or negotiate between the diverse claims of community, locality and nation on our time, imagination and energy for commitment – when a globalizing university increasingly disciplines our 'work time' with productivity demands and professional performance norms that are indifferent or inimical to any 'outside' claims of belonging.¹⁵

I emphasize 'culturally' engaged academics not because I think that cultural work displaces or is synonymous with social or political engagement (this is not a view I hold) but because the *kind* of disciplinarity imposed by what Simon Marginson and Mark Considine call 'the enterprise university' is particularly difficult to handle for activist scholars who do work in cultural domains.¹⁶ The demand that scholars must publish primarily in English-language international refereed journals to secure research funding (Australia) or renew their contracts (Hong Kong) is a clear example. Basically, if you live and breathe as well as 'work on' non-Anglophone cultural issues, being an academic these days means writing in a language (English) that few people around you will read for a journal nobody sees except for readers who won't care – unless you put time into reconstructing or transfiguring the significance of those issues, which means acquiring the cultural capital to do this effectively.

I caricature a little to underline the *industrial* nature of the difficulty as it arises from a globally uneven distribution of academic labour (involving linguistic and cultural effort as well as highly variable time, pay, job security and working conditions) and thus is not entirely helped by an Anglo-American representational politics of making 'space' for 'others' – who must then do extra work to take advantage of that space. On the other hand, in good conditions this work of linguistic and cultural translation is immensely rewarding for those who do it, and, it is also politically fruitful when the labour is shared in a spirit of willingness to confront the inequalities involved. Such work builds transnational communities of effort which, while striving towards a mutual understanding that may never finally arrive, have the capacity to create those conditions of confidence

and trust which shape solidarity (if they do not alone sustain it) and make possible new conversations that genuinely do cross borders.

The two communities of effort which have shaped this book are the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (IACS) network, and the collective of *Traces: A Multilingual Journal of Cultural Theory and Translation*. Both work across linguistic as well as national and disciplinary boundaries. Emerging from an earlier initiative by Kuan-Hsing Chen, IACS is an English-language refereed journal edited from Taiwan and Singapore; it sustains a regional Society, holds a conference that has travelled from Taipei to Fukuoka, Bangalore and Seoul, and often translates articles from Asian languages.¹⁷ Both Chapter 3, 'White Panic or Mad Max and the Sublime', and Chapter 11, 'Please Explain?', were delivered as papers to international symposia in Taipei (in 1992 and 1998 respectively) and written for an inter-Asian rather than an exclusively Australian or 'Western' readership. *Traces* publishes each issue separately in Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean, and each article appears in all four language editions. This means that while writers can choose not to use English, every writer must keep readers of all four languages in mind. Few people are familiar with the diverse intellectual cultures, institutional contexts and generic expectations active in all four languages, and so each writer must take the risk of addressing 'the multitude of foreigners' in every language of the journal.¹⁸ *Traces* was founded by Naoki Sakai, whose work is the subject of Chapter 7, 'An Ethics of Uncertainty'. However, it also motivates the inclusion in the last section of essays written for general publics and exploring heterolingual tensions and pleasures inhabiting everyday English.

The particulars that I want to stress raise issues of translation in the sense I have just outlined. Beginning with a story about a translation mistake (my own) within English, the first chapter explains why it can be hard labour to convert a local talk about the Australian socio-cultural institution of 'mateship' into a global English article. In writing, Australian English is very close to standard American or British varieties; compared to the effort of translating a Cantonese talk into an English text, my problems of proximity certainly partake of what Marjorie Garber, drawing on Freud for a discussion of discipline envy, calls 'the narcissism of minor differences'.¹⁹ My argument, however, is that such problems arise not with words marked as specific ('Australianisms') but in usage and with memories or allusions inhabiting unmarked phrases. My *effort*, then, is to draw out the difficulty of saying when a minor difference marks and, if it is suppressed or remains untranslated as 'too local', *masks* a major divide, in this case not between Australians ('mates') and Americans ('buddies') but within the former category, as when an egalitarian majority is seized by minority envy and complains of its marginalization. This leads me to query the tendency in cultural studies on the one hand to *nationalize* work not British or American in provenance, and on

the other to *over-extend* notions of 'expatriation' and 'migrancy' as models for a transnational practice.

Writing about disciplines, Garber argues that differentiation is a strategy which they use 'to protect themselves against incursion and self-doubt', thereby creating an evil twin or 'closest other' which returns to haunt the discipline so secured.²⁰ This strategy is, of course, far more widely employed (or, to put it another way, this model of narcissistic self-composition is allegorical in force) and in 'Panorama', 'White Panic' and 'Beyond Assimilation: Aboriginality, Media History and Public Memory' I variously examine the white woman settler as a haunting as well as haunted 'closest other' within media zones of narrative dealing with violent historical matter while striving for cross-cultural appeal. I was not aware of whiteness studies when I wrote these texts but, at the risk of creating another minor difference, I think I would prefer to see them as *majority* studies, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of majority as 'the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian'.²¹

By this I mean that while these chapters unequivocally deal with the historical production of whiteness, they also analyse historical moments in which a majority is caught up (for concrete, often socio-economic reasons) in a wave of fear, resentment or panic about becoming minor, a becoming that would, adapting Deleuze and Guattari once again, 'rend us from our major identity'.²² Pauline Hanson's 1996 warning that Australians were at risk of 'being swamped by Asians' is a vulgar but classical expression of this fear, which, as I suggest in accounts of the gendered erasure of Aboriginal and Asian figures in twentieth century landscape writing ('Panorama') and in the film *Mad Max* ('White Panic'), mixes not only with desire but also with that strange energy that Marjorie Garber calls *envy*.

For Garber, envy, understood as the 'opposite' strategy to differentiation, involves 'a kind of energy, an exhilarating intellectual curiosity, as well as what Veblen called emulation'.²³ While I certainly do not conflate the harmful, socially aggressive crises of white majoritarian identity with the process of discipline formation, Garber's account is useful for understanding what can happen when these interact. The work of Fanon long ago drew attention (from the perspective of a man of colour burdened and battered by a white colonial gaze) to the envy, curiosity and emulation at work in racist masquerades of becoming minor;²⁴ Charles Chauvel's film *Uncivilised* (1936) is exemplary of the more complex but no less violent formations of stereotype which I examine in this book. More recently, the conscription of otherwise sober scholars to the anti-political correctness campaign against so-called 'other studies' and 'victim studies' in universities showed once again that if discipline envy is not in itself socially noxious, it can become so when it mixes with other, more dangerous movements.

In the media events and texts discussed in 'Panorama' and 'White Panic', this volatile amalgam of fear and envy is rendered anecdotally by translator figures who articulate boundary problems for an audience as well as marking them in representation. One such figure in 'Panorama' is the travel writer Ernestine Hill (1899–1972), with her explicit reflections on translating outback life into stories for urban consumption; within Hill's work is the figure of 'Mrs Witchetty', a white woman who married an Aboriginal man, lived with his people and dreamed of writing an autobiography. In counterpoint to this story of the 1930s is the 1988 tale of Mrs Smith of Kingoonya, a white woman living without television in an outback town and a 'formerly iconic' national remnant whom the globally pitched *Australia Live* purports to celebrate but does not and cannot address.²⁵

'White Panic' gives a detailed account of the inside/outside boundary thinking and ambivalence about alterity which animated late nineteenth century racial exclusion policy, and its pathological hostility to the too permeable, reproductive bodies of women. Examining the relay of that policy's logics a century later, in popular cultural translations of 'the plot of the sublime' and in policy rhetoric about dynamic Asian economies threatening a lazy, complacent Australia, I turn to action cinema's role as a field of experiment projecting other possible ways of narrating the nation. The major translator figure here is Mad Max, the go-between or *carrier* between inner and outer worlds, past and future. Another is the figure of Auntie Entity played by Tina Turner in *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, as she translates for a global marketplace the possibility of black jurisdiction over the deserts of an Australia in which Aboriginal people and Asian women can only be glimpsed in peripheral vision.

For thinking about translation as a cultural politics, the most important chapter for me is 'Beyond Assimilation', on Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries* (1989), a short film about a situation arising from the assimilation policy pursued by governments in the twentieth century of rending Aboriginal people from their kin and cultural identities most deeply through the institution of the family: a black daughter is trapped in the desert, caring for her dying white mother. Picking up the theme of temporal depth in images, this chapter explores the homage paid in *Night Cries* to the painting of Albert Namatjira, an immensely popular Aboriginal artist of the 1940s and 1950s who made landscapes in a Western mode. Drawing on recent scholarship about his life, this chapter spells out the difference between seeing his painting as an expression of 'split identity' and conceiving of it rather as a translative *act* by which Namatjira spoke to non-Aboriginal Australians about his country in a visual language which he judged, correctly, that we could understand. It seeks to describe the rhetorical effectiveness of a short film which played a significant role in widening public debate about the stolen children of Aboriginal

Australia by entwining a universal mother–daughter story with a historically specific white–black story – creating a ‘doubled’ field of address in which anybody may struggle to secure a single place from which to perform identification.

The next four chapters deepen the basis for understanding Moffatt’s film and Namatjira’s painting as works of translation. In my reading of Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* I follow Rosalyn Deutsche’s analysis of its logic of ‘mistaken identity’ (a misrecognition of the burden of feminist and post-structuralist texts) in order to ask why this logic comes into play and what happens when it does so.²⁶ The feminist debate about this book is an old one now, and I revisit it here to identify the obstacles to thinking about translation which arise from the ‘tradition and modernity’, ‘general and particular’ dyads which organize Harvey’s text but also, much more widely, script recurring problems of translation between social and cultural theorists. Super-imposed on an opposition between ‘narrative’ and ‘the image’, these dyads also make it impossible to conceptualize aesthetic and media *practice*.

This discussion of Harvey’s account of the ‘fragmentations’ of postmodernity recalls my earlier distinction between an anecdote conceived of as detached from a wider narrative, and an anecdote understood as a singular force with the capacity to initiate contact in conditions of heterogeneity. The chapters on Paul Willemen and Naoki Sakai explore the practical implications of thus distinguishing heterogeneity from fragmentation and singularity from particularism. Willemen’s *Looks and Frictions* proposes a theory of cinematic experience *as* translation, taking as its premise the constitutive heterogeneity of all psychic and cultural activity, while Sakai’s study of cultural nationalism and the subject of ‘Japan’ in *Translation and Subjectivity* proposes a theory of translation based on the premise that any audience is ‘mixed’.

In a move inconceivable for Harvey’s version of the general–particular dyad, Willemen asks how to take location seriously in the *formulation* of critical work, while at the same time offering a critique of ‘specificity as fetish’ in film theory. Outlining the major concepts with which he develops an account of translation as constitutive of subjectivity and communication in cinema (‘inner speech’, ‘the fourth look’, ‘double-outsidedness’ and ‘the in-between’), I relate Willemen’s interest in an institutionally located and *directed* politics to his argument that the national in cinema is a question of address, and also to his vision for a transnational avant-garde. The critical anecdote in this chapter is that of Willemen’s migration from Belgium to Britain and his encounter with the culture of literary English. Putting the frictions of translation at the core of British film theory in the 1970s and 1980s, his story affirms the value of sustaining a sense of non-belonging and non-identity with the culture one ‘inhabits’.

The chapter on Sakai extends this critique to the historical arena in which geo-politics and discipline formation interact. Sakai's account of the complicity between universalism and particularism in social theory adopts what Willemen might call a 'doubly-outsided' location as it implicates both 'Asian Studies' in the West, and the discipline called 'Japanese Thought' in Japan, in the history of Japanese imperialism. In earlier work, Sakai argued that a rivalrous 'logic of co-figuration' (opposing and comparing 'tradition' with 'modernity', 'particularism' with 'universalism', and 'East' with 'West') took hold in Japan as an *outcome* of a theory of translation and thence a concept of national language that emerged in the eighteenth century. *Translation and Subjectivity* refines this argument with a critique of 'homolingual' theories of communication and translation based on the model of a unified national language. Focusing on the enunciative effort (the work of address) which precedes the possibility of a communication which may always fail to occur, Sakai insists that translation is a *social* relation, and that the art and politics of creating transnational critical space involves accepting to speak in a state of uncertainty about whether one will be understood or what the outcome might be.

Following these discussions of disciplinarity (Harvey, Sakai) and institutional practice (Willemen), 'Crazy Talk Is not Enough: Deleuze and Guattari at Muriel's Wedding' turns to the question of the 'outside' that boundary-marking operations always instate. I do a little translation myself to draw out from the dense prose of *A Thousand Plateaus* a model of *home-making* capable of bringing *in* to the home the outside term of the identity problem that bothered Gertrude Stein, while conceiving of the home as a workplace as well as a dwelling. A theory of translation consistent with those of Willemen and Sakai could be based on Deleuze and Guattari's pragmatics of 'several regimes of signs', which assumes the inadequacy of linguistic presuppositions for semiotic analysis and shifts the emphasis away from the circularity of signs referring to other signs and towards 'the *multiplicity* of the circles or chains' and the things that can happen or 'jump' between them.²⁷ My purpose is very much more modest: I take from *A Thousand Plateaus* a way of thinking about inside and outside which escapes not only the circularity of 'white panic' thinking but also the blockage of a simplistic (non)-deconstruction of the inside/outside *binary* that reveals its impossibility without accounting for its practical uses, and I do this to enable a discussion of the academy as an institutional home which is open to outside forces. P.J. Hogan's film *Muriel's Wedding* (a tragi-comedy of small town globalization) helps me to read Deleuze and Guattari in this way and to situate feminist pragmatics in a mundane social landscape.

In a little-read passage of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari stress that 'crazy talk is not enough' to secure translation from one semiotic to another, and

that translation is very difficult when we confront a 'dominant atmospheric' semiotic.²⁸ Academics who have defended the humanities, theory, feminism or cultural studies in the bellicose ambience of the media in recent years may wonder if any sort of talk could get their point across. Of course, some scholars are also media practitioners and education policies fostering 'industry links' are bringing the two professions perhaps more closely together than ever before in their modern history as distinct. At the same time, the academy-media interface has become a fraught and merciless, even a perilous place for academics suddenly caught up in a whirlwind of scandal or controversy which takes them by surprise.²⁹

I have always disliked the term 'culture wars', not because the martial image is melodramatic but because the phrase so successfully lent a fuzzy, pluralistic alibi to a hard-edged *ideology* war, waged over two decades or more, to attach credibility (our beliefs about other people's beliefs) to neo-liberal ideas of the common social and economic good, thereby securing recognition value (effective 'interpellation') for ruthlessly limited ways of imagining the actual and the possible. Now that the dust of culture wars has packed down into the iron-hard ground of military globalization, on which the violence of terrorism and 'war against terror' supports a spreading militarization of civic everyday life, it is obvious that the former rhetorically prepared for the latter; ten years before the destruction of the World Trade Center, President George Bush Snr warned Americans that 'political extremists roam the land ... setting citizens against one another on the basis of their class or race', urging them to 'join in common cause without having to surrender their identities'.³⁰ As the word spread, in the blink of a cursor it became commonplace in Australia, too, to hear talk of feminist and 'multiculturalist' terrorists not only on campus but in government as well, and to meet passionately angry citizens, colleagues and family members for whom the term *terrorist* worked as an objective correlative of their feelings about seemingly endless criticism of their values and ways of life ('of course, I don't mean you, dear').

Like many others I took a small part in some of the brawls of the 1990s, in particular those over sexual harassment in universities, precipitated for Australians by *The First Stone: Some Questions about Sex and Power* (1995), an attack by the novelist Helen Garner on two young women who 'went to the cops' about the Master of their college;³¹ the hoaxing of *Social Text* by Alan Sokal, who persuaded the journal to publish pastiche as science studies;³² and the savage impact of educational reform on the working conditions and prospects of academics, especially the young.³³ The bile and brutality stirred up by the first two scandals was, to put it mildly, thought-provoking beside the indifference inspired by the third in media professionals who would also aspire (one must imagine) to a good education for their children.

Yet all three situations manifestly involve shop-floor issues of, as it were, occupational health and safety. Arising in academic workplaces undergoing rapid change, they concern the codes of conduct (and industrial safeguards) we should expect to operate there, as well as the terms on which highly diverse bodies of people working very long hours can feel at home as they work; a hoax, no less than an assault or a redundancy campaign, acts to undermine other people's sense of security. These links were rarely picked up in the media. The first two scandals merged in a moral panic over PC 'feminazis' who were bad scholars as well,³⁴ but the third, with its unsettling news for families about stress-related illness and insecure employment – in a country where universities are major employers ensuring the survival of some quite large towns – was isolated to education features or mocked in op-ed pieces about the whiners in the ivory tower. The common source of conflicts over sexual harassment, refereeing ('quality assurance') and an erosion of job security, pay and quality of *life* in a productivity-driven process of institutional restructuring – an experience shared by academics with other workers, including journalists – failed to attract attention away from excitingly perennial topics such as 'eros' in the classroom or infelicitous prose.

This deep, empathetic disconnection between academics and journalists has a rich professional history which merits complex explanation. The two sallies from the culture wars included here for their emphasis on translation focus merely on one element, the cultivated habit of professional people who are not academics themselves to think of the university not as a workplace, conflicted and changing like any other, but as a site of personal *memory* that evokes strong emotions and remains frozen in time. It is not uncommon for media folk and creative writers like Garner to frame a shocked revelation of bizarre goings-on in universities today with a contrasting story of 'the way we were' when they themselves were students (a tactic I use without shame myself in Chapters 9 and 12). It usually goes unmentioned in such baby-boomer *bildung*-anecdotes that their authors, who may elsewhere heartily endorse dismantling 'welfare' and opening the economy to 'global competition', enjoyed the option in their youth of an excellent, cheap education courtesy of the taxpayers within a highly protected national economy structured by racial and gender exclusion.

The seventies-style subtitle used by Garner ('some questions about sex and power') *places* sexual harassment in this faded world of her youth and mine where a white student pestered by an authority figure could indeed 'knee him in the balls', as Garner puts it, while gazing past him to a social horizon of plentiful employment, jobs for life, free medical care and a decent old age pension.³⁵ Even then, far less freedom of movement was afforded Aboriginal people who had no such horizon, and migrants who were battling to attain it.³⁶ Today, the vista has changed for all and harassment is a life-shaping question of *work*,