The
Limits of
Responsibility:
Histories, species, politics

An interdisciplinary conference hosted by the School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, in association with the University of Otago Postcolonial Studies Research Network

Venue: Massey University, Manawatu Campus,
Palmerston North, New Zealand
Date: 3-5 Dec 2012

Keynote speakers

Prof. Susannah Radstone	*School of Arts and Digital Industries, University of East London*
Prof. Michael Belgrave	*School of Humanities, Massey University*
Dr. Walescka Pino-Ojeda	*Director of the New Zealand Centre for Latin American Studies, University of Auckland*

Responsibility is a key concept invoked in many contemporary forums, popular and academic. A wide range of discourses, both in cultural criticism and in public life, define the ethical and civil responsibilities of the citizen and the human subject. Notions of apology, reconciliation, reparation and collective trauma all hold citizens to be responsible for forms of violence and oppression in their personal lives and national histories – and responsive to the often challenging claims of others. Beyond this, discourses about human and animal rights demand responsibility for, or to, the lived, experiential being of those outside the boundaries of national, ethnic or species identity and seek to establish relations of care for others, including non-human creatures. Similarly, political responsibility now extends beyond immediate communities of interest based in nation, region or belief to include those who are defined differently from normative values in terms of age, gender, sexuality or disability. Whether this reflects an amplification of the idea of a self's or nation's sense of responsibility *for* its 'others' or a shift towards an ethical realisation of necessary responsiveness *to* that which is deemed other, remains in question.

Responsibility is also key to the work of major contemporary theorists as divergent as Agamben, Levinas, Derrida and Ricoeur. Contemporary Western society and culture might now be celebrated for its responsiveness to ethical and political multiplicity. But these recent cultural 'advances' may also be seen as complicit – along with the technocratic state, corporate managerialism and therapeutic cultures (including mass media) – with a tendency to control and direct human relationships, emotions, memory and physical well-being. How should responsibility be understood: with respect to the limits and borders established and policed by the state and corporate capitalism, or, more benignly, by discourses of apology and reconciliation or animal rights? Who or what decides on the *caesura* that defines the threshold between human and non-human, citizen and non-citizen, victim and terrorist, and those that are included in or excluded from public commemoration, repudiation or erasure? How can cultural criticism be responsible for, or responsive to, the articulation of these limits and borders and their social, political and historical impact?

We particularly welcome proposals that address the following issues:

- Amnesty
- Animal rights
- Bare life
- Civil society
- Commemoration
- Cultural trauma
- Forgiveness
- Human rights
- Individual responsibility
- National affect
- Political apology

- Politics of memory
- Postcolonial identities
- Post-settlement politics
- Reconciliation
- Reparation
- Sacrifice
- Shame
- Terror
- Walled states
- Welfare reform

The conference convenors invite abstracts of no more than 300 words and a short bio to be sent to Allen Meek at A.Meek@massey.ac.nz and copied to Jenny Lawn at J.M.Lawn@massey.ac.nz with "CONFERENCE" in the subject line by 28 SEPTEMBER, 2012.

Further information and enrolment information is available on the conference website at:

http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/departments/school-english-media-studies/conference-2012-the-limits-of-responsibility/conference-2012-the-limits-of_responsibility.cfm