

RESEARCH artefact

School of Arts & Sciences, UNDA Sydney, 2020 Issue: 1

Research Roundup

Recent staff publications and creative works

Lego media

"In LEGO media, irony is all-pervasive. Irony, or the fluctuation of meaning between oppositional points, typically generates a rich multiplicity of meanings – but this is not the case in recent LEGO movies and videogames. For example, while LEGO films demonstrate an acute, BuzzFeed-like awareness of popular culture as they jump ironically from one reference to another, their ubiquitous use of irony leads to the flattening of meaning, rather than its multiplicity. By way of a close, formal engagement with LEGO films and videogames [this chapter] examines how LEGO's privileging of the list as an aesthetic form ultimately serves to negate irony's potential as bearer of critical meaning."

Ari Mattes, "Everything Is Awesome When You're Part of a List: The Flattening of Distinction in Post-Ironic LEGO Media", in *Cultural Studies of Lego: More Than Just Bricks*, edited by Rebecca C. Hains and Sharon R. Mazzarella, 73–95. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Vile violence?

"Late in 2016, a news story broke of a 'porn-sharing site' on which over 2000 sexual images of Australian teen girls, from over 70 high schools, were uploaded without their consent. News media characterised the website as 'vile' and 'depraved'. However, the extent to which the actions of the site-users constituted a form of sexual violence remained opaque in the reporting. This paper examines the coverage of this news story as a case study to explore the ways expanding scholarly and activist understandings of sexual violence in the digital age are—and are not—reflected in news reporting on this case."

Denise Buiten, "It's 'vile' but is it violence? A case study analysis of news media representations of non-consensual sexual image-sharing", *Feminist Media Studies* (2020).

Miss Haversham's Rage

"Miss Havisham is a spectral spinster figure that haunts the western imagination, an emblem of an ostensibly 'unjustified' and 'unjustifiable' female rage, a repository for masculine fears and fantasies about women, age, sexuality, and power. This article examines the shifting visions of Miss Havisham as an object of horror in film, fashion, kitsch, on the internet, and, more recently, as a revisionary figure of female resistance in Tony Jordan's television series, *Dickensian*."

Camilla Nelson, "Miss Havisham's Rage: Imagining the 'Angry Woman' in Adaptations of Dickens' Famous Character", *Adaptation*, 27 December 2019.

Water and devotion

"Historically, Venetians were considered one of the most successful and sophisticated seafaring people of the later Middle Ages. From the site's very earliest origins at Rivoalto, the historical record shows that Venetians were fisherfolk and traders and thus dependent on the sea. Slowly they moved to control it, becoming ingenious shipbuilders and engineers, competent navigators and powerful imperialists. On the surface, late-medieval Venetians appear to be a unique species, both at one with and in control of the sea. The hagiographical and devotional record however suggests that the Venetians had a much more precarious relationship with their aquatic surroundings. This chapter aims to examine evidence not normally exploited as a source for Venetian history – hagiography and devotional history."

Karen McCluskey, "When the Fury of the Proud Sea Re-awoke: Water, Devotion and Lived Experience in Renaissance Venice", in *Lived Religion and Everyday Life in Early Modern Hagiographic Material*, edited by Jenni Kuuliala, Rose-Marie Peake & Päivi

Note: These are reduced abstracts or introductions from the publications

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The year that no one expected is finally coming to its welcome conclusion. Pandemics and fires, restructures and cancellations, Zoom and face masks, farewells to so many of our colleagues across the university. And yet while we hope for a better 2021, it nevertheless will bring its own uncertainties. What is certain is that despite all we have had another great year of research, including for staff, HDRs, postgraduates and undergraduates. And that is celebrated in this 2020 issue of *Artefact*. The issue covers research events and outcomes from late 2019 – a time of relative travel freedom that seems aeons ago – to the middle of 2020, from a beautiful reflection on Charlotte Wood’s writing residency by Emma and Adriano to an introduction to our School HDR representative, Jasper.

I hope this *Artefact* inspires you to continue with your research, even during challenging times. I hope that you and your families have a wonderful, if appropriately socially distanced, Christmas. And see you on the other side of 2020.

Enjoy the issue!

Dr Christine de Matos is a Senior Lecturer in History and the Associate Dean, Academic Development and Research.



Leftovers

“We are now in an era where fictional television storytelling is a dominant and commanding screen form, which has perhaps finally evaded its historical position as secondary to cinema. There has been a significant influx of long-form fictional content to the small screen internationally since HBO series such as *Sex and The City*, *Six Feet Under* and *The Sopranos* heralded a shift in the television world order. Yet critics and scholars have been grappling with the terms through which they discuss the intricacies of this long form craft, shifting between notions of contemporary, complex and the more subjective; quality. This article will examine Jason Mittell’s poetics of “complex television” (2015), and reconsider his observations of post-1990s television to focus on the practice of screenwriting and the concerns of the writer/creator.”

Marco Ianniello, “The Leftovers (Reheated): The Layering of Story and Character Archetypes in the Television Drama Series: *The Leftovers*”, *Comunicazioni Sociali - Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies* (2019).

Jane Austen

“Only a few years ago, nobody much liked Mary Bennet... More recently, a cultural shift – with one foot in modern era feminism and the other in Austen’s world – has given rise to a different and perhaps more nuanced reading of Mary’s character, not to mention a plethora of adaptations (books, videos and plays, memes, gifs, and other fan works) that work hard to expand Mary’s inner life and endow her with a future that is every bit as sparkling as the one that Austen conjured for her older sisters.”

Camilla Nelson, “The Mary Bennet Makeover: Postfeminist Media Culture and the Rewriting of Jane Austen’s Neglected Female Character”, *Persuasions Online* 40, no. 2 (2020).

Dancing the past

“Can modern western dance be seen by historians as a public performance of the past? This article explores this question in relation to the ballet *Spartacus*, with particular reference to its Australian contexts. Despite dance being known as a conduit to share knowledge and history in non-western cultures, many historians seem reticent to acknowledge its same potential in modern performances such as ballet and contemporary dance. Yet, as with film, there seems to be much potential to engage with dance in terms of how it interprets the past, how it communicates these interpretations to an audience, and how an audience receives that knowledge and experience.”

Christine de Matos, “Dance as Performative Public History?: A journey through *Spartacus*”, *Circa: The Journal of Professional Historians*, no. 7 (2020): 27–33. Winner of the Circa Prize for best article.

Civilian internment

“On 11 December 1942, reacting to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, British authorities arrested three Chinese women doing domestic work in the Japanese Consulate in Singapore. Along with many Japanese and other members of the Japanese empire living in Malaya and Singapore, they were taken to British India and interned for most of the Asia-Pacific War. This article explores their attempts to appeal against their wrongful internment, providing a unique and personal account of individuals fighting against wartime bureaucracy. It also taps into larger issues related to colonialism, migration, identity, war, and civilian internment, and the trying conditions of wartime incarceration.”

Christine de Matos, “Three Domestic Workers, Two Internment Camps and a War: A Journey from Singapore to British India”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 93 Part 1, no. 318 (2020): 23–42.



Rating scales

"Figural rating scales are tools used to measure male body dissatisfaction. The present review aimed to examine the design and psychometric properties of male figural rating scales and make recommendations based on findings. Relevant databases were systematically searched for studies that had developed and validated male figural rating scales. Twenty studies were included in this review. Figural rating scales differed in terms of the number of images represented and type of stimuli used (hand-drawn silhouettes, hand-drawn figures, computer-rendered figures, and photograph figures). Reliability and validity evidence varied greatly in strength across all scales."

Daniel Talbot, John Cass and Evelyn Smith, "Male Figural Rating Scales: A Critical Review of the Literature", *Behaviour Change* 37, no. 2 (2020): 59–73.

Another

"Japanese director Tsutomu Mizushima's 2012 animated television series, *Another*, presents a narrative whereby one social group's refusal to accept an unexpected death triggers an intergenerational curse. This paper takes a close reading of Mizushima's anime, showing how its narrative contends that the present—and by default the future—is not self-sufficient but instead relies upon understandings of the past. The analysis uses the lens of Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology, which opens up a space for discursive accounts of the presence of the past in the present and its influence on the future, and therefore serves as a powerful tool for interrogating questions of war memory."

Luke Beattie, "The Past is With Us and Yet to Come: A hauntological analysis of Tsutomu Mizushima's anime Series, 'Another'", *New Voices in Japanese Studies* 12 (2020): 65–79.

Creative competencies

"The World Economic Forum's (2018) report lists "creativity" as the third most important competency for the future of work. This study interviews three practitioners and three academics to investigate why creative thinking competencies are important to organizations in Australasia, and how organizations can go about nurturing these competencies. The paper takes the form of a question-and-answer report (Q&A) providing direct, verbatim quotes from the participants. Readers will be able to contrast the various views, and see how creative thinking competencies can be nurtured in traditionally non-creative roles in the organization."

Philip Dennett, "Csikszentmihalyi meets Socrates: Fostering a sense of group flow to produce creative outcomes." *Journal of Organisational Creativity*. 1,2. 23-47.



From 24 to 26 July 2020, the A&S Writing Group went on a writing retreat in North Narra-been. There may have been a stunning and distracting view, but these little invigilators were there every day to ensure everyone kept on with their writing tasks.

Photo credit: McCluskey 2020.



Could you tell us briefly about your research? What is your current focus?

My research generally focuses on body image-related issues in men, including the manifestation of body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and muscle dysmorphia. Over the past couple of years, I have been working on developing and validating novel visual clinical tools to assess body dissatisfaction and other related variables in men and women, and investigating the existence of body-related cognitive biases in individuals with eating disorder psychopathology. Recently, I have begun exploring the link between personality traits (such as different sub-categories of narcissism and perfectionism) and eating disorder symptomatology in men.

What is the cutting edge in your field and how does your work extend/relate to it?

Since the inception of mass visual media, there has been an interest in how the persistent portrayal of ideal, desirable bodies in the media impacts affects the individual and the way they feel about their own body. More recently, research has begun to investigate this 'exposure effect' in social media – a medium in which the user

Daniel Talbot

Interview with a researcher



can not only depict their own body in a certain way, but also interact with other users in a virtual space. In collaboration with a research team from Western Sydney University, I have been working on a research project to examine the interaction between the presentation of traditionally 'un-ideal' body types on social media, body dissatisfaction, and online behaviour. Preliminary results

suggest that when people are exposed to traditionally 'un-ideal' body types on social media (such as plus-sized models), they feel better about their own body. This research highlights the potential importance of portraying realistic bodies in traditional and social media in order to shift unrealistic expectations about how our bodies should look.

How has your research influenced your teaching?

There are numerous ways in which my research has influenced my teaching. I have found that, amongst many other things, the research process requires curiosity and adaptability. Similarly, I have found that a curious and adaptive, flexible approach is beneficial in teaching. Being curious about students' experience within the learning process, including what they find interesting, what works, and what doesn't, has been extremely helpful in prompting on-going informed reflection about my teaching practices. Additionally, adapting (where possible) my teaching approach based on this reflection, and the preferences and strengths of students, aids in developing what I hope is an interesting and beneficial program of study.

HDR Snapshot

"Graduations" 2020

James Graham (Masters)

Submissions and approvals

Safiya Okai-Ugbaje (PhD)

Seyi Lagoke (PhD)



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We welcome your feedback and contributions, which can be sent to philip.dennett@nd.edu.au



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Conference report

Double Dutch: Two conferences in the Netherlands

Christine de Matos

1. International Convention of Asia Scholars 11, 16-19 July 2019, Leiden, The Netherlands

2. European Labour History Network conference, 18-21 September 2019, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

In 2019, when the world was still open and inviting, I attended two conferences in the Netherlands.

The first was the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), held in July at the Universiteit Leiden. This is one of the largest international conferences for Asian Studies, held every two years. I have previously attended this conference in Malaysia and South Korea. At this one, I presented a paper “Three Chinese Maids; Two Internment Camps, and a War: Civilian Internment in British India in the Asia-Pacific War” in a panel on War and Conflict. The paper emerged out of research I have been conducting with Rowena Ward (who chaired the panel) from the University of Wollongong on the internment of civilian Japanese in British India during World War II/the Asia Pacific War. We conducted research for this in archives in India (with a small grant from the Australia India Institute) and in the National Archives in London. My paper looked at the “accidental” internment of three Chinese women (China was a British ally), who had been working for the Japanese consulate in Singapore, and their struggle to get released.

As conferences increasingly move online, which have benefits including greater equity of participation and reduced impact on the environment, it will be difficult to emulate some of the networking opportunities that arise from the live



Support for the Global Climate Strike at the ELHN Conference. Can you find me?

Photo credit: <https://social-historyportal.org/elhn/conference-2019>

version. For instance, one of my fellow panel members is the editor of a journal of Malaysian history, and suggested my paper would be of value to that journal. I had not previously considered publishing that paper (I had my mind on a different one), but decided to go ahead. I engaged in further research, wrote a more robust paper, and submitted it for full peer-review. It is now published as “Three Domestic Workers, Two Internment Camps and a War: A Journey from Singapore to British India”. A second opportunity arose when I was introduced to a scholar from Ritsumeikan University in Japan. She recently invited me to be a coeditor for a new special journal project that will look at forced migration in the Asia Pacific War – this comes out of that work on civilian internment and the forced movement of people from Singapore, Malaya and elsewhere to India.

The other missing social aspect is the quintessential conference dinner – in this case the conference committee must have had quite a few postgrads involved as it was instead a conference nightclub...complete with karaoke room, a live music room, and another with DJ and dancefloor. All in the stunning neo-renaissance Stadsgehoorzaal, built in 1891. Did I dance? No, but I

supped to the sound of music.

The second conference was the European Labour History Network conference (ELHN), held in September in Amsterdam at the International Institute of Social History. The ELHN is another conference I have attended previously in Paris, and it has a different organisational structure, made up of Working Groups who organise their sections/panels of the conference. I am part of the Military Labour History Working Group, and I presented a paper “Labour under Military Occupation: Free or Unfree?” in the panel on Free/Unfree Military Labour. I also acted as the discussant on a second panel on Military Labour.

We held our Working Group meeting at this conference, at which I was selected to be one of the coordinators. After the conference, I was contacted by an acquisitions editor at De Gruyter Oldenbourg (Berlin), who was present for my paper. She expressed an interest in publishing a book on the topic of my paper in their “Work in Global and Historical Perspective” series. If only there was more time! These examples again show the networking value of the live conference, and it will be interesting to see if these kinds of opportunities translate into the Zoom-conference.



Jasper Lloyd

Interview with an HDR student

Could you tell us briefly about your thesis?

I'm a Masters by Research student in Sociology. To be more specific, I study social movement theory (SMT), analysing the relationship between lifestyle action and social movement participation. I've chosen to use diet as a case study for this analysis, as it's a clear and concrete adjustment that people make to their daily lives, often due to ethical motivations. Many alternate dietary practices (think vegetarianism, veganism or locavores) are closely linked to broader social movements such as animal rights or environmentalism, making diet a strong fit for my research. The two main ideas that I aim to investigate are: a) whether motivations for alternate dietary practices are shifting from animal rights towards environmentalism; and b) how effective participants feel lifestyle change is as a contribution to a social movement.

How would you explain the broader significance of your research to someone outside your discipline?

I've found that there's a public debate around how best to contribute to a social (in my case, environmental) movement. On one hand is a macro level approach, aiming for legislative change through collective action, targeting the state through protests and marches. On the other hand is a smaller scale attempt to instigate social change, focusing on adjusting individual behaviours to be consistent with the values of a social movement. In my mind, these differing contributions to social change are inherently linked; a collective movement such as environmentalism falters if its participants don't lead by example. Thus, when a



movement's success is – in some senses – determined by individual action, it's incredibly important to ask: to what extent do participants feel as though their actions contribute to the movement as a whole?

What is your current focus?

Right now, I'm focusing on environmental scholarship in the hopes of adding a new dimension to my literature review. This was suggested by one of my reviewers in the research proposal stage. It's been really fascinating shifting my reading into 'hard' environmental science literature. It was a focus of mine before my Masters began, so it's been great getting back into it. My ethics application has also been recently approved so I'll be moving into data collection soon, which is really exciting!

What is cutting edge in your field and how might your work extend/relate to it?

Analysis of activism has really been focused on moments of collective mobilisation in SMT literature. While this makes sense, given that these extraordinary moments of protest are highly visible and often draw the media's

attention, a growing body of scholarship prefers to look at how participants act between these 'moments'. I often think of it in terms of a wave; protests occur at the crest, while recruitment and individual action occur in the trough. Despite being a rigid analogy, it illustrates why investigating these other aspects of a social movement are so important.

Environmental activism as a motivation for engaging in alternate dietary practices is also a relatively unexplored area. Most scholarship understands animal rights or health-based motivations as dominant, however with increasing youth participation in environmental activism, some research suggests that these motivations could be shifting. From a non-academic perspective, the introduction of plant-based meals in the fast-food industry is a sign of this shift. Particularly when labelled as 'rebel' burgers, they tend to evoke notions of contentious activism. I'm still not sure whether that's a positive or negative framing!

What do you hope to do when you finish your degree?

Environmental research and activism are areas I feel particularly called to, so I'm hoping I'll be able to continue working in that space. However, my supervisors and past professors from the school of Arts & Sciences have given me the opportunity to tutor Sociology courses this year, which I've really been enjoying. While I'm still learning the ropes, it's incredibly satisfying watching students grapple with sociological concepts and effectively apply them for their assessments.



Study leave report

Christine de Matos

In Semester 2, 2019, I undertook Extended Study Leave and now have an even greater appreciation of that time as we continue to deal with the current pandemic. How long ago it seems, those lost days of travelling to conferences and archives and new places...

In July 2019, I preceded my Study Leave by travelling to Leiden in the Netherlands to attend the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) conference (more in conference reports). Here I presented a paper that emerged out of a research project on civilian internment in India during the Asia Pacific War. After the conference I travelled across the North Sea to London, where I spent two weeks working in the archives. The first week was in the National Archives

in Kew, near the stunning Royal Botanic Gardens. The second week was spent in the Imperial War Museum and the amazing British Library in London. In both cases, I was looking for primary sources for the civilian internment project, and for another project on the Allied Occupation of Germany and the British families who went there as part of the occupation forces.

While in London, I was able to connect with a few colleagues, including our own Jane Bergeron, who was visiting while on Long Service Leave. We had a lovely meal in, and historical walk through, Richmond (thanks Jane!)

After my time in London, I travelled back to the Netherlands, where I settled into my quiet writing retreat. The main purpose of my ESL was to write, so I

had searched for a quiet, peaceful place in which to do so. I found it in a little apartment in rural Voorschoten, which lies between Leiden and The Hague. My neighbours were cows and horses and chooks. I rode 15min by bicycle to do my grocery shopping, and walked 25min to get to the nearest bus stop, which could take me back to centres of civilisation in Leiden (15 min) or The Hague (30 min). What a joy and privilege it was to wake up each day in such a beautiful place to write, read and think.

I stayed in Voorschoten until mid-October, and write I did. I finished revisions to one article begun prior to ESL (published in May this year) and wrote full first drafts of two more, one on the civilian internees and one on occupied Germany. I also wrote a conference paper, which I presented in September in Amsterdam at the European Labour History Network conference (more in conference reports).

I stayed in the Netherlands due to the two conferences there and because it was not far to get to the archives in London (a one-hour flight). But another perk was that my daughter, at that time, lived near The Hague in Rijswijk. So I was also able to see her, and ended up doing some of my writing while taking care of my grandkitty, Blueberry, as my daughter travelled to the Baltic for a week. The mornings were a race between me and the cat to claim the only chair at the desk. Let's just say I often lost, and was relegated to the floor and coffee table for my workspace.

In mid-October I (reluctantly) returned to Sydney and continued my writing from home. I resumed working on the two draft articles and sent them to journals for peer review (and am currently completing revisions as a result of those reviews). I also wrote a fourth article, which had emerged from the conference



Meet some of the neighbours. Photo credit: de Matos 2019.



With Jane Bergeron exploring the history of Richmond, UK. Photo credit: de Matos 2019.

presentation in Leiden. It was published in June this year.

Writing also involved two grant applications. While on study leave, I was contacted by a scholar in Germany whom I had met at a previous conference in Belfast, Bettina Blum (Universität Paderborn). She invited me to join a comparative research project on occupied Japan and Germany, specifically looking at the occupier's home space. With another scholar in Japan, Kazuto Oshio (Sophia University), we worked on and submitted a grant application to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), a German funding body. The application to initiate the project was successful and is currently in progress. I also liaised with scholars I am collaborating with on a potential Linkage project on representations of Australian history in contemporary dance and ballet. Just after ESL finished, I travelled to Broome to engage with Nulungu as a research partner, and in Sydney met with another partner, the Australia Council for the Arts. Unfortunately, Covid has

contributed towards delaying the project further – it is not exactly a great time to be researching live dance. But hopefully this will change in the near future.

Finally, I drafted chapter plans for two books as future projects.

In all, I feel satisfied with the outcomes of my ESL. While we always wish we could do more – for instance, I had hoped to complete more on the Linkage application – I achieved most of what I had hoped to do. Study leave demonstrates what we can accomplish with our research when we have an extended time of dedicated head space, and I now cherish it even more as we go through the challenges of our current time, one that may require us to rethink the way we do research in the future. And not just due to the pandemic, but also in the context of climate change.

This was my rural home for almost three months on my Quiet Writing Retreat. Photo credit: de Matos 2019.





Louise St Guillaume

Last year I was awarded the E.G. Whitlam Fellowship by the Whitlam Institute within Western Sydney University. The Fellowship, which took place between July and December 2019, culminated in a public lecture and launch of the research at the Western Sydney University, City Campus in February this year. The research sought to understand the experiences of people with disability who receive Job Seeker payment (the unemployment payment and formerly Newstart Allowance) and live in Western Sydney. It also sought to determine whether people with disability on Job Seeker can access disability supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The research found that the rate of Job Seeker at the time was inadequate for people with disability to be able to meet their needs, that applying for the Disability Support Pension was difficult and that there were many barriers to people with disability being able to meet their mutual obligations which were required to be met to receive Job Seeker. Additionally, it was found that some people with disability on Job Seeker are accessing disability

Fellowship and industry collaboration

supports through the National Disability Insurance Scheme, yet how the disability and income support systems and policies intersect and interact requires further consideration for people with disability who are being governed by both policies simultaneously.

Alongside the public lecture and launch of the research report in February, the research had some other important outputs and contributions (The Whitlam Institute, 2020). Firstly, upon making a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs' Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart Allowance, I was asked to present evidence at a Committee public hearing in October 2019. This evidence and the submission was referenced in the Committee Report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). Additionally, the research was reported in an article in *The Guardian* (Henriques-Gomes, 2020) and I was interviewed by Fiona Wyllie on ABC Statewide Drive. I was also able to present the research to Year 11 students at St Scholastica's College, Glebe, and the research will be integrated into The Whitlam Institute's Civics Education program. The significance of these outputs and contributions was recognised by The Whitlam Institute through an invitation to become a Research Fellow. As such, I am now also a Research Fellow of the Institute.

Industry Partnership

During the year I have had the opportunity to work on several collaborations with various industry partners, with many of the projects ongoing. Firstly, Dr Jose Sakakibara from the School of Business and I are currently writing up the research findings of a project for the St Vincent De Paul Society NSW, started by our students in Research Methods and Business Research Methods. Research Methods, the undergraduate research methods course in the School of Arts and

Sciences, has for a couple of years collaborated with Business Research Methods (the undergraduate research methods course in the School of Business) and a partner organisation who acts as a client. This year our client was the St Vincent De Paul Society NSW, who wanted students to investigate what motivates young people to shop in the second-hand economy. The students collected and analysed the data and then wrote up their findings in research reports. It is this data which Jose and I are now drawing from to inform our report and come up with some recommendations for the Society.

Secondly, I have been working on a couple of projects with the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA). MDAA is the peak advocacy organisation for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) with disability, their families and carers in NSW. The first project I am working on is investigating their consumers' experience of the National Disability Insurance Scheme appeals process. The second project is an evaluation of a program MDAA runs called Community Voices which seeks to train consumers to tell their stories and to educate the community and raise awareness about the value of community diversity.

Finally, I am currently in discussions with the Welfare Rights Network and Economic Justice Australia to do a small research project on the barriers to accessing the Disability Support Pension for people with psychosocial or psychiatric impairments.



Look to the stars and write

Notre Dame's inaugural writer-in-residence talks to students about the future of writing

By Emma Kohen and Adriano Cianfarani

Prizewinning author Charlotte Wood (virtually) sat down to discuss the future of writing with two students from Notre Dame's (unofficial) writing group, the Peake Society.

Naturally, we asked her what every budding writer wants to ask one of their favourite authors: is there one book you think everyone should read?

Charlotte's answer was a resounding "No!"

"I don't think books are vegetables that must be eaten," she says. "I don't really like the way books themselves are kind of fetishised as a form of moral nourishment." For Charlotte, reading should be for pleasure, and books can be our greatest companions. "Reading widely allows a much more complicated and living experience of all the possibilities of language," she explains. "Without the capacity for the complex use of and understanding of language we are condemned to a stunted kind of loneliness."

Most of us do feel a little lonely given the current circumstances, and the pandemic has also raised questions about the future of the creative arts. "I think there's a danger that readers are a dying breed," says Wood, "but the novel? No." She hopes that during these...well, unprecedented times, people might begin to recognise the "enormous social, intellectual and emotional value in a thriving arts-scene."

But we're not there yet. Recently, the Australian government proposed new legislation increasing the cost of degrees in the arts and humanities, while reduc-



ing fees for "job-ready" STEM courses (Study International). While there's no doubt that these vocational programs are important, we would argue that the arts are also crucial in allowing us a profound understanding of self and others. "We have a disturbing anti-intellectual and even more anti-arts attitude in this country," Charlotte says. "I can't think of a single Australian politician in government now who has made it known that they actually, sincerely, read fiction for pleasure."

So, what advice does she offer writers like us, who feel unsure about pursuing their passion? "Take that attitude, chew it up, spit it out, look to the stars and write," she tells us. "Now, and always."

As we cast our gaze upwards, we are struck by a new curiosity: what inspires the writer that inspires us? "I draw inspiration from all around me," says Charlotte. This inspiration, of course, is for her new novel delving into the life of a Catholic nun. Notre Dame, with its historic buildings, austere hallways, and cosy office spaces, has been the perfect place for Charlotte to work. "Inspiration has kind of

seeped out of the walls and into my book in tiny and unexpected ways, which has been wonderful."

Although COVID-19 put a damper on her project for a time, it is the incomprehensibilities of life that have become key ingredients in Charlotte's writing. From her first "unpublishable (sic)" vignette about her father's death to her latest novel *The Weekend*, writing has allowed Charlotte to "give shape to what felt like overwhelming and shapeless experience."

And perhaps this is why the Writer will live on, even if the Reader may not. In a world of secondhand clichés and consumerist gluttony, Charlotte wants us to resist; to think more. Feel more. As she puts it, "the novel is changing form over and over and over, which is what keeps it alive and rich and vibrant." Maybe, then, it is not the Novel that gives us sustenance, but the novel. Our experiences constantly take new and varied forms, and language allows us to explore the nuances of our lives.

So...how do we begin?

"Give space and trust to your wilder instincts, the ones to which you can say, I don't fully understand this, but I'll come with you," Charlotte says.

"And tell the truth."

Charlotte Wood's Residency at The University of Notre Dame Australia is supported by a \$30,000 grant from the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund.

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PhD Research Fellowship report

Christian Santos

In February 2020, I had the incredible opportunity to spend three weeks as a research fellow based in Manila, Philippines, at San Beda University (SBU), for my PhD research. My current thesis focuses on how to understand and situate the agency of a religious actor in International Relations. I explore this question through a case study on the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) on agrarian land reform and contraceptive government policies between 1986-1998.

SBU is a Catholic university administered by the monks of the Order of St Benedict in the Philippines. This engagement was made possible through an existing memorandum of understanding between Notre Dame and SBU. It was also fortunate that I was awarded this year a RTP stipend scholarship. In many ways, this was a trip of perfect timings. Firstly, SBU wanted to increase its international engagements, collaborations, and academic exchanges with other institutions like Notre Dame. Secondly, the now known global COVID-19 pandemic was slowly creeping in the horizon but I was in the Philippines already with family. This meant I could continue on to SBU while other international guests' visits were cancelled. Then, finally, not long after my return to Australia, the Philippines (and soon after Australia) enter into COVID-19 lockdowns.

It was a short but impactful research trip. The aim for the research was to obtain and access resources not readily available, develop greater local insight for the research, and form new contacts. This was all achieved. Crucially, for the research I overcame a writing block after having several informal discussions with my new academic contacts at SBU and



Meeting with Fr. Marvin Mejia, CBCP Secretary General, at the headquarters of the CBCP (photo: Santos 2020)

beyond. An interesting experience was the academic and campus life of another Catholic institution. As an educational institution physically connected to the Benedictine Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat, the day was punctuated with the prayer times of the monks where everyone stops what they are doing at those times to pray. Fortunately, I could end each day with vespers with the monks in the abbey church. A contemplative atmosphere fruitful for research.

I was hosted at SBU by Prof Tita Branzuela, VP for Linkages and International Affairs, Prof Nomar Alviar, VP for Research and Innovation, and the staff of their respective offices. I was provided a workspace, lunch each day, and access to the resources at SBU, including the faculty study rooms in the library. Interestingly, in 2016 as an undergraduate and recently completed Arts Honours student,

I previously met Prof Branzuela and Prof Christian Bryan Bustamante, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, at the 2016 Association of Southeast and East Asian Catholic Colleges and Universities conference held at Notre Dame's Broome Campus. I remember after a conversation with Prof Branzuela about my Honours research and potential plans to do future research that she gave me her contact card. Who would have thought that years later, now as a PhD candidate, would I find myself at SBU meeting them again.

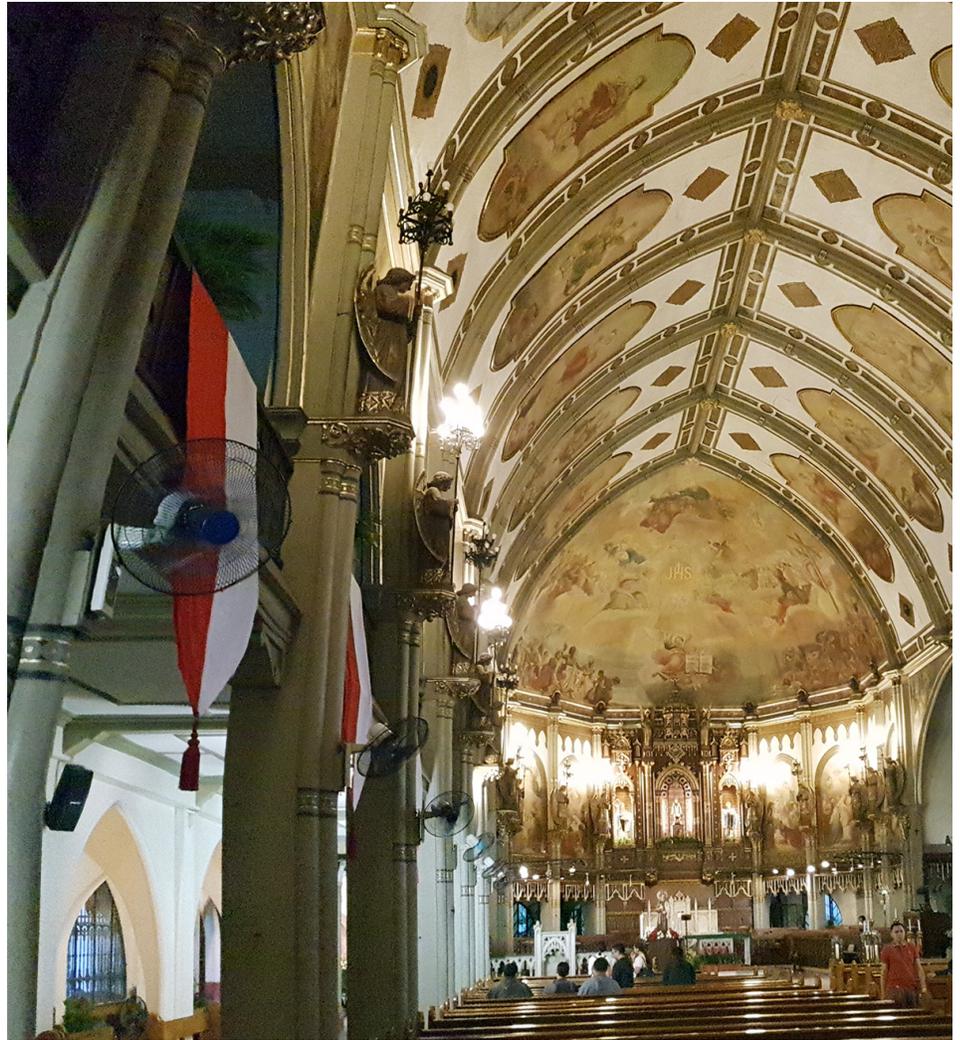
I was struck by the generosity, warmth and support of my hosts at SBU. They were extremely helpful in assisting to identify and connect me with academics and other contacts that could provide useful leads or sources. One such example was Fr Ranhilio Aquino, Dean of the Graduate School of Law, who coincidentally previously worked at the CBCP



and is friends with the CBCP Secretary General, Fr Marvin Mejia. I was given an introductory letter from Fr Aquino to give to the Fr Mejia to be able to meet, talk, and provide any resources to me. When I met with the CBCP Secretary General at his office, it was an enlightening conversation to be able to understand more about the CBCP for the research. This really brought clarity to my research thesis. To my surprise, Fr Mejia informed me that he had talked to the CBCP's chief archivist and, if I wanted, I could have access to look at the archive.

Also, Prof Feorillo P.A. Demeterio, from De La Salle University, was a contact suggested by Prof Bustamente. Prof Demeterio had previously written two books on the CBCP. I tried to source the books but without success. However, when I met with Prof Demeterio, he gave me a copy of his books, which I am very grateful for. It was again a good conversation about the Philippines and my research. I also had an informal meeting with the SBU's Political Science Chair and other Political Science faculty members. Finally, I also met A/Prof Nassef Manabilang Adiong, an academic in religion and IR at the University of the Philippines and founder of several Philippine academic associations in my research field. SBU and each new contact provided many links and suggestions for other future opportunities. Due to the constraints of time, I could not fit all of the engagements I could have had, including a meeting organised by SBU's Political Science Chair, Mr Gian Paolo Ines, with an academic at the University of Santo Tomas.

Among the many highlights, I was invited by the Dean of Arts & Sciences and the Political Science Chair to give a seminar, alongside an invited professor from the University of Santo Tomas, to the second year SBU political science students' comparative politics class. The presentation centred around political parties in the political systems of the Philippines and Australia. At the end of the presentations,



Inside the Abbey Church at San Beda University (photo: Santos 2020)

the session included an open Q&A with the students. The students were amazing, attentive, intellectually curious, and had very good questions for each of us. I have had previous experience of giving a guest lecture at Notre Dame but this felt different. It was a wonderful international experience to guest lecture at a university in the Philippines.

It would not be possible to detail all the amazing experiences of this research trip, but hopefully this has provided a snapshot. This invaluable trip has given me international experience, many new connections, which I hope will be maintained and grown in the future, and

many possible opportunities to follow up on. Importantly, this international trip has matured my thinking and direction within my PhD research. Thank you to my supervisor, Prof John Rees, and Prof Peta Sanderson, Notre Dame's then PVC International, SBU staff, faculty and administrators, including Rector-President Fr Aloysius Ma. A. Maranan OSB, and all of my new connections for this unforgettable experience. I would encourage any future Notre Dame engagement, collaboration, and exchanges with San Beda. It is my hope that engagements like this will continue to grow and strengthen, particularly with San Beda University, who I am extremely grateful to.

