

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



Writing and Society
Research Centre

Seminar Series 2018



Islands of the South: with papers by Alice Te Punga Somerville, Ross Gibson & Elizabeth McMahon

Chaired by Samantha Trayhurn

DATE: Friday 21 September

TIME: 1pm – 3pm

LOCATION: Female Orphan School, conference room 1 (EZ.G.23), Parramatta South Campus, Western Sydney University

‘From Manoa to a Sydney garden: Pacific literature is where you are’ – Alice Te Punga Somerville

In “The Ko’olau,” the first poem of his 2012 collection *From Manoa to a Ponsonby Garden*, Samoan writer Albert Wendt describes his attempts to draw the mountains at the end of the Manoa valley in Honolulu where he lived for some time. For Wendt, being in a place calls for engagement not only with the landscape but the Indigenous people related to it: “the first Kanaka Maoli who named/ and loved them forever.” This process sparks his memory of other places - “There are other mountains in my life” – and he recalls his connections with two mountains in Samoa and one in New Zealand. In this way, his poem traces the links between indigeneity and migration, and the ways in which one’s identification as Indigenous and migrant depends on where you are; the wider book moves between Manoa and his garden in Ponsonby, Auckland, where he lives. However, the questions he asks are not limited to a Samoa/ Aotearoa/ Hawai’i triangle. In this talk, I will draw on Wendt’s poem in order to think about how Pacific literature calls on readers in Sydney to think about where they are, and how reading in Sydney calls us to think about Pacific literature.

‘Edge conditions: aesthetic systems and the apprehension of change’ – Ross Gibson

Mingling ideas from aesthetics, complexity studies and narratology, I will discuss some of the ways certain ‘insular’ or ‘haven-space’ artworks can help us live with changefulness and uncertainty.

‘Fictions and Topographies: Islands and Continents of the Global South’ – Elizabeth McMahon

BIOS:

ALICE TE PUNGA SOMERVILLE is an Associate Professor at the University of Waikato, NZ. At its heart, Alice's research is about texts by Maori, Pacific and Indigenous people. Dr Te Punga Somerville's work is underpinned by her belief that we (Maori, Pacific and/ or Indigenous peoples) are constrained when the stories about us are limited. She therefore focus on texts as evidence, sites and foundations of stories that are far more complex than those that are told about us by other people or even those that are generally told by ourselves. Dr Te Punga Somerville's MA and PhD focused on Maori written literatures, and as she deliberately sought broader contexts for exploring this writing she developed a twin interest and expertise in Indigenous studies and Pacific studies. She also writes the occasional poem.

ROSS GIBSON. Formerly the inaugural Creative Director at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Ross Gibson is Centenary Professor in Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra. His work spans several media and disciplines. Recent projects include the Radio National feature program 'Green Love' (2016), the books *Changescapes* (2015), *Memoryscapes* (2105), and *The Criminal Re-Register* (2017), all published by UWAP, and the public-art installation 'Bluster-Town' at Wynyard Rail Station in Sydney (2017).

ELIZABETH MCMAHON is an Associate Professor in the School of the Arts and Media at UNSW. Her research interests are in Australian literature, Island Studies and Gender studies. Her recent monograph, *Islands, Identity and the Literary Imagination* (New York and London: Anthem, 2016) is the culmination of research funded by an ARC Discovery grant titled *Our Island Home: The Shifting Map of Australian Literature*. It won the 2017 Walter McRae Russell Award for the best work of literary criticism on an Australian subject published within the previous 2 calendar years; and the inaugural (2017) Australian University Heads of English Prize for Literary Scholarship. She has also published widely on the representation of gender and sexuality in Australian writing, and recently edited, with Dr Brigitta Olubas, a new collection on Australian author Elizabeth Harrower. Since 2008 she has co-edited *Southerly*, Australian oldest literary journal and co-edits a book series titled Rethinking the Island for Rowman and Littlefield International.

SAMANTHA TRAYHURN is currently undertaking a Doctor of Creative Arts under the supervision of Anthony Uhlmann, Ben Etherington and Gail Jones. Samantha is interested in world literature as a process for exploring non-unitary, post-human subjectivity. Samantha has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) from Griffith University, and a Bachelor of Science. She is interested in expanding upon a cross-disciplinary creative arts practice that investigates global ecologies, both natural and conceptual. Her PhD novel is concerned with exploring transcultural topologies through migration, interspecies subjectivity and transcorporeality. Samantha has had creative work published in *LiNQ Journal*, *Pure Slush* and *Art Ascent* and she organises live readings and creative workshops via *CrossCurrent Creative*. Her social commentary also appears in the *Overland* online magazine.

This seminar is part of the ARC Other Worlds: Forms of World Literature research project
<http://www.formsofworldliterature.com/>

All welcome. RSVP/info writing@westernsydney.edu.au

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