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## Of Pearls and Coral: Jurisography and Ego History

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## Of Pearls and Coral: Jurisography and Ego History

### Abstract

In this talk I'd like to create a conversation between what Ann Genovese and Shaun McVeigh (2015) felicitously call 'jurisography', which is, we might say, just beginning its intellectual journey as a concept of great fertility and possibility, and what the French historiographer Pierre Nora (2001) refers to as ego-histoire, or ego history, which is now becoming an international intellectual movement. As will become clear, ego history is not simply to be identified with autobiography. I also do not equate ego history with jurisography. I wish to suggest there might be resonances between jurisography and ego history that we might think about.

## **Places Lived: An Ego-Historicist and Jurisographer Discuss Living with Law in Sydney**

**John Docker and Ann Genovese**

The following essays, by John Docker and myself, were delivered on the final panel of the 'Lives Lived with Law' symposium, held at the Melbourne Law School in December 2014. The panel was called 'Places Lived', and our purpose was to reflect together on how intellectual traditions are inherited and inhabited in a place. The essays were written and presented as they are published here, commencing with this short introduction. We wanted to stage in public a long-standing personal discussion about what it might mean to write about Australia, in many forms and styles of address and how this involves, for us, self-fashioning a life through writing in Australia, and as Australians. In both instances, as will become evident in my essay, I have a debt to pay to John.

In staging the conversation in the ways we did at MLS it was important to John and I to explain – perhaps, by way of Introduction, unnecessarily assertively – that we subscribe to inhabit what Hannah Arendt (2007) called 'the status of the conscious pariah'. We stand outside (John), or inside but to the side (myself) of conventional institutional or disciplinary situations. We choose this standpoint in order to self-consciously address what duties we have to make the assumed or orthodox strange, and visible, where we live. This, we have long discussed, is in part a response to personal genealogies, which we

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understand as existing in relation with our writing personas. This is also part of what we consider in our essays, in which John explores writing autobiography as an *ego historiste*, and I consider what it means to write histories of jurisprudence as a (feminist) jurisographer (a persona invented in complicity with Shaun McVeigh and Peter Rush).

It is worth noting two things before reading our conversation that underscore our intentions, but are not the primary consideration of the essays. They are about how writing of lives lived in Australia, for us, is a concern with making sense of Australian experiences of law, politics, and culture as contested, and *sui generis*, but existing in response and engagement with other conducts of life and inherited intellectual traditions. The first concern we wish to note is that to write as Australians and about Australian lives as experiences of thought and practices is neither parochial nor nationalistic, nor irrelevant to conversations elsewhere. We understand our work as belonging to cosmopolitan traditions that are already Australian. More to the point (as John made very clear in his 1974 book *Australian Cultural Elites*) to pay attention fully to what has been inherited and contested in the everyday experiences of intellectual life in Australia, it is necessary to refuse an apologetic comparativism with England or elsewhere that deadens violence, pleasure, drama, or imagination. Without this refusal, we think, Australian work risks being cast (and cast aside) as the 'esoteric, familiar, and unnecessary', especially in the academic North (Curthoys 2003: 70). The other concern is the centrality of paying attention in our writing to what Indigenous scholars and friends have invited us to witness. In order to think properly about how we take care of our conducts of life in 'Australia' we must look to the experiences of living lawfully in place, and places that are not only, or always, about the 'nation state'. As John noted to me in preparation for the writing of our essays, for Anglo-Australian scholars this is often resisted, in many ways. In 1974, for example, although Australian intellectual life was in renaissance, John recalled that it was considered impetuous to want to draw out what made Sydney and Melbourne distinct from each other (as opposed to different to London), let alone to question how the intellectual traditions of Australia responded to the contentions

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of feminist and Indigenous politics (Docker 1974; Coleman 1962; Serle 2014).<sup>1</sup>We note that considering Australian life as a matter of intellectual traditions *per se* is often, still, treated in many institutional contexts as perplexing or foolhardy.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, we take up our own practices and these traditions of imagination and responsibility seriously. Although the ‘Lived Lived with Law’ Symposium was held at Melbourne Law School, in Melbourne, and I live and write here, and John lived and studied here many years ago, we reflected in our conversation on what it means to live and write in, and of, Sydney. It is Sydney that draws us together, personally, and as a consequence, intellectually, in the forms and practice of our writing. It is for this reason that Sydney is the stage for our conversation in the essays that follow.

### Notes

- 1 See also Manning Clark’s (1962) important observations about the diverse traditions of intellectual culture that Docker takes up; and also A.A. Phillip’s (1975) critical response to Docker’s arguments. Phillip’s review arguably performs the same insouciance and humour, and shows how Docker’s book joined and reimagined the literary critical tradition in Australian for his own time.
- 2 We note the recent series of books on Australian Capital cities published by UNSW Press, (for example, Sophie Cunningham *Melbourne* (2012)) are seen as ‘trade books’. Without the sweetener of spatiality or ‘grounded empiricism’, concerns with traditions of thought and politics in Australian states, territories, cities and towns, are, we would suggest, out of vogue in Australian academia (in ways they were not in the 1970s and 1980s). We would also note that scholarly writing about ‘international’ cities (New York, London, Berlin) remain translatable between ‘trade’ and ‘academic’ practices and audiences.

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## Of Pearls and Coral: Jurisography and Ego History

John Docker\*

In this talk I'd like to create a conversation between what Ann Genovese and Shaun McVeigh (2015) felicitously call 'jurisography', which is, we might say, just beginning its intellectual journey as a concept of great fertility and possibility, and what the French historiographer Pierre Nora (2001) refers to as ego-histoire, or ego history, which is now becoming an international intellectual movement. As will become clear, ego history is not simply to be identified with autobiography. I also do not equate ego history with jurisography. I wish to suggest there might be resonances between jurisography and ego history that we might think about.

In the first part of this conversation I will offer some comments on Pierre Nora's (2001) manifesto-like essay 'Is ego history possible?', on ego history as an activity of self-reflection. In the second part, I will briefly indicate how Nora's conception of ego history is being applied to Australian Indigenous history by a group of young scholars in Europe. And finally and very quickly, in the third part I will attempt to relate Nora to my own intellectual formation in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in relation to my first book, *Australian Cultural Elites*, published in 1974, its sub-title *Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne*, asking the ego historical question, 'why did I engage with such a topic at such a time, [and] how did I become interested?'. While I would perhaps describe myself as a Sydney intellectual, I have

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had a long and very productive relationship to Melbourne. Indeed, my first publication, in the late 1960s, was with the journal *Arena*, a defence, wildly polemical as only the young can be, of the then popular Hollywood film *Bonnie and Clyde* against conventional left dismissal of mass culture (Docker 1968-1969: 83-86). It was the beginning of a lifelong association with *Arena*, though I don't think I've ever been part of its, as it were, communitarian utopian dream.

### 1 Pierre Nora and Ego History

In his essay, Nora (2001) offers reasons for why he considers that ego history made its appearance in French intellectual life when it did, in the late 20th century. One relevant development, Nora tells us, was the return of the subject to the centre of action and thought, which came after the great period was over of what he refers to as structuralism, semiology, and textology. The return of the subject influenced historians to be more aware of the freedom, will and desires of the thinking and acting individual. The late 20th century was also, Nora reflects, the moment of a new interest in writing biography, which had specific French associations, including the powerful historical image of de Gaulle. Another epochal trait was the rise of historiography, Nora observing that in France historiography was for a long time slow to impose itself on historical practice, yet when it did its effects have been almost subversive, dismantling traditional national grand narratives. Nora feels that both historiography and ego history evince a capacity to de-familiarise that which we feel we live spontaneously, such as memory □ a well-known interest of Nora □ as in his collection on places of memory. Inflected by historiography and ego history, memory has to become self-conscious and self-questioning. Yet another development was that one now felt one lived in a reflexive or epistemological age, where theoretical reflection was being integrated with historical practice. In Nora's view, historiography and ego history, along with theoretical reflection and self-reflexive memory, are part of the same constellation.

As you read 'Is ego history possible?' you quickly realise Nora

intends the question to be taken very seriously: ego history may not be possible, it may be a failure, or half-failure. But is failure failure? For ego history to succeed as a single, unified, coherent project would be to destroy ego history, to return it to conventional historical writing, which ego history wishes to make strange. In our *Is History Fiction?*, Ann Curthoys and I refer to what we conceive as the ‘double character’ of history, that it both works through a rigorous scrutiny of sources *and* partakes of the world of literary forms (Curthoys & Docker 2010: 11). What literary affiliations does ego history move one to think about? When Nora invokes the notion of ego history defamiliarising conventional empirical history, I think of theories of defamiliarisation in literary theory and dramaturgy, in the Russian Formalists and Brecht. I also think of theorists of modernity such as Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt.

Nora regards the ego historian in ways that remind me of Hannah Arendt’s (1993) book *Men in Dark Times*, suggesting an intellectual personality to be discussed in terms of biography, anecdote, vignette, and social genealogy (as in her chapters on Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Jaspers). We might also think of Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* regarding philosophers as ‘conceptual personae’ or ‘thought figures’, engrained with ambivalence, contradictoriness, and idiosyncrasy (Curthoys & Docker 2010: 10). There is also the important notion of sensibility – a notion that Ann [Genovese] and Shaun [McVeigh] (2015) suggest is important for jurisography – that can be explored in terms of image, metaphor, and story, and also in terms of cultural figures. Nora (2001) himself is drawn to the figure of the outsider. He tells us that for a long time ego history existed outside of conventional academic history; an existence that was clandestine, subterranean, and uncategorisable, exciting and fascinating by its intensity and passion.

Nora, however, doesn’t claim to be a complete or absolute outsider to the history profession. Rather, he positions himself as ‘marginal central’. It is, he says, his intellectual nature to be always inside and outside at the same time. He is marginal to academic life in that he has

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not had a classic career; he cannot be clearly defined as an academic, or editor, or writer. He is central in belonging to higher studies and as part of the publisher Gallimard. But his higher studies institution is eccentric (giving shelter to what he jokes are sheep with five feet), even if – or hence – lively and creative. His chosen field of memory is not history in a traditional sense. In moving across various fields and sectors of intellectual life, his journey appears to him like the lateral movement of a crab, which in turn reminds me of familiar images from T.S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

'I should have been', laments Prufrock, 'a pair of ragged claws' scuttling across the 'floors of silent seas' (Eliot 1961: 14). Prufrock's passivity, timidity, and self-contempt does not, however, characterise the sensibility of Nora's ego historian. Rather we might think of a marrano-like figure I talk about in my book *1492: The Poetics of Diaspora*, the stranger as evoked by Georg Simmel, both inside and outside a group, disturbing it by a kind of abstraction, a freedom to question what others in the group take as given. Simmel cites European Jews as exemplars of his conception of the stranger, who as he says 'comes today' and 'stays tomorrow' (Docker 2001: 86-87).

Nora (2001) tells us that his own troubled feeling of being for as long as he could remember at once inside and outside French society was intensified by his experience of being a teenage Jewish boy surviving by hiding during World War Two. He feels a distance from people who have not experienced how tragic history and life can be. He realised that he was fascinated by the history of contemporary France, *this strange country*. He wants to ask of France fundamental questions that were born for him during the war, in the stupor of defeat, the experience in France of Jews like himself, the Resistance; and after the war, the conflict between communism and Gaullism and further questions posed by France's colonial wars. He regrets that the Annales school in its interest in the long view made it so difficult for historians to study contemporary France. Nora turns to memory and ego history as ways into contemporary history, which he believes has been neglected by French historians.

To explore further a shared interest with Ann and Shaun and jurisography, I find particularly interesting Nora's (2001) conception of the ego historian as a distinctive intellectual personality of an unsettled, fragmented, and contradictory kind. At one point Nora asks of the ego-historian, who is she or he? As I interpret this question, Nora is hazarding the thought that, as he puts it, the ego historian is neither, or rather might be all of, the autobiographer, the writer, the friend, the psychoanalyst, and the confessor.

Here is what so attracts me about Nora's essay. The ego historian cannot be enclosed within a single intellectual identity. Nora insists that the ego historian is not, for example, to be encapsulated as an autobiographer, though she or he will draw on autobiography. Furthermore, the ego historian is not necessarily to be identified with historians, with the history profession. Nora makes it clear how much he admires, for example, the (unclassifiable) cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, describing de Certeau in a way that would be highly unusual in terms of conventional history, as a Jesuit historian who has been accepted as a Lacanian psychoanalyst. Nora is sure that it is not possible for the ego historian to possess a single coherent successfully positive identity, as it were, because she or he exists unresolvably between the social and the psychoanalytic. Yet, he goes on, if ego history represents various failed efforts in terms of identity and coherence, its failures, or half failures, are of immense interest. Indeed, its half-failures, as he phrases it, are perhaps ego history's true success. I'm reminded of Walter Benjamin, when in his essay 'Some Reflections on Kafka' in *Illuminations* he observes that to understand Kafka we must never lose sight of his being a failure: 'One is tempted to say', Benjamin wrote, that once Kafka 'was certain of eventual failure, everything worked out for him *en route* as in a dream. There is nothing more memorable than the fervor with which Kafka emphasized his failure' (Benjamin 2007: 144-145). In her beautiful introduction to *Illuminations*, Arendt (2007) believes that Benjamin and Kafka are in this respect very much alike. Kafka, Benjamin, and the ego historian as a failure or half-failure: here surely is an interesting lineage for the genealogy of ego history – and perhaps also of jurisography (it is of some relevance to note that Arendt

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refused to refer to herself as a philosopher.)

In the spirit of Pierre Nora's (2001) essay, then, I regard ego history – and perhaps jurisography might be conceived in a similar way – as an adventure of ideas, highly personal and self-reflexive, free to mix and juxtapose genres, texts, media, modes, perspectives, and narratives in unpredictable and surprising ways. A thought here on jurisography and genre. In their recent biography *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* Eiland and Jennings tells us that in a letter to his friend Scholem, Benjamin suggested that to use a genre one must first destroy it and then recreate it (Eiland and Jennings 2014: 337). Perhaps jurisography will approach the inherited genres of legal writing in this light.

A final provisional thought on the sensibility of the jurisographer, and again, Hannah Arendt (2007) on Benjamin might help us here. Arendt says one way we can attempt to comprehend Benjamin's sensibility is as a pearl diver 'who descends to the bottom of the sea ... to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and corals in the depths, and to carry them to the surface' (Arendt 2007: 50-51). In Arendt's terms, we might also compare the jurisographer to the figure of the pearl diver who recovers rich and strange 'thought fragments' and reconstitutes them in new constellations.

### **2 Ego History becomes a Transnational Movement**

Ego history has helped inspire the constellation of a group of young scholars situated in Europe – Vanessa Castejon (2010), Anna Cole (2010), and Oliver Haag (2014) – who in an anti-Eurocentric spirit research and write about Australian Indigenous history. They extend Nora's notions of ego history, with its own interest in French colonialism, towards a conversation between Europe and Australia, with its history of colonialism. At a conference entitled *Myth, Memory and History at the Centre for Australian Studies*, University of Barcelona, in 2008, that Ann Curthoys and I attended, Anna and Vanessa told us about ego history and urged us to become interested in it, which, thankfully, we have. The experience has been as rewarding as Anna and Vanessa predicted at the Barcelona conference.

Since 2008, interest in ego history has accelerated across the world. Anna and Vanessa contributed ego history essays to Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys and my (2010) collection *Passionate Histories*, sub-titled *Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia*. Anna wrote her doctoral thesis at UTS in Sydney on Aboriginal debutante balls and helped write and produce the 2010 film *Dancing with the Prime Minister*. For family reasons and in pursuing research, Anna is always moving between England and Australia, and her (2010) essay in *Passionate Histories*, 'Making a debut: myths, memories and mimesis', registers the kind of creative uncertainty, the desire to keep reconsidering and reassessing one's arguments and values, associated with diaspora consciousness, where diaspora suggests, as I note in the preface to my *1492: The Poetics of Diaspora*, belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, more than one past and future. Diaspora suggests loss and separation, yet also the possibility of new adventures of identity and the continued imagining of unconquerable countries of the mind (Docker 2001: vii-viii).

In like spirit, Vanessa Castejon's (2010) chapter in *Passionate Histories*, 'Identity and identification: Aboriginality from the Spanish Civil War to the French Ghettos', illuminates hidden histories of Europe and imbricates them with histories beyond Europe. Vanessa tells us her essay takes up the challenge of ego history to consider the 'intimate relations' one has with the subject of one's research. She begins by disavowing that her personal story 'is part of Indigenous history': 'I am very far from indigenous: I am a product of exile'. She feels she is from 'nowhere' (Castejon 2010), her parents in France having a passport only for the stateless and refugees; she reflects on her upbringing in the poor, immigrant and multi-ethnic part of Paris known as '9-3', and is proud to belong to it, despised as it is by the French government (Castejon 2010). She was brought up to believe herself simply French, until in the mid 1990s she learned that her family history is Spanish, and that her 'anarchist uncle's father was part of the Republican government in Exile' in its continuing 'fight against Franco's regime' (Castejon 2010). Later in Australia doing her doctoral thesis at Monash on Aboriginal politics and becoming interested in rebellious

figures like Gary Foley, she was fascinated to learn of the Aboriginal Provisional Government. She becomes increasingly interested in her family's Spanish and Catalan history characterised by anarchism and rebellion, the family being expelled into exile in 1939, along with 500,000 other Republicans, forced to sleep in holes in the sand when they crossed the border into France. Conscious now of a diasporic relationship, she learns Spanish at university and takes up Spanish nationality, becoming intensely interested in fragmented identities and broken histories, displaced populations, and the ways governments attempt to impose definitions of being. Vanessa's essay is in her words a 'meditation on the cultural transfers between Aboriginal Australia, the Spanish Civil War and the French ghettos' (Castejon 2010: 219-227).

In 2011, Anna and Vanessa and their European colleague Oliver Haag, along with an Australian-based historian Karen Hughes, ran an innovative ego history conference in Paris, *Researching the Other, Transfers of Self: Egohistoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia*.

In 2012, Ann Curthoys published an essay, 'Memory, History, and *Ego-Histoire*: Narrating and Re-enacting the Australian Freedom Ride', an evocation of how the 1965 Freedom Ride through NSW towns, in which she participated as a young University of Sydney student, has been remembered and commemorated. Ann discusses the role of the participant-historian as a keeper of memory, suggesting there is a relationship between professional history and popular memory (2012: 25-45). She reflects that because of her (2002) book *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* – which Oliver Haag (2014) refers to as a significant contribution to ego history in his essay 'Becoming Privileged in Australia ...' in *Ngapartji Ngapartji* which I will talk about in a moment – she for many years now has been asked to speak to school children; to assist with requests for photographs; her 1965 travel diary which is online has helped participants in two recent reenactments of the Freedom Ride; her book has helped inspire a play; and American Freedom Riders, black and white, are keen to meet up with her when they happen to visit Sydney. As Ann says, it is rare that a week goes by without her being contacted to provide various kinds of information

on, or to speak about, the 1965 Freedom Ride.

In 2014, ANU E-press published Anna Cole, Vanessa Castejon, Oliver Haag, and Karen Hughes' edited collection, *Ngapartji Ngapartji, In turn, in turn: Ego-Histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia*. In his essay, Oliver Haag (2014), the third member of the European ego history triad with Anna and Vanessa, ponders the implications of his Romany family history for his work as a scholar in Europe and Australia, in a subtle and complex poetics. Oliver does not think of himself as a Romany, rather of Romany family background, in a family living in different central and eastern European societies that is often bitterly divided over questions of identity: 'I have grown up with national categories which were ubiquitous in spreading agony across my family'. (Haag 2014) He is a 'German-speaking scholar of Indigenous Australian studies', yet his experiences are extremely different in Europe and Australia (Haag 2014). In Austria and Germany, the Romany are despised and discriminated against, and he is often considered, because of a perceived darkness of skin, a Romany or in any case a migrant. In Austria and Germany, his own experiences of being of Romany descent are entirely negative. In his life as an academic, when he attempts to introduce the I voice into his scholarly presentations, he is told the 'I' voice is to be avoided because it impairs objectivity, and also because his ego history interests unnecessarily draw attention to 'race', whereas German and Austrian intellectuals, because of the Holocaust, deny the relevance of race even though their societies are intensely racialised in terms of skin colour. Visiting Australia he finds an exhilarating experience, noting that Jeremy Popkin has observed that Australian historians are interested in writing autobiographies, much more so than European historians. He negotiates differences between non-Indigenous and Indigenous intellectuals. Non-Indigenous intellectuals regard him as a white European, endowed with the privilege of whiteness. Indigenous intellectuals, on the other hand, who themselves frequently write life histories, are very interested in his Romany family history and pepper him with questions about his biography in an open and flexible manner. He feels that in a transnational way, interacting with Indigenous intellectuals in Australia makes him see

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and understand Europe differently: 'Indigenous intellectuals have influenced some of my views on racial representations in Europe'. He refers to a line from Tennyson's poem *Ulysses* - 'I am a part of all that I have met' - and feels that he too can say of his transnational life in Europe and Australia that 'I have become, in a sense, a part of all I have met'. Yet depressingly when he returns to Europe his attempts to present ego historical perspectives influenced by Indigenous Australia, using terms like cross-cultural and intercultural, are dismissed as essentialist. He will continue his difficult journey.

In this efflorescence of activity, ego history is, then, beginning to constitute an innovative intellectual movement, as I am sure will occur with jurisography.

### 3 The Importance and Intricacies of Place

Ego history by its very nature, drawing attention to the self who writes, is intensely aware of the specificities of location. Reading the European exponents of ego history, in the meditations of Pierre Nora (2001), Anna Cole (2010), Vanessa Castejon (2010) and Oliver Haag (2014), we become aware of many locations: wartime France, England, Paris, Spain, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. Meditation is stimulated by transnational and diasporic journeys. Sometimes place is denied. Vanessa writes of the 'taboo history' in France of the 'war in Algeria' (Castejon 2010: 227). The unity of nation states is questioned and exceeded. The world becomes a fractured mosaic.

Place is important for the ego history I have been writing for the last couple of years, its importance perhaps indicated by its title, *Growing Up Communist and Jewish in Bondi*, which always seems to make people smile: the distance between Bondi signifying on-the-beach mindlessness, and histories of religion and politics. Place was important, too, for my (1974) *Australian Cultural Elites*, that drew rather unnuanced comparisons between Melbourne intellectual traditions which I evoked in terms of a detailed textual critique of *Meanjin*, and Sydney intellectual traditions, I analysed in terms of poets and writers like Christopher Brennan, Norman Lindsay, Kenneth Slessor,

A.D. Hope, and Patrick White. I also evoked the Sydney Freethought Tradition inspired by the longtime University of Sydney philosopher John Anderson, with its interest in theories of anarcho-syndicalism, pluralism, and libertarianism. *Australian Cultural Elites*, it's now easy to see, was written in an almost absurdly impersonal way; there is no I voice anywhere, no drawing attention to the narrator. The Introduction declares with great boldness that 'there is a Sydney pessimism versus a Melbourne social optimism', and that 'Melbourne intellectuals feel at the centre of their society', whereas Sydney intellectuals feel that society has to be 'either avoided or opposed' (Docker 1974: ix). Both Sydney traditions, the literary and philosophical, insist on what I called a kind of elite pluralism, which characteristically involved seeing anti-authoritarianism, sexuality, and consciousness as metaphysical realms of freedom, freedom from society (Docker 1974: ix).

How and why had I come to think of this brash comparison of Australia's two major intellectual centres, especially when most Australian literary, cultural and intellectual history, apart from Manning Clark's essay 'Faith' in Peter Coleman's collection *Australian Civilization*, as I noted in my introduction, insisted that Australian culture should be regarded as a unified and monolithic entity (Docker 1974: ix)? Arriving in Melbourne from Sydney in 1967 to do a two-year MA in the Melbourne English department as a twenty two year old, and having never until then I have to confess given Melbourne a thought, I was immediately struck by what I perceived to be vast differences in sensibility. As I explained in a later essay (1981), 'How I became a Teenage Leavisite and Lived to Tell the Tale', published in *Meanjin* that became the prologue to my (1984) book *In a Critical Condition*, I'd been an intense Leavisite devotee in my final Honours years in the English Department at Sydney University. During the early 1960s the Melbourne Leavisite S L Goldberg had come to the Sydney English Department to launch a Leavisian campaign, accompanied by trusted lieutenants and imports from the UK, then left a few years later, in my third year of 1965, with the Sydney department in ruins, split into two warring segments, to return to the safety of the Melbourne English Department. Goldberg the Leavisite General had decided

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to retreat, rather like Napoleon, who had expected a grand conquest, from a burning Moscow.

Having become a fervent Leavisite, I ventured south at the beginning of 1967, took up residence in Carlton in a semi-detached with another Sydney Leavisite doing an MA, where we did no housework for a year – I will give no further details on the state of the house after a few months. Soon I began to mutter to any other ex-Sydney Leavisite exiles who might listen, that the young Melbourne postgraduates we were encountering as fellow tutors in the English Department ‘lack cynicism ... they’re not cynical’, I would growl, ‘they don’t go in for self-irony, where’s the humour, do they have to be such fervent followers of Vincent Buckley who thinks poetry is some sort of sacred rite, how precious, and he loves the Vietnam War ...’. As often as I could in vacation times I flew hastily back to Sydney and its libertarian culture and pub life at the Newcastle in lower George Street in the city and the Forth and Clyde in Balmain. Indeed ‘Sydney’ signified a lost paradise for me, hopefully to be regained as quickly as possible. After a year of living in a kind of Dickensian house of dust, though living so close to Carlton shops I did enjoy learning to cook with instructions from my mother before I left Sydney – though I can’t recall ever cleaning the kitchen – I moved from Carlton to Albert Park, to take a rented room in the top part of a tall house inhabited by the genial Melbourne historian Noel McLachlan, round the corner from the end of the tram line, I can’t now remember the number of the tram, in a long street facing the Bay. By this time I had become severely disillusioned with the whole Leavisite fantasia, especially its absurd idealising of pre-industrial England as part of Leavis’ modernist dislike of modern mass society which he believed was urgently in need of superior critical discrimination by a chosen minority of critics, chosen that is by Leavis as prophet and messiah; a modernism I would later comment on in my *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History* (1994). I began to drink heavily and boorishly, and, wandering along a pier at the Albert Park shorefront, would occasionally contemplate suicide in the rather uninviting waters of Port Phillip Bay.

## John Docker

Fortunately, on one of my visits to Sydney, in late 1967, I met Ann Curthoys in the libertarian Push hotel the Forth and Clyde in Balmain. Ann, I think, [was] hoping this youthful barbarian emerging from his southern fiasco might stop drinking and do some writing, and also that he might learn the rudiments of housework.

There, in ego history terms, was the personal genesis of *Australian Cultural Elites* as an intervention, as I put it in my Introduction, into comparative intellectual history in Australia (Docker 1974: ix), and I venture to believe that my book did have some influence in stimulating more differentiated cultural histories, for example, in Jim Davidson's (1986) collection *The Sydney-Melbourne Book*. Also, I didn't break completely with Leavisism, in that I retained its methodological desire to analyse the interior world of texts, but now I extended that method into analysing any text, non-literary as well as literary, and that approach has remained with me, including in my most recent book, *The Origins of Violence: Religion, History and Genocide* (2008). It is an approach that challenges what I see as a frequent limitation of conventional intellectual history, its desire too quickly to summarise an illusory essence of a thinker's ideas. By contrast, an anti-essentialising method that focusses on the inner working of texts can, I think, yield more in teasing out all sorts of ambiguities, contradictorinesses, and eccentricities.

Jurisography will, I feel sure, share with ego history an anti-essentialising method. It has affinities with Walter Benjamin's (1996) preferred method that he describes in the prologue to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Here Benjamin writes that investigating the representation of ideas involves digression, fragmentation into capricious particles that are distinct and separate, a focus on minute details of subject-matter, the seeking out of extremes, an awareness of discontinuity, of irreducible multiplicity (Docker 2001: 247).

**Notes**

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