

UTS, Fictocriticism, and me

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英語学科及び人文学部の皆様、この貴重な機会をいただき、心からお礼申し上げます。

Dominant modes of communication studies in Japan tend to exclude experience. The uncertainties of experience are ruled offside by an objectivity informed by the hard sciences. The messy incontinentness of experience are left to fester in the too-hard basket.

At the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), interesting work in cultural studies has addressed the problem of how subjectivity is implicated in the analysis of culture. Professor Stephen Muecke, as editor of *UTS Review: Cultural Studies and New Writing*, has been a leader in this effort.

My initial interest in Stephen Muecke was his mid-nineties advocacy of experimental history of Daniel S. Milo: “liberate the imagination of the historian, admire the force of the possible, [and] intervene in order to spread disorder” (Muecke 1996, p.3). UTS was the venue for the Rethinking the Past: Experimental Histories in the Arts conference, and on July 28 2006 I presented this paper: “Experimental history: Kumai Kei, tea, and the lethal discourse of transience.”

Fictocriticism is an important element of new writing at UTS. I was intrigued by the potential of fictocriticism to address certain relationships between subjectivity and cultural analysis. The tale of the cultural analyst, with its complexities of multiple and shifting subjectivities, influences how cultural

practices are experienced, explored and written up. Fictocriticism is one way to highlight the links between life history and the practice of certain modes of cultural studies.



Given that fictocritical writing is relatively unknown in Japan, here is a concise genealogy offered by Muecke: “Fictocriticism is an experimental genre of writing. It makes an argument with storytelling or poetry as its vehicle. It might be called a mischievous little intellectual genre. Fictocriticism traces its origins to Montaigne, continuing through Barthes and making a different appearance in the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe or Joan Didion. Tending towards the laid-back narrative, the inclusion of the local and singular, the embrace of contemporary culture and media, the name, and the style, have been adopted enthusiastically in Australia and Canada.”

One of the highlights of my time at UTS was auditing a fictocriticism class taught by Katrina Schlunke, editor of *Cultural Studies Review*.

Stephen Muecke introduced me to the seminal work of Michael Taussig and Jose Gil, and the required readings for Katrina's course gave me a broader perspective on the possibilities for fictocritical modes of experience, thinking and writing. Katrina's conception of fictocritical writing deals with the instability of categories of analysis. Her interest in the persistence of the past, and the various forms of dialogue between anecdotes and history as we write the past have been useful for my project on local and national identity.

What was equally important during my sabbatical, a time when I did virtually no teaching, was the privilege of watching an educator of Katrina's caliber in action each week. Having Stephen and Katrina read and comment on my work was also a very valuable experience.

Three great works of fictocriticism:

Muecke, S. 1997, *No Road (bitumen all the way)*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle.

Taussig, M. 2004, *My Cocaine Museum*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Schlunke, K. 2005, *Bluff Rock: Autobiography of a Massacre*, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, WA, Australia.



Although most of my time was spent at UTS, I also made contact with colleagues at University of New South Wales (UNSW), the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, and Murdoch University.

One outcome of these meetings was attending a conference at the University of Sydney. World Without Walls-East and West-21st Century Perspectives was held 3-7 December 2006, and I presented a paper entitled "Performing Hakata: Yamakasa and Sōsaku Noh."

Being able to focus on research for a year enabled me to expand my theoretical horizons. I would like to close by expressing my gratitude for my Fukuoka University colleagues, and acknowledging the support of Dr Kate Barclay at Institute for International Studies, and the kind encouragement of Stephen Muecke and Katrina Schlunke.

Sydney-based artist Tom Carment generously gave permission to reproduce his work here.