Cases and their Publics: Interdisciplinary and Transnational Perspectives on the Case Study Genre

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The conference „Cases and their Publics: Interdisciplinary and Transnational Perspectives on the Case Study Genre" was held at the University of Melbourne, Australia, from September 26-28, 2011. It was convened as part of the Australian Research Council Discovery Project „Making the Case: The Case Study Genre in Sexology, Psychoanalysis and Literature". The case study opens itself up to scholarship in various domains, and its unique status as both a transnational and interdisciplinary phenomenon, blurring lines between conceptually distinct academic domains, was illustrated and confirmed by diverse contributions to the conference from the fields of history and literature, including the history of sexuality, history of psychoanalysis, literary history and literary theory, medical history, history of feminism among others.

Despite these differences in disciplinary situatedness three main themes emerged: the relationship of the case study genre to its public/s, the investigation of the history, technology and typology of the case, reflections on the complex relationship between cases and their subjects, and—last but not least—the transnational and interdisciplinary circulation of case studies.

In his keynote address, WARWICK ANDERSON (Sydney) contrasted the Freudian case study with the serialized nature of the unitary file in order to historicise the latter in the military and medical logics of the late 19th and early 20th century. He discussed inherent characteristics of bureaucratic files: required secrecy as well as their ultimate destiny to become archived files which completely changed their mode of reception. JOHN CASH (Melbourne) reflected on the narcissistic illusion expressed in Sigmund Freud's Rat Man case (1910) and in Stanley Milgram's famous *Obedience to Authority* report (1974), arguing that both case reports are linked by a latent social anxiety over authority changes. BIRGIT LANG (Melbourne) demonstrated how German sexologist Erich Wulffen and his case collections for the educated public stereotyped criminals while at the same time inducting his readership into contemporary court conventions. She also exposed how Wulffen's literary cases for the general public functioned as exemplars for his political convictions. ANNE FREADMAN's (Melbourne) investigation of the rhetorical dimensions of the case study genre served to illustrate her argument that in recent literary theory, the genre has lost its place, since literature inherently cannot support generalisation.

The focus on the relationship of subjects, cases and their publics was the second key theme of the conference. While scholarship to date has often identified the case study as a technique of social control, a number of conference papers highlighted the complex relationship between modern subjects and subjectivities. JOHANNA GEHMACHER (Vienna) raised the problem of how autobiographical texts can be framed as cases, arguing that the German feminist Käthe Schirmacher made herself into a case in order to promote her political viewpoints. A similar argument was advanced in KATIE SUTTON's (Melbourne) analysis of autobiographical narratives of German transvestites in specialised gay publications in the 1920s. She concluded that these technologies of the self were an attempt to create subjectivity as part of a group identity. REBECCA JENNINGS' (Macquarie) discussion of the case of Sandra Willson in the Australian 1950s showed how medical discourse and knowledge were 'subverted' by the patient to claim a homosexual self and to conduct a personal search for understanding of her sexuality. Shifting from the patient to the medical practitioner, JOY DAMOUSI (Melbourne) investigated the case of the therapist in psychoanalysis, taking the American psychoanalyst and activist Viola Bernard as an example. Bernard's case notes dating from the mid-twentieth century, Damousi argues, illuminate wider historical developments and consider the ways in which the case study genre can shed new insights

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onto the workings of the psychoanalytic relationship. LISA FEATHERSTONE's (Newcastle) paper focussed on Dr Wallace, an Australian physician, eugenicist and sex educator whose views on normal sexuality in the 1950s are expressed in his case files. Like the other papers in this group, it investigated normality as a cultural construct and as a social ideal. The lively discussions following the presentations put the temporality of the case study in the context of access to case materials, whose changes over a relatively short time span highlights the instability of meaning and ethical norms.

The third theme concerned the transnational and interdisciplinary public circulation of the case. In her keynote paper, LAURA DOAN (Manchester) problematized the representativeness of the sexological case for current scholarship through the 1920 court case of Harley versus Carr which highlighted the gap between the medical discourse of the time and common popular beliefs of sexuality. ALISON LEWIS (Melbourne) explored how Alfred Döblin's novel *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord* can be read as an overdetermined—even anxious—literary case study, undermining established conventions while at the same time indicating possibly irreconcilable medical, social and artistic motivations. TIMOTHY VERHOEVEN (Monash) also explored the way in which specific cases were disseminated, discussing the transnational reception of the Barbara Ubryk case, a famous instance of 'convent atrocities' in the context of transatlantic anti-Catholicism. REY TIQUIA (Melbourne) demonstrated the power of the case to permeate interdisciplinary boundaries between Western and Chinese medicine, arguing that elements of both systems of evaluation should be incorporated to develop new schools of practice. By analysing Armand Dubarry's series of 'psychopathological novels' *Les Déséquilibrés de l'amour*, JANA VERHOEVEN (Melbourne) showed how through the insertion of medical discourse, fin de siècle authors of erotic pulp fiction attempted to claim respectability in order to widen their readership and include lower middle-class women as a target audience. Freud's and Jacques Lacan's recourse to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Sandmann* served CHRISTIANE WELLER (Monash) to investigate the psychoanalytical treatment of the reflective nature of literary texts in positing the literary case study within their theory of castration. Still in the domain of psychoanalytic readings of literary texts, ALEX KURMANN (Melbourne) argued that the French Vietnamese author Linda Lê conferred traits of Antigone onto her exilic 'sister', Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann.

The conference was complemented by a literary evening in which acclaimed Australian author and academic Brian Castro read from his novel *Double Wolf* (1991), which takes as its premise the fact that Sergei Wespe, Freud's famous 'Wolfman' patient, was an aspiring writer, and adept at spinning tales. The reading was followed by a discussion with the author hosted by John Cash and Birgit Lang.

The conference papers did not only investigate the complex relationships between cases and their publics across a range of historical and social settings, but also contributed to the transnational and interdisciplinary mapping of a genre, which has drawn much scholarly attention recently.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Laura Doan (University of Manchester): The Nurse, the Clerk, His Wife, and Her Lover: The Case Study in the History of Sexuality

Birgit Lang (The University of Melbourne): The Many Publics and Cases of Erich Wulffen

Katie Sutton (The University of Melbourne): The Case/s of Transvestite Autobiography in 1920s Germany: Creating Identities and Publics

Rebecca Jennings (Macquarie University): Sandra Willson: Not Guilty or Insane? A Case Study in Australian Lesbian History

Lisa Featherstone (The University of Newcastle): The Curious Case of Dr Wallace: Early sex therapy in 1950s Australia

Reading Brian Castro followed by discussion with John Cash and Birgit Lang

Keynote Warwick Anderson (University of Sydney): „Archive Cases"

Joy Damousi (The University of Melbourne):

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The Psychoanalytic Case: Confidential and Confessional

John Cash (The University of Melbourne): Obedience and its discontents

Timothy Verhoeven (Monash University): The Sad Tale of Sister Barbara Ubryk: A Case Study in Convent Captivity

Johanna Gehmacher (University of Vienna): A Case of 'Token Identity': Radical Activism before World War I and the Public Image of Käthe Schirmacher (1865-1930)

Anne Freadman (The University of Melbourne): The Seductions of Singularity: The Case of Genre Theory

Rey Tiquia (The University of Melbourne): Using Socially-Contrived Standardizing Clinical Case Records and Developing Appropriate Protocols to Evaluate the Efficacy of Chinese Medicine Therapies

Alison Lewis (The University of Melbourne): Female Sex Murderers and the Overdetermined Literary Case Study of 'New Objectivity': Alfred Döblin's *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord*

Jana Verhoeven (The University of Melbourne): *Les déséquilibrés de l'amour* — Armand Dubarry's Psycho-Pathological Novels

Alex Kurmann (The University of Melbourne): Antigone in Exile: the French Case of Ingeborg Bachmann

Christiane Weller (Monash University): Castration and the Knowledge of Literature. Names of the father(s) in the *Akedah* and *The Sandman*

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