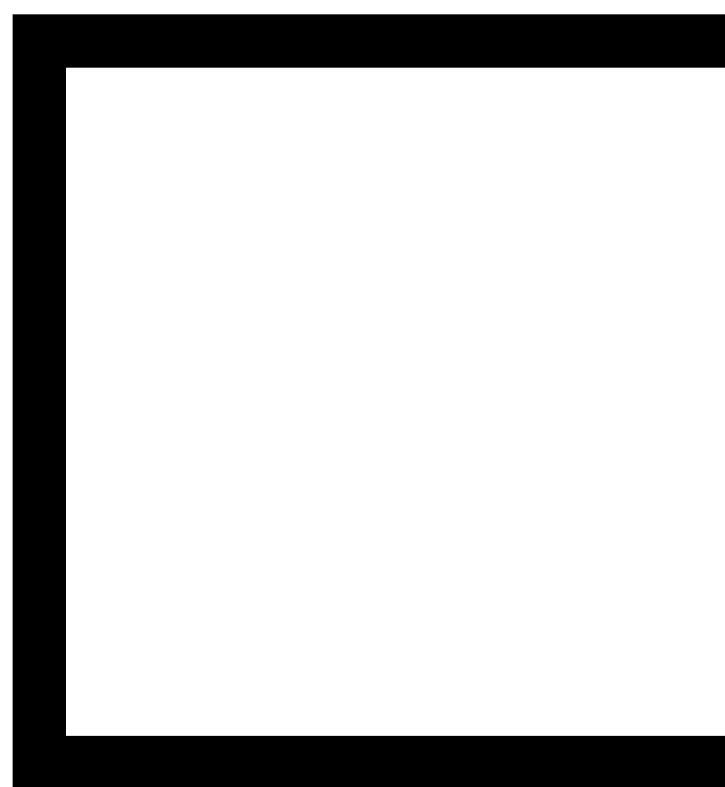


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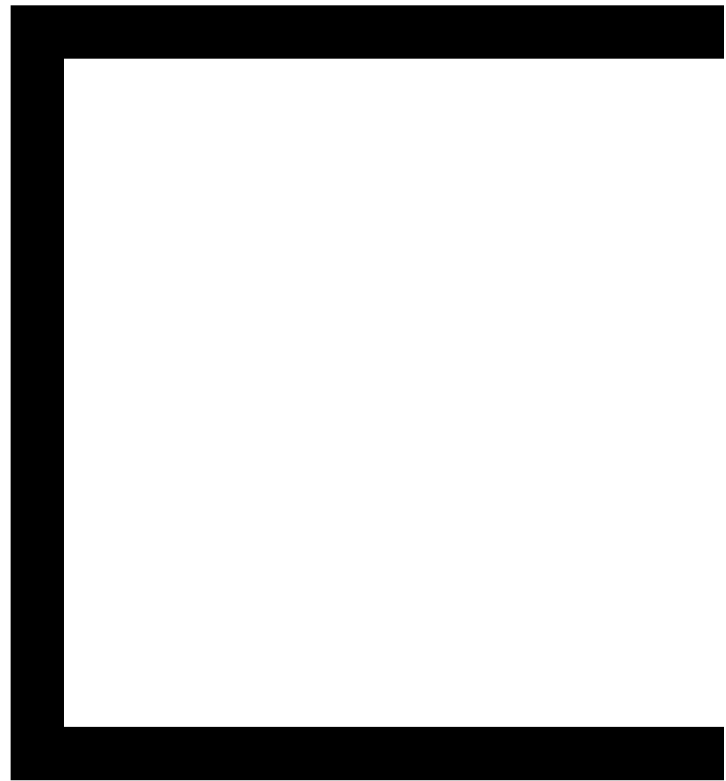
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editorial

KATRINA SCHLUNKE AND JOHN FROW

Thinking and writing about the past, challenging what 'history' might be and how it could appear, is an ongoing interest of this journal and an ongoing (sometimes contentious) point of connection between cultural studies and history.

The shifts in how we research and write the past is no simple story of accepted breakthroughs that have become the new norms nor is it a story where it is easy to identify what the effects of cultural studies' thinking upon the discipline of history has been. History has provided its own challenges to its own practices in a very robust way. Cultural studies challenges what the past is and how it might be rendered from a wide ranging set of ideas and modes of representation that have less to do with specific disciplinary arguments than responses to particular modes (textual, filmic, sonic), particular sites (nations, Indigenous temporalities, sexuality, literature, gender) and perhaps a greater willingness to accentuate the political in the historical. When a cultural studies practitioner turns to the past they take with them an intellectual assumption that the method of research and the mode of its representation will be related and that what is 'past' can never be decided upon.

We render the past in the context where we find it. History is no longer only found in paper archives but in the very making of alternate archives. The expansion of what history could be about is well appreciated and profitably packaged under the advantageous but circumscribed heading 'cultural history'. The word cultural here refers certainly to the expanded archive and mostly to a contextual and particular account of a cultural phenomenon or thing but not at all to the critical creative practices of reading and therefore writing history, nor to the radical questioning of historical method that a 'cultural' history should suggest. This is 'cultural' history without the cultural turn. Hence, perhaps, the particular need for

'experimental' histories where more than an extended archive is at work and where history can be speculative and adventurous.

Who can forget the pleasure of the strangeness of seeing something from somewhere else? Think about the description of the ways in which rope cables were protected at sea in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by 'laying the platts' through 'worming', 'keckling' and 'rounding' and learning that the tarring on these ropes weakened them by about one tenth. How do we mark these words against the present, knowing representation *per se* will fail? Worming, keckling and rounding faintly recalling some rural treatment of sheep, physically reshaping our mouths to new/old sounds and not quite resolving the experience into the knowledge of words used to describe cable protection in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Can we make histories that are active engagements with the present or will we be one more stalled Charon marooned on the Styx, giving no rest to already dead facts? What kind of writing will let the strange familiarity of words like 'worming' or 'keckling' in this context keep their attraction and refusal to be known without a resolution of that tension into a knowable past? Or, as Butler identifies this paradox—how to show the 'the past is irrecoverable and the past is not past'.

History still seems to stall on its seductive promise of knowing and being seen to be knowledge. No book of history can ever be too dull to be worthy nor too finely focused to be totally obscure—these are fine legacies. But where are the fleshly, wordy, anecdotal needles to the skin that erupt into embodied queries and skunk hour style? History comes to us out of sound and film and all the other media and yet these forms seem not to have permanently impinged on either history telling or thinking. So very long ago Barthes and White connected for us the ways in which history is written to the form of the novel and to history being itself a particular construction of writing. This knowledge still seems to come and go within how we write our histories—readily acknowledged and yet not regularly acted upon. But in other modes, in film and the television of Kluge, as Tara Forrest points out, the thinking/doing of what is history seems always present. It is here that the importance of the word *experimental* arises. In venturing something, in failing and in an awareness of the productiveness of the discourse that is history, the mark of the past upon us becomes the point of possible other histories.

Tara Forrest, the guest editor of this edition, provides an excellent overview of both the traditions of experimental history and the particular enactments you will find within this volume. It was a pleasure working with Tara on this edition and we look forward to seeing future submissions to the journal that might continue to challenge and add to this thinking about the past and history.

