

# editorial

JOHN FROW AND KATRINA SCHLUNKE

‘Slight Anthropologies’ has been plucked from Gabrielle Fletcher’s challenging and absorbing example of new writing to become the connective tag for this issue. In many surprising ways the essays in this collection evoke an idea of the human as a fragile category. ‘Slight’ anthropology is here then a study of a particular kind of ‘mankind’ where both the practice and the object are in different ways porous events. As this title touches upon the diverse essays and reviews collected within, the initially deprecating mode (slight) can be seen to operate as a kind of contagion, where one vulnerable project spreads through another and another.

To make the strange familiar and the familiar strange once summed up the cultural translation that underscored the expansive project of early anthropology. Now the ground and textual structures which lie between familiar and strange are simultaneously multiplying and disappearing—they cannot be relied upon to remain only translatively connected. Martin Thomas returns films of Indigenous ceremonies (an item familiar to a museum archive) and sees the images re-ordered into an old/new cultural setting that makes them at home but also strange. For Thomas it is one of the most moving moments he has experienced—himself both a stranger to, but a literal carrier of, culture.

John Frow’s essay has a more haunted task: how to write, how to catch the structure of feeling that is always a structure of politics as a familiar world becomes strange? Is Australia now a strange world with which we are familiarising ourselves or a familiar one in which we catch fleeting glimpses of our strange selves? Or is this the wrong way to think (one shift to another) when the changes that occur through careful bureaucracies and forced silences are more cellular and horizontal than an obvious change of regime? The familiar remnant might now only appear on a surface—there being no core of values buried within a system.

For Lisa McDonald to look at the intracellular amid the questions of terror and art is now a practice that 'involves a disciplinary sway across themes of t/error and conviction, a momentary and perilous fluency between alteration and resolve'. McDonald ponders: 'After the buildings and bodies fell, I wondered where all the ash went and how long it stayed wherever that was: the interstices of the city, the gutters, the streets, the drains'. And Belinda Morrissey and Kristen Davis wonder about how real are the other material traces left after something human has gone in the more individual cases of disappearance and murder?

If this seems peculiarly a volume that is about the vulnerability of the category human—a silenced political subject, a breath of ash, a prime minister's body—it is also an issue that continues to pressure the ideas of culture and difference and culture as difference. Eve Vincent and Erin Manning write in very dissimilar ways about how country can be shown to be known as it is moved within a non-Indigenous desire to include a material and cultural difference. When Juan Obarrio writes in note 33 a definition of postshamanism, 'the discourse of an ever expanding curved line, an always displacing border', we seem to face a culture of mystery without workable ritual far from the ordinary extraordinariness of shamanism itself. What kind of words work in these contexts that shake up 'western' culture? Andrew Munro humanises Lyotard and John Kinsella tries to break open the spaces of judgement using poetry to start dialogue. But perhaps it is Ouyang Yu's poem where the stumbling between difference is seen as the ordinary of culture. Is Yu's poem about the limits of the human or does his mixture of hates and loves make up the ordinary extraordinary of the multiple cellular reactions that it is to participate and observe in the provincial global world? Are we simply reading poetic but straightforward description? Perhaps it is old fashioned participant observation of difference where we might twist nipples to make same or settle for the banality of 'Aussie' for at least as Yu writes: it 'doesn't have a long memory'. Slight anthropologies are not easily discarded things. In this volume they bring together new writing and cultural studies as always but equally they make up ground between the haunted, the vicious and the evolving. They evoke both illuminating ephemera and the heavy hand of global politics to make us sense and respond anew within our strangely familiar worlds.