BOOK REVIEW

Clinging to the Wreckage

Noel King
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

This review indicates the extent to which these two books survey similar intellectual-academic fields and contribute to a current discussion of the state of play in global neoliberal university contexts. It also considers some specificities of the history of the emergence and consolidation of cultural studies in Australian tertiary education from the 1970s to now, and cultural studies’ relation to English, and media studies.

I work in Australia, but over my career I have studied, taught or occupied visiting positions in the UK, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Austria. Much of what I have to say I hold to be true of cultural studies as a field, and not just of the Australian (or British or American) iteration of it. (Turner 2012, pp. 4-5)

I use ‘media and cultural studies’ as a portmanteau term for research and teaching that cover a multitude of cultural and communication machines and processes … Television resembles computers; books are read on telephones; newspapers are written through clouds; films are streamed via rental companies; … genres and gadgets that once were separate are linked. (Miller 2012a, p. 95)


It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything should be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Every inch
of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn’t get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there. (Dickens 1834 [1971], p. 48; p. 304).

I

The reason for discussing these books together is that very frequently they touch on similar issues. At various moments in his excellent, timely analysis of the place cultural studies has come to occupy in international university education Graeme Turner mentions how changed the circumstances are now in the Australian tertiary education sector from the time twenty-five years earlier when he was busy setting up cultural studies as a degree programme at universities from coast to shining coast, from Curtin University in the west to Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland in the east. At those moments when his discussion describes the contemporary neoliberal Australian university system his comments connect with the burden of Toby Miller’s argument in Blow up the Humanities, his wide-ranging, witty contribution to the increasing body of writing analysing the dilemma currently confronting humanities courses trapped in a neoliberal educational environment. Miller’s analysis mixes pugnacity with charm and a recent piece from him in The Australian’s ‘Higher Education’ section gives a good indication of what attitudes he espouses in this book (Miller 2012b, p. 33). Chris Lorenz’s wonderful article in Critical Inquiry on the triumph of US neoliberalism and New Public Management in the university systems of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Sweden should be read alongside these two books (Lorenz 2012).

There is another happy coincidence in linking these books: in the period from 2008 to 2010 Toby Miller was paid to come in once a year from Los Angeles to assist Graeme Turner with his Federation Fellowship on ‘Television in the post-broadcast era: old media, new media and the formation of national communities’. As Turner explained:

I’ve got him coming across once a year as part of the Federation Fellowship I was awarded. That’s one of the things you can do with that money. It really does enable you to do the things that look like luxuries in normal programs. But I just get Toby to come across to have a chat, literally, about the work, and it’s been fantastically useful. It has also meant that he now has a sort of watching brief on the project. So he’ll send me things that occur to him. You know how much he reads; nobody reads as much as Toby. He consumes an enormous amount of web based material too, just amazing. And at two in the morning his time, he’ll send me an email saying you ought to look at this web site, it’s got some really good stuff. So he’s just been a real resource for the project. And it’s costing me about five or six grand a year to bring him out. It’s really bugger all. (Turner in King 2010, p. 155)
Turner’s book is written from the perspective of one who ‘is a card-carrying member of the first generation of cultural studies scholars’ (p. 5). I count myself among that generation and indeed, when Graeme Turner left Curtin University in 1986 to take up a position at QUT, and later the University of Queensland, in Brisbane, where he remains, I was offered the job he vacated in the West. I left the (then) South Australian College of Advanced Education, Magill Campus at which I had been teaching with Gunther Kress, Stephen Muecke, Barry Reay, Phil Almond and others in a BA Communication Studies set up in 1980 by Gunther Kress. As it happens Kress initially had tried to establish a BA Cultural Studies based on the UK (postgraduate) model of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies but was unable to get this degree approved, whereas a degree with ‘Communication’ in its name was able to be established. At this time the Birmingham Centre offered itself as a model to a range of places. Staff in the Bachelor of Communication Studies degree at New South Wales Institute of Technology (later University of Technology, Sydney) seem to have been inspired by the Birmingham Centre’s 1970s roneoed ‘Occasional Papers’ to generate their own occasional ‘Media Papers’, and collective authorship was adopted at places like Griffith university (in the production of audio-visual counter-texts) and elsewhere in Australian tertiary education. Given an ongoing debate about the relation of departments of English to Cultural Studies—at some Australian universities cultural studies breaks away from an English department to establish itself as a distinct entity, at others it is incorporated into an English department, affording, among other things, a new suite of textual objects—it is worth recalling that the influential Birmingham Centre was founded on monies paid by a grateful Penguin Press after the role played by Hoggart as a defence witness in the 1960 Obscenity trial surrounding the publication of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (Montgomery Hyde 1990). (It is nice to see Miller record this point in his book).

Turner’s book ‘offers a personal accounting’ (p. 2) and that is appropriate from someone whose career has seen him move around Australia establishing degrees in cultural studies, almost always against internal academic opposition. A particularly appealing aspect of his discussion is the way it regularly places the position of recent arrivals into the Australian university system who are hoping to work in the area of cultural studies—‘younger researchers entering the field’—against the situation that obtained when cultural studies was first being established: ‘(T)here is much greater professional pressure on these young people than I faced at the beginning of my career’ (p. 5).

II

Turner’s book has a strong discussion of the institutional and intellectual strengths and weaknesses of being considered a ‘discipline’ as opposed to being ‘interdisciplinary’ or regarded
(positively or negatively) as an ‘undiscipline’. Here the analysis might have mentioned an early moment in various universities’ excited embrace of cross-disciplinary perspectives. The distinction I have in mind is between ‘interdisciplinarity’ and ‘multidisciplinarity’. The latter would describe the Essex Sociology of Literature volumes published from conferences held annually at the University of Essex in Colchester, attended by people such as Edward Said and Pierre Macherey, and organised by local staff like Peter Hulme and the late Francis Barker. The strategy was to settle on an annus mirabilis (1848; 1936) and gather synchronic perspectives on the literature, politics, and culture of that time by applying the distinct disciplinary viewpoints of literary studies, comparative literature, sociology, history, and so on. That strategy readily translated into a way of teaching undergraduate courses, and Griffith University (and perhaps Murdoch and Deakin) practised some version of this. At Griffith University a major called ‘Society and the Media’ included, across any given semester, lectures from historians, film studies academics, sociologists and philosophers, all targeting an agreed, delimited range of texts and issues.

At the same time, elsewhere, there was a relentless critique of disciplinary thought and I associate the concept of ‘interdisciplinarity’ with an attitude that wanted to apply disciplinary modes of analysis but do so in a manner which interrogated the underpinnings of those modes of analysis; like doing historiography while practising history. Here I would include debates within Marxism during the 1970s and 1980s, the flourishing for a brief time of journals like Theoretical Practice (and later History of the Present), and some articles in Economy and Society.

Most disciplines went through a period of reimagining themselves at this time. Think of the work of historian James Clifford (Clifford 2003) and Clifford Geertz in Anthropology, the impact of Terry Eagleton’s best-selling book Literary Theory: An Introduction (Eagleton 1983) on international literary studies, some volumes in the Methuen ‘New Accents’ series, such as Catherine Belsey’s Critical Practice (Belsey 1980)—sufficiently influential in course- adoption terms to get her invited to lecture in India, among other places—and Dick Hebdige’s Subculture: The Meaning of Style (Hebdige 1979), the book whose vigorous sales saved the New Accents series from ending shortly after Terry Hawkes had begun it. (Hebdige later says, around the time of his collection Hiding in the Light, that he sometimes wondered whether material he saw on Biff cards, or read in The Face might have had an origin in art and graphic design students listening to his and others’ lectures on popular culture).

During the stages of renovation of a discipline there are many acts of reaching out to draw on neighbouring disciplines, and the US journal Representations was begun precisely to allow this to happen, and to satisfy the then-urgings of some University of California, Berkeley staff to have an institutional space within which a rigorous merging of
disciplinary perspectives could be played out. More often than not these interconnections are relatively short-lived.\(^1\) Turner’s discussion of cultural studies sees it as having made a fundamental, enabling contribution to ‘the “new humanities” interdisciplinary fields that have opened up in the past 20-30 years’ (p. 28), and he is passionate about wanting people now to understand ‘just how liberating it was to be relieved of one’s oppressive subjection to the discipline of an academic field’ (p. 44). On this issue of being lorded over by disciplinary knowledge and those who possessed it, it would be hard to better Raymond Williams’s remark, made in *Politics and Letters*, about his experience of being a Welsh undergraduate at Cambridge university, sitting in a tutorial and being ‘continually found out in ignorance, found out in confusion’ (Williams 1979, p. 51). Ian Hunter’s years of analysing the ‘literary gaze’, identifying the contours of the ‘seminar of conscience’, breaking down the regimes in place for ‘learning the literature lesson’ possibly derive from his having been drummed out of his Honours year in a Leavisite English department in Melbourne for the crimes of reading William Empson and Roland Barthes, and for presenting as a student more interested in matters philosophical than matters English literary. Hunter’s payback came in a series of brilliant articles following the publication of his book *Culture and Government* (Hunter 1988).

### III

If you sit in on these so-called remedial classes, you perceive the institutional incapacity to cope with the crossroads of race, gender and class—even when the teacher has the best will in the world—to come to grips with the actual play of the choice of English as tongue in the imagination of these working-class new immigrant survival artists (Spivak 2003, p. 11).

Even areas which at first blush would seem to be safely involved with more than one discipline are found to be in need of renovation. In *Death of a Discipline*, the 2003 book derived from her Wellek Library lectures in Critical Theory delivered in 2000 at the University of California, Irvine, Gayatri Spivak claims that since 1992, ‘three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the discipline of Comparative Literature has been looking to renovate itself’ (2003, p. 1). Spivak places Comparative Literature in relation to Area Studies and Cultural Studies and claims Area Studies was established ‘to secure US power in the Cold War’, whereas Comparative Literature in the US finds its origins in ‘European intellectuals fleeing “totalitarian” regimes’ (p. 3) Spivak relates the rise of ‘Cultural and Postcolonial studies … to the 500 per cent increase in Asian immigration in the wake of Lyndon Johnson’s reform of the Immigration Act of 1965’ (2003, p. 3).\(^2\) At one point Area Studies is contrasted to Cultural Studies, uncovering a polarity in which Area Studies ‘exhibit quality and rigor … combined with openly conservative or ‘no’ politics’ whereas ‘Academic “Cultural Studies”’ is ‘a metropolitan phenomenon originating on the radical fringes of national language departments’ exhibiting ‘metropolitan
language-based presentist and personalist political convictions, often with visibly foregone conclusions that cannot match the political cunning of Area Studies at their best’ (p. 8). Spivak’s argument stages imagined battles and imagines possible overlaps-alliances among Area Studies, a revamped Comparative Literary Studies, and Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies is glossed as ‘monolingual, presentist, narcissistic, not practiced enough in close reading even to understand that the mother tongue is actively divided’ (p. 20). Other academic-institutional entities appear in her pages, for example, ‘Ethnic Studies’, and a ‘liberal multiculturalism’ whose demands must be resisted by ‘the new Comparative Literature’ lest it define itself solely in relation to the terms offered by ‘liberal multiculturalism’. Rather, the new Comparative Literature must ‘persistently and repeatedly undermine and undo the definitive tendency of the dominant to appropriate the emergent’ (p. 100).³

IV

Undergraduate teaching programmes abound, postgraduate students do too; cultural studies research centres have proliferated and prospered; cultural studies academics find themselves on national academic committees, research funding assessment panels, government advisory boards, and in the media (Turner 2012, p. 20).

Turner’s lucid, succinct account of the successful institutionalisation of cultural studies acknowledges various disquiets attendant on that success. The place of cultural studies in the UK, Hong Kong and Taiwan is glossed, the success of cultural studies in the US in the 1980s and 1990s is described, and the following sensible, site-specific advice proposed: ‘It is important to recognize that the institutional histories of cultural studies in the various places it has been established are highly contingent upon the regulatory, political, disciplinary and funding frameworks in place there at the time’ (p. 24). When Turner says that university administrators have been ‘killing off the disciplinary department or School in order to remove them as obstacles to the mergers, restructures and administrative rearrangements that have been the preferred strategies of neoliberal higher education and funding regimes’ (p. 46), it is a grim reminder of the power of non-intellectual, non-academic, administrative intervention to achieve intellectual dismantlings that no academic book or article could hope to bring about, however severe its critique.

While on this matter of names and disciplines I should add that I have long argued that the relation of cultural studies to media studies and communication studies in Australia is one whereby, depending on the institution selected, a very similar curriculum could be encountered even though the named degrees were in Communication Studies, Media Studies or Cultural Studies.

Turner’s book is very good on the double narrative of the direction and achievement of cultural studies in Australia. He regards a central
achievement of cultural studies as the rescuing of ‘the media, contemporary popular culture and everyday life from the neglect (or, worse, from the distaste) of the traditional or established disciplines’ (p. 34). But once cultural studies succeeds in carving out a distinctive space for itself within tertiary education, the familiar debates start about whether it has lost its cutting edge, become central rather than marginal, conservative rather than radical. Turner moves across these issues thoughtfully, especially when he describes the contemporary Australian neoliberal university environment with its attendant loss of any idea of tertiary education as a public good. To offer delicate calculations about the pedagogical-intellectual-research cost-benefit aspects of being a discipline or some other entity is complicated now by the proliferation of the view that everything within the sector is something to be sold and cost-centred. Turner notes that the argument in favour of allowing more people to attend university—‘(on the face of it, a straightforwardly progressive idea)’—has come:

at the cost of the slow embrace of a crudely vocationalist instrumentalism. This instrumentalism has participated in the production of a version of the university in which the primary purpose of the acquisition of an education is to equip the individual for employment. (p. 163)

Turner has a lovely moment when he writes:

Even though universities these days talk of themselves ceaselessly as businesses, there are many ways in which, even now and despite their best efforts, this is just not true. One of these is the extent to which the university remains a privileged and productive space for reflection, for theoretical development, for analysis and critique. (p. 118)

Another ‘way’ would be the evidence offered by a series of abysmal, expensive, internal university funding failures to become entrepreneurial. Anyone who has taught in the Australian university humanities sector over the last twenty-five years would know of some examples of ignorance, patronage, inefficiency and corruption on their campus. Turner regards the international tertiary educational position of the liberal arts and humanities as one that has deteriorated because they lost battles ‘against instrumentalist rationales for higher education’, and also because they experienced a:

steady decline in public and political support. ... Crudely put, once, in an earlier period few of us can now remember, the university was regarded as itself constituting a public good: it developed the potential of the nation through the civilizing and modernizing process of the generation, dissemination, and transmission of knowledge. The humanities were located at the core of that process. (p. 162)

Turner is too hardened—and successful—a university campaigner to think there is any chance of a nostalgic return to this time, and he is well aware that:
this is the conception of the humanities that produced the traditions cultural studies was established, in part, to oppose, and that went hand in hand with a regime of access that to the university that was unashamedly elitist, gendered, classed and in some cases even racialized. So, it was worth contesting. (p. 162)

One of Turner’s concerns is that the successful institutionalisation of cultural studies has seen it reproduce some of the worst features of those disciplinary configurations it challenged, becoming as ‘elitist … and as mystificatory’ (p. 8) a domain as the areas it once challenged. Based on some recent undergraduate tutoring in courses that would be regarded as cultural studies I would add a point that Turner doesn’t make: there has developed a terrible tendency to move away from using primary texts, instead setting secondary textual commentaries that give their views of the primary texts that once constituted cultural studies. So one reads a summary of aspects of the work of Roland Barthes or of Michel Foucault, of a psychoanalytic text from Freud or Lacan, one encounters a recent feminist description of Laura Mulvey’s earlier writings, survey descriptions of the work of Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, Jacques Derrida, and so on. Yet it would not be difficult to think carefully about which sections of those primary texts to set in a course reader and have secondary critical elaborations, revisions, contestations available elsewhere, perhaps partly in that same booklet of set readings but otherwise available on e-reserve in the Library. If cultural studies is graduating generations of students who have read only secondary accounts of major texts and writers in the field (even allowing for the fact that occasionally some of those writers themselves become canonical), then it could not be said to be preparing students for postgraduate work in that area.

Turner says that one initial strategy of interesting students in cultural studies’ theoretical orientations was to select a set of popular cultural objects that spoke to the students’ own engagement with their popular culture. This phrase pops up when he is talking about the three years he spent involved with assessing work at Lingnan University whose students he found:

very much like the ones I started teaching in the CAE sector back in the 1970s; first generation university students, low levels of class capital, not necessarily academically gifted but passionately engaged by cultural studies’ demonstrable capacity to help them understand their own culture. (p. 87)

In his discussion of the undergraduate teaching of cultural studies in its earliest days, it is lovely to see Turner mention how talented a teacher was John Fiske and how important an institutional figure in the march of cultural studies in Australia and the United States. Many years ago, in a Meanjin article (Turner 1991), Turner mounted a similar defence of Fiske’s stature in the cultural studies field. I can endorse Turner’s opinion here, as someone who taught with John Fiske at Curtin University and benefited, along with others, from his generosity.
Near the end of his book Turner finds promise in a ‘growing pattern of Western interest in and genuine collaboration with Asian-based scholars and intellectuals’ (p. 141), and foresees possible international collaborations with cultural studies work being undertaken in Asia and in Latin America. That seems a good call. Toby Miller has for some time now been teaching short-term in Mexico City and in Colombia and his publications (not least Blow Up the Humanities) reflect this expanded range of political, cultural and pedagogic experience.

IV

In the 1990s, Stephen Muecke and I were teaching within UTS’s highly ranked Bachelor of Communication Studies when a series of administrative interventions into curricula offerings took place, restructuring the School of Humanities. On each occasion UTS became perhaps the sole example of an educational institution at which the embrace of the word ‘culture’ meant offering fewer rather than more undergraduate units. It was an exercise in hacking rather than growing—whereas at the University of Newcastle, an amalgamation that generated a ‘School of English and Communication Studies’ soon saw ‘English’ dropped from the departmental name. At UTS Muecke was quick to identify the consequences of reconfiguring undergraduate credit point obligations in degree paths such that ‘production units’ came to constitute two-thirds of a degree, with ‘studies units’ dropping back to constitute one-third of such degrees. His phrase for this rejigging was ‘the TAFE-isation of the University’ and he was right, and has been shown to be correct across a great many other Australian campuses since that initial observation. Any broadly Humanities-style degree that includes some mixture of film-TV production, radio-sonic production, digital media, convergent media, journalism, public relations, and latterly, but now consolidating strongly at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, creative writing, is able to emphasise the acquisition of production skill as the reason students should choose to go to that campus and take that degree path.  

When Turner describes a relatively recent downturn in student interest in majoring in Cultural Studies and suggests that students now are more drawn by a topic—celebrity, reality television—than a set of methodologies, he wonders what has caused this. The use of potentially off-putting, alienating flights of high theory as a new area entrenches and legitimates itself isn’t the only possible cause. It is also the case that the current Australian university environment makes it very difficult for Cultural Studies to say what its particular ‘production’ area is, whereas areas that include some combination of media production, fiction and non-fiction writing, are perfectly placed to give reassurance to anguished parents on University Open days, saying yes, our degrees will definitely help your son or daughter make their way into a professional, paid engagement with the wonderful wide world of convergent media, independent film production, the TV
industry, public relations, glossy magazines, or whatever takes their fancy.

After the internal rearrangements and re-weightings of curriculum obligation are carried out in the manner mentioned above in respect of UTS’s Communication Studies degree, an immediate consequence is that a cohort of studies academics begins to feel uneasy, wondering how secure its future employment is, and how many further incursions will be made into distinctive areas of teaching and academic-research expertise as the TAFE-isation process continues. And here we should factor in those sporadic criticisms from the fourth estate about the allegedly wilder ‘extremes’ of university humanities work, just as journalists are quick to pillory sundry projects that receive Arts Council funding whenever these things are announced. Perhaps recent retrenchments, targeted and untargeted redundancies at Fairfax Media, and elsewhere have tempered the tendency of the old school journo who embodies the clichéd craft traditions of the real world (aka school of hard knocks with ink in their veins) to ridicule tertiary education institutions. The prospect of being sacked concentrates the mind wonderfully.

The problematic status of Cultural Studies in respect of being able to demonstrate its social utility to an imagined public, announcing in a persuasive manner how it imparts a set of marketable skills, finds a parallel response within an academic world which increasingly defines itself in terms of those limited understandings of what constitutes skill-acquisition. Turner is clear about the degree to which the contemporary university is a very different institution from that which obtained in the 1970s and early 1980s. But even then there were signs of what could come. In the early 1980s, when we were establishing the BA Communication Studies in Adelaide some established staff at that Magill CAE (teachers of early childhood education and philosophy of education) seized on a Patrick Cook cartoon from that era’s National Times in which one character admonishes another, ‘Speak semiotics you fool!’ They pasted copies of it on their office doors, presumably hoping that their Dean, Gunther Kress, a card-carrying Social Semiotician, and a then youngish Lecturer B Stephen Muecke, with his background in linguistics, French, anthropology, and Aboriginal oral storytelling, would be disconcerted by this act. Little did they realise it was more likely to provide extemporary fodder for the next lecture given by those newer staff members.

V

That debunking attitude persists inside and outside the Australian academy, although not now with a misunderstood conception of semiotics as its target. There is also a high degree of ‘eftsu opportunism’ evident in various universities whereby, say, a language department that is finding it difficult to recruit students in suitable neoliberal numbers will offer a unit or two in French or German film
and/or TV, and will open that unit to students not majoring in those languages, allowing them to submit essays in English. Such survival manoeuvres cannot be decried but the system which requires departments to perform this kind of financial tap dance deserves total denunciation. As Michael Wood’s piece in *London Review of Books* asks, ‘Must we pay for Sanskrit?’ (Wood 2011). This was Wood’s contribution to a conference sponsored by the *London Review of Books, New York Review of Books* and Fritt Ord, held on 26 November, 2011 at King’s College, London. *LRB* subsequently published two pieces from that event, Wood’s and another from Oxford-based Keith Thomas (Thomas 2011), each an elegant and worrying probing of the implications of the implementation of The Browne Report in UK Higher Education. As many would remember, world television carried images of the riots in London associated with protests against these proposed reforms.\(^6\) Nick Clegg later would say publicly that the decision to increase university tuition fees was a mistake, something he regretted, but of course it was not a decision he looked to rescind. Many of the comments from Wood, Thomas, and Stefan Collini (Collini 2012) apply to the current Australian context, although I don’t see any eminent Australian cultural institution hurrying to run a weekend conference to contribute to the wider UK and US debates on this topic. Thomas mentions the British government’s commitment to ‘the notion of the university system as a market, driven by economic considerations’ and describes the current university’s ‘oppressive micro-management which has grown up in response to government requirements’.

Before settling into his current position at Princeton University Michael Wood had many years’ experience of Cambridge University and the University of Exeter in England, Columbia University in New York, and the university system in Mexico City. His piece recalls his student experience of higher education in England (‘a grammar school boy who went to Cambridge in the 1950s’) at a time when:

> Higher education was … what we now call ‘cultural capital’ – and far more closely connected to culture than to capital. That sense of education as a ‘public good’ is itself of inestimable value and makes everything possible: music college as well as agricultural college, free inquiry, disinterested curiosity, engineering school, degrees in dead languages. (Wood 2011)

It isn’t difficult to trace, in broad terms, an immediate prehistory to this international situation and of course the continuing impact of the GFC/GEC is crucial, as is the often elided debate about whether tertiary education constitutes a public (common) or a private good. In Australia this battle is long lost. In 2001, US academic Marjorie Garber published an ‘analysis, an intervention, and a credo’ (Garber 2001, p. xi) directed at

> the various attacks against the academic profession and various feuds within it – the disparagement of amateurs by professionals and professionals by amateurs, the desire to keep the disciplines
pure, the accusation that academic writing is, unlike the language of the real world, jargon-ridden and incomprehensible. (Garber 2001, pp. ix-x)

When one places recent books from two other US academics, Louis Menand’s *The Marketplace of Ideas* (2010), and Martha Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit* (2010) alongside Harvard University President Drew Faust’s 2010 address to the Royal Irish Academy and her earlier comments in 2008 and 2009 on the place of the university in a world drastically reorganised by the GFC/GEC, and also alongside the devastating information contained in Berkeley professor Richard Walker’s *New Left Review* article on the state of play in the California education system (Walker 2010, pp. 5-30), it quickly becomes evident that the current times are dark indeed for the Arts and Humanities in the UK, USA, and Australia. Add to that the recent flurry of publications such as Benjamin Ginsberg’s *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters* (2011), Richard Arum’s *Academically Adrift* (2011), Mark C. Taylor’s *Crisis on Campus* (2010), Jonathan R. Cole’s *The Great American University, Its Rise, Its Pre-eminence, Its Indispensable National Role, Why it must be Protected* (2010), and one sees the ongoing response to the crisis. In writing his contribution to this debate, Miller formed the view that the best recent books on the topic were Gaye Tuchman’s *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University* (2009), and Chris Newfield’s *Unmaking the Public University* (2008), and his earlier *Ivy and Industry* (2003).

VI

At one point in his survey Turner alludes to the Berkeley Free Speech Movement in the 1960s and recalls the ‘brief burst of interest in establishing “Free Universities”: informal and unaccredited counterculture alternatives to the official universities explicitly set up to challenge the disciplines’ control over the content of undergraduate curricula’ (p. 43). He recalls one such entity operating at Sydney University when he was an undergraduate, and reading about that made me wonder whether this also helped inform the course he taught on popular culture at Mitchell CAE in 1972 which ‘covered rock music, ’60s film, underground magazines, contemporary fiction, poetry—in those days, there was actually an underground but highly popular poetry movement coming out of San Francisco—so there was all that stuff’ (Turner, in King 2010, pp. 143-4). His mention of the ‘Free Universities’ also prompted me to think of such US tertiary education venues as the University of California, Santa Cruz (and its celebrated ‘History of Consciousness’ programme), Goddard College (African American fiction writer Walter Mosley a graduate!), Reed College in Portland, Oregon (where a young Steve Jobs smoked dope and sat in on philosophy lectures) and Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington State; maybe Bard College and Brown University in the north-east US, all places that in different ways might be thought to continue what Black Mountain College was trying to do in an earlier era, in the 1930s and 1940s when ‘its visionary
experiment in education and the arts’ had a ‘tremendous impact on American culture’ (Benfey 2012, p. 13). Having seen a wave of ‘Gradgrindism’ break so broadly over the Australian university education sector from the moment former West Australian, Rhodes scholar, and Prime Minister Bob Hawke let loose the dog of John Dawkins, his Perth-based parliamentary colleague, there can be nothing wrong in remembering with fondness those times of secondary and tertiary education before ‘My School’ became ‘My University’, when hippie high schools which taught more music than grammar were supplemented by forms of Steiner-Schools-for-teenagers as some newer universities tried to escape the constraining academic-intellectual disciplinary systems that obtained at that time. The fact that these small forms of pedagogical escape must be transitory doesn’t mean they can’t be returned to and re-tweaked. Miller’s book, while not at all endorsing my anarcho-hippie educational reveries and wishes, offers a compressed discussion of where humanities education now finds itself and how best it might reconfigure itself to become a significant presence in the tertiary education future.

Miller argues that there are two humanities in the Unites States. Humanities One inhabits ‘fancy private universities’, is ‘venerable and powerful and tends to determine how the sector is discussed in public’ (Miller 2012a, p. 1). Humanities Two is located in ‘everyday state schools, which focus more on job prospects’ (2012a, pp. 1-2). Humanities One holds sway rhetorically while Humanities Two ‘dominates numerically’. By the end of his book he has argued that the way forward is to combine these two strands, ‘blow up’ in the sense of ‘inflate’ as much as ‘destroy’.

When he discusses the extent to which the US tertiary education system is shifting costs onto students and away from governments, Miller could be describing the Australian system. He quotes his former NYU colleague, Andrew Ross, on how US universities follow the same trail as subcontracting in industry: the casualization of routine instruction followed by the creation of a permatemps class on short term contracts and the preservation of a smaller core of full-timers, who are crucial to the brand prestige of the collegiate name. Downward salary pressure and eroded job security are the inevitable upshot. (Ross quoted in Miller 2012a, p. 13)

Both Turner’s and Miller’s books were written and published before the flurry of the recent announcement in Australia of the imperative to move towards ‘Massive Open Online Courses’. (For some reason that phrase is always capitalised.) The stupidity surrounding this argument has been impressive, even by the standards we in Australia have been setting ourselves and others. As represented in newspaper and television discussion there has been no recognition of how particular even a small configuration of an English literature curriculum could be in a country like the US which has to be so aware of Native American, African American, Latino and Asian engagements with a set of
supposedly canonical texts. The online fantasy of bringing in a humanities curriculum from a Boston university, to be tended by part-time, casualised, Australian academics surfing the latest version of the information superhighway is grotesque. Leaving aside questions of copyright clearance (it can be brought in but can it be bought in?), the work situations of the academics delivering it (are they surfing the wave or being dumped by it?, to adopt one of Miller’s metaphors) even a moment’s embrace of the once derided idea of ‘cultural nationalism’ would tell us that there is an Australian, New Zealand, Scottish, Welsh, Irish perspective on things, and that any localised educational institution (within those momentarily homogenised national configurations) modifies its received cargo cult object all the time in important and compelling ways. It would be interesting to see what Turner and Miller made of this recent beat-up about Massive Overseas Online Courses.

Miller identifies ‘another corporate tendency’ as ‘transferring the cost of running schools away from governments and towards students, who are increasingly regarded as customers investing in human capital’ (p. 23). For Miller, the contemporary US education system ‘puts children of the working-class into generational debt and wastes millions of dollars on anti-educational sports programs’ (p. 26). Both Miller and Turner are critical of the rise of the ‘creative industries’ paradigm in Australian and UK universities. In Australia the most successful carrier of this mantle has been QUT under the guidance of Stuart Cunningham and later, for a while, John Hartley. In his discussion of this issue Miller draws on the earlier UK moments of Richard Hoggart’s _The Uses of Literacy_ (Hoggart 1957) and C. P. Snow’s celebrated discussion of the sciences versus the humanities as the debate between ‘two cultures’ (1969 [1959]), and it is good to see these older texts redeployed in this way. Inevitably, Richard Florida’s writing is mentioned and that too has a point in an Australian context which saw a former NSW Labor Government seize on Florida’s book _The Rise of the Creative Class_ (Florida 2012 [2002]), and when the current Australian Labor Party Prime Minister has said in public that no Australian entering the workforce can expect to remain in the same job for life; rather he or she should expect to be involved in at least three different occupations. This was some distance from Florida’s portrait of a mobile creative class deciding which US mid-sized town to settle in, based on how vibrant are its cultural offerings. As Miller puts it, ‘The revival of such cities, Florida argues, is driven by a magic elixir of tolerance, technology, and talent, as measured by same-sex households, broadband connections and higher degrees in postindustrial regions’ (p. 77).

In another of his chapters Miller analyses ‘the mundane (and dire) state of humanities publishing’ (p. 45) as another sign of the embattled circumstances of universities now. This connects to a much broader, ongoing argument concerning the collisions and contradictions of an academic system that favours the single-authored scholarly monograph as a calling card for a tenured academic position; yet university presses no longer publish as many
monographs and books derived from doctoral theses as they once did, in part because the sales for such publications are abysmal, in part because university Libraries have long since reversed a situation in which (once upon a time) 80% of a Library's budget was devoted to purchases of scholarly monographs and 20% to the purchasing of academic journals (Walters 2004). As aggregated publisher-providers of (mainly but not exclusively) Science journals gouge Library budgets mercilessly, 20% now goes to monographs, and university presses increasingly have to look to trade presses as a model for being a cost-efficient part of the neoliberal university. And yes, it is as strange as it seems, university presses need to sell in numbers that prove they are more than paying their way, as opposed to an earlier era that regarded academic work very rarely as something that would sell in trade press numbers.

VII

To conclude I will move to the realm of popular music and anecdotes. Graeme Turner plays in a Brisbane band called ‘The Pedestrians’. It is hard for anyone with a love of soul music not to see Turner’s book title as alluding to the great song (I have ‘The Temptations’ version in mind), ‘What becomes of the broken hearted?’ (also the title of a New Zealand novel; Duff 1996). In Perth in 1988 Toby Miller kindly gave a seminar (two hours) in a course I was running called ‘Exile, Education and the Road’. A colleague (Barbara Milech) had suggested the title as a succinct expression of a course that would focus on road poems, road novels, road movies, and road songs, and where of course a river could be a road, a trail, a highway. Toby’s presentation covered the musical heritage of this tradition, and after he had spoken for an hour, and played some songs from a carefully organised audiotape of his own meticulous compilation, we broke for coffee and some relief from our intellectualising, chilling a little. When we re-entered the room the audiotape was gone. Such was the admiration for Toby’s presentation that the sincerest form of flattery had moved beyond imitation to become theft.

Ian Hunter is the drummer for ‘The Pedestrians’, and as a young man in Shepparton, Victoria, was a member of a Hoadley ‘Battle of the Sounds’ finalist group called Th e Modes. In a recent ‘Symposium on the Humanities’ held at the University of Queensland to mark his retirement, Hunter gave a paper in which he described the historical moment of the Humanists’ notion of the Humanities as comprised of ‘a small group of the arts – centrally grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, poetry, history, ethics’ (Hunter 2011). In the UK in the 1980s, after he was sacked from Cambridge, Colin MacCabe took a Chair of English at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, and was insistent that any act of reading should be accompanied by a parallel act of textual composition as the best way to assist undergraduate understanding of the imbricated activities of producing and consuming cultural texts-artefacts. Toby Miller says that:
if the humanities are primarily concerned with explaining how meaning is made, they must consider the wider political economy, and not simply in terms of culture as a reflective or refractive index but as part of that economy, because culture is the creature, inter alia, of ‘corporations, advertising, government, subsidies, corruption, financial speculation, and oligopoly.

Changing the current doxa of the humanities in this direction could enrich students’ and professors’ knowledge base, increase their means of intervention in cultural production, counter charges of social and commercial irrelevance, challenge the safe houses of interdisciplinarity and disciplinarity, and make the field’s citizenship and social-movement claims more credible. (Miller 2012a, p. 107)

In his concluding chapter Miller describes universities as versions of what Foucault called ‘heterotopias’, or ‘spaces where a better future can be represented’ (p. 118). Miller argues for a merging of his characterisations of Humanities One and Humanities Two whereby the ‘philosophical ideas of One’ meet the ‘institutional ideas of Two’ (p. 123). After finding ‘common cause’ they would ‘reach out to colleagues and fellow travellers’ to generate ‘a new, refurbished, collectivist humanities’ that can persuade ‘social movements, workers, and policy makers’ (p. 123) to come on board.

In May 2013 a small group of Media, Music and Cultural Studies academics from Macquarie University will hold a two day conference on ‘Health and the Contemporary Australian University’. They are hoping to get at many of the ways in which neoliberal and New Public Management practices of the sort described by the University of Amsterdam’s Chris Lorenz are demoralising and stressing out workaday Australian academics who deliver undergraduate curricula, supervise postgraduates, perform committee work and academic-community outreach, while scrambling to publish and attract ARC funding. Lorenz has accepted an invitation to speak at this conference and as its organisation firms up I’m sure other speakers will draw on some of the considerations put forward in these books from Turner and Miller.

In 2012, Don Watson described developments underway at RMIT as ‘nothing other than managerial trash’ and added that if he were working at such an institution he would quit (quoted in Coslovich and Preiss 2012). But there’s the rub. Very, very few academics working in Australian universities have that option; hence the importance of trying to make forceful, compelling, public statements about the wrecked state of humanities tertiary education in Australia. We must wait to see if some recent claims from VCs at Murdoch University and the University of Adelaide do in fact see a walking away from the current strategy of misplaced investment and managerialist grind down. At the moment I’m sure there are many humanities academics in Australia well below retirement age who would gladly down tools and stroll off campus singing the lyrics to Jagger’s-Richard’s ‘No Expectations’: ‘Take me to the station/And put me on a train/I’ve got
no expectations/To pass through here again’. But to align Turner’s book title again with some lyrics from its soul music twin, the campuses of these academics are so many ‘lands of broken dreams’, and in the complete absence of any credible options, somehow ‘they’ve got to find/Some kind of peace of mind’. So thinking of ways that would interest them (intellectually-pedagogically) in reconfiguring the place of the humanities in Australian universities is really crucial at the moment, and holding conferences of the sort forthcoming from the Macquarie University School of Arts academic enclave is one way to try to go forward.

Noel King recently retired (October 2012) from Macquarie University. He took the train home.

Notes

1 In the case of Representations, it was noted by the participant editorial members that they eventually retreated back into the disciplinary configurations from which they had come.

2 Spivak refers to the Report of the Mayor’s Task Force on the City University of New York undertaken in 1998 to explore the question, ‘What is English?: Literary Studies in a Public Urban University’. That university had been faulted for having a preponderance (87%) of its undergraduates in remedial English classes. The Report noted that after Johnson lifted the quota system in 1965, ‘During the 1990s the white population of New York city declined by 19.3%, while the black, Hispanic, and Asian populations have risen by 5.2%, 19.3%, and 53.5%, respectively’ (2003, p. 11).

3 That short detour via the specificity of Spivak’s instance of arguing for a renovation of the area within which she works in the US and international tertiary education systems was occasioned by my reading Turner and Miller’s references to ‘Area Studies’ in their books.

4 I also spent some days with him during his years at Wisconsin, Madison. I remember driving with him through deep winter nights as he went from Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he lived, to teach his courses at Madison. Audio-books of Stacy Keach reading a Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler novel accompanied us on the drive.

5 At UTS it was Muecke who in the early 1990s established, against opposition from some UTS staff, first a Master’s Degree in Creative Writing and soon after a DCA, which saw writers such as Amanda Lohrey and Glenda Adams employed to teach this new area.

References


King, N 2010, ‘Interview with Professor Graeme Turner, Univ. of Queensland, November 9, 2007’, *Television and New Media*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 143-56.


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