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EDITORIAL

Migrant

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It's now fifteen years since 433 mainly Hazarra and Tamil refugees were rescued by a Norwegian container ship, the MV *Tampa*, from an overcrowded fishing boat in international waters between Indonesia and Christmas Island. To many readers from outside Australia, that event would have little meaning, although it might evoke another anniversary: it is fifteen years too since the attacks that took place on the World Trade Center buildings in New York City. In November of 2001, the editorial of this journal cited Mick Taussig on the American President standing atop the rubble of the towers, 'absorbing the enormous power of the dead whose spirits are otherwise uncontainable'. That power, we now know, was unleashed in Afghanistan, in Iraq and elsewhere leaving hundreds of thousands dead and initiating catastrophic consequences that continue to cascade from Aleppo to Zambia. To invoke the 'Tampa incident' here is not to identify a historical turning point, nor is it to draw attention to a merely local or parochial event subordinated to a global war on terror.¹ On the contrary, it was and continues to be a moment that recrystallised politics and culture; it reconfigured paranoia about borders, it recultivated fear of terrorism, renewed state bureaucratic and privatised brutality, made possible a newly xenophobic and militant assertion of Australian-ness, and produced space in which to vilify, collectively punish, humiliate and crush powerless and desperate people seeking help. In some senses we could argue that the Tampa incident prefigured a newly cruel disposition towards refugees that Australia modelled for the world and which parts of Europe are now seeking to perfect.

1 The compulsory incarceration of asylum seekers had been initiated by the Labor government in 1993. For a 'longer history', see Klaus Neumann, *Across the Seas: Australia's Response to Refugees: A History*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2015.

The Tampa incident is worth recalling here to not only as a gesture of thought that refuses to bow down before media or political amnesia or to succumb to the emergency zealotry of fear mongers or moralists. But, in addition, it might be worth contemplating the duration between Tampa and today to ask about the durable and unstable nature of cultural configurations and about the contribution of cultural research to a more sustainable future. The first issue of *Cultural Studies Review* was published in May 2002, and featured 'A Line in the Sea: The Tampa, Boat Stories and the Border'.² This essay by Suwendrini Perera recalled other boat stories, the 1983 pogrom of Tamils in Sri Lanka incited by government MPs, the welcome to asylum-seekers offered by Gungalidda elder Wadjularbinna and the history of Australia offering refuge to (some), like Ngoc-Tuan Hoang, who had fled Vietnam in the 1970s. Fifteen years later, in this issue, Jordana Silverstein considers some aspects of the bureaucratic 'management' of refugee children, and explores the ways the figure of the 'unaccompanied refugee child' has been produced through a set of historically conflicted discourses whereby the 'guardians' of the child must seemingly both protect and discipline the child. In this issue, too, in the context of unpacking how suicide is conceptualised, Rob Cover considers the horrendously high rates of self-harm among asylum seekers and refugees in detention. It is a measure of the organised brutality of detention that Cover's alternative—a mode of acceptance or hospitality that fosters resilience against suicidality—seems almost utopian. And in our reviews, John Budarick considers Radha S. Hegde's recent book, *Mediating Migration*, as part of 'the explosion of studies over the past two decades or so that have sought to understand migration, transnationalism and diaspora through the lens of cultural processes'. Although *Cultural Studies Review* is not a campaigning organ, we think that Perera's and Silverstein's essays, as well as many other examples of work we've published over the last decade-and-a-half, have made small but valuable contributions to corroding some of the conceptual structures that underpin Australia's malicious detention regime and perhaps also to efforts to bring into being a different future.

This is a general edition of *Cultural Studies Review*; that is, not one organised around a special section but rather a collection of essays, possessed of various virtues. George Kouvaros's evocative and beautifully synthetic essay revisits Siegfried Kracauer's wonder about his increasing susceptibility to 'the speechless plea of the dead' in order to weave this concern through his account of the photos of the ancestor. The fresh thinking that arises from Kouvaros's poetics and critique is what the academic essay does—make us think again. In a different mode of remembering, Janice Newton tracks a very local and regional instance of how the silencing of Indigenous past and presence is perpetrated through the failure to name and re-name that enables a silenced land to actively carry its known history. The essay also enacts a form of respect and so brings into existence possibilities of different futures. Scott Webster's essay is organised around that most banal of objects, the house key. But that ordinary key becomes a way to translate and so get closer to the suffering of those Palestinian families who are forced out of their homes and neighbourhoods in what has been called domicile. Together these very different essays explore some of the affective, materialist and political aspects of recollection.

In a different register, Dennis Bruining takes to task the existing presumption that 'matter' was in some way left out of key poststructuralist thinking and confirms the continuing presence of a materialised body in much of that thinking. Erika Kerruish questions how we

² It was in 2002 that *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 appeared as the re-launch of *UTS Review*, its predecessor that had been inaugurated in 1995 by Meaghan Morris and Stephen Muecke and resulted in seven volumes, the last of which appeared in 2001.

can enrich our thinking of the robot–human relation and whether a greater engagement with the ‘embodied imagination’ would do so. Tess Williams suggests that the most recent Alien movie *Prometheus* has shifted our focus from monster to scientist and the discourses of science, which enables a questioning of performance and spectator. In their contrasting ways these are three bodily scholarly essays, each of which push against our habits of thinking about correction and invention.

The reviews in this issue are a very rich continuation of the challenges that our essayists throw up. In their careful critiques they register the pulse of cultural studies thinking right now and it is indeed a strong pulse.

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