

“On the Margins”

The European Association for Studies of Australia (EASA) will hold its bi-annual conference at Bordeaux 3 University (France), 4th – 7th September 2013.

Guest Speaker: Alexis Wright

The conference theme, “On the Margins,” was selected so as to reflect current research undertaken within CLIMAS, the research group at Bordeaux 3 University that will host the event.

To Europeans, Australia was for a long time very much on the margins: relegated to the bottom right-hand corner of traditional world maps, it was colonised by the less respectable members of English society while its original inhabitants were largely unacknowledged in the country’s official history. From an Indigenous point of view, too, despite the disruption they have caused it is the white Australians who are marginal figures; after all what is 200 years in the country’s existence against an Indigenous culture of 30,000 to 50,000 years? However, the latter view cannot be said to be a mainstream one nowadays, and margin, clearly not a stable term when talking about Australia, gives rise to questions such as who is on the margin of whom or what? Is the margin mainly territorial or conceptual? Are those on the margin there by choice or not? How has the definition of the margin changed over the years and how is it likely to change again in the future?

Using the concept of the margin discursively, one can tie it in with the colonial perception of Australia as a binary opposite to Europeanness, the Antipodean as oddly out of kilter and in all senses less, yielding the contrast against which the white settlers could define themselves. One can also invoke the stereotype of the Indigenous as uncivilised, uncouth, in need of enlightenment etc, or see it as that expression of liminality that scares, defamiliarises, and proves impossible to control. The incommensurability of the Bush, the Outback and Dead Heart of the land, possibly imbued with Indigenous meaning, may also come to mind. Conversely, the margin may be seen to denote the fragile coastal fringe that houses a settler population the size of Belgium and the Netherlands together on an ‘island’ twice the size of continental Europe. Australia imagined as margin provides a tense paradigmatic interface that keeps questioning our European values, and may lend itself to discursive interventions informed by Derridean spectrality, Freudian uncanniness, or a Foucauldian wish for control of difference. How does this margin reach the Centre, how does it displace it, speak back to it, to us?

Besides, some recent historiographic decentrings in Australia have served to marginalize erstwhile dominant discourses in a way which further problematizes the notion of marginality, potentially destabilizing a good many of the above-mentioned clichés and yielding the possibility of approaching the embrace of a peripheral position as a convenient cover-up meant to screen from sight various continuing practices of economic exploitation. Traditional topics such as ‘exile’ or ‘the cringe’, as well as more recent affirmations of indigenization or cultural unease, may be revisited from this perspective which is likely to accord with the contribution of our Aboriginal keynote speaker.

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers which respond to the broad conference theme in relation to a wide range of disciplines and subject areas across the humanities and social sciences. These might include: history, fine arts, ecology, politics, mythology, literature, film, media and performance studies, music, geography, anthropology,

architecture, law, popular culture, political science, sociology, archaeology, biography, cultural studies, migration and settlement studies, gender and women's studies, war studies, sports studies, religion, education.

Papers could tackle the questions raised above, and a range of topics including, but not restricted to, those listed below:

- Real and imaginary margins
- Enforced and desired margins
- The margin strikes back
- The margin as a site of liminality
- The margin as a site of resistance
- The marginality of the centre and the centrality of the margin
- The appropriation of the margin
- Marginal genres and literary/artistic practices
- Marginal discourses and linguistic registers
- Marginal histories
- Marginal aesthetics
- Marginal gender and sexuality
- The cultural consumption of the margin
- The commodification of the margin
- The sustainability of the margin
- The marginality/centrality of violence and trauma
- The porousness and indeterminacy of borders
- Victim and/or perpetrator: contesting paradigms
- Margin envy/trauma envy
- The margin as the unrepresentable
- Marginal spectrality/marginal uncanniness
- The sublimity of the margin
- Marginal means/tools/strategies vs. central themes/issues/concerns
- Marginal politics, political margins
- Rewriting the margins

EASA also encourages contributions from New Zealand Studies within the conference theme, and welcomes proposals from authors to read from their works at the writers' evening and from translators to participate in a round table on translating Australian literature into European languages.

All delegates of the Bordeaux conference will have to be paid-up members of EASA. The membership fee is 40,00 EUR (discounts possible at 20,00 EUR). For all information about this you may contact the association's acting treasurer, Professor Dominique Sève (dominique.seve@univ-lehavre.fr), or consult our website: www.easa-australianstudies.net

Please send a 200-word abstract attached as either a Word or PDF document together with a brief biographical note to susan.barrett@u-bordeaux3.fr by **February 28th 2013**.