

The View from Above: Cosmopolitan Culture and its Critics
An interdisciplinary conference for post-graduate students and early career researchers

Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 September 2014

University of Melbourne

Keynote speakers:

Professor John M. Ganim, University of California, Riverside

Dr. Brigid Rooney, University of Sydney

‘Cosmopolitanism’ connotes a dynamic, eclectic and sophisticated cultural sphere, one that transcends borders and national differences. Although the term is an ancient one, deriving from the Greek word *kosmopolitês*, its meaning has never been stable. The notion of the cosmopolitan is glamorous and in some respects elitist, suggesting a ‘luxuriously free-floating view from above’ (Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 1998). At the same time, it has utopian connotations of pluralism and universality.

In the last decade or so, discourses of cosmopolitanism have experienced a resurgence. The term is increasingly associated with multiculturalism, diasporic culture and the impact of globalisation. Critics have advocated new forms of ‘rooted’, ‘vernacular’, postcolonial and even ‘refugee’ cosmopolitanism, in an attempt to break away from Eurocentric canons and outmoded nation-based identity politics. But do these new accounts of cosmopolitanism resolve the tension between its egalitarian and elitist impulses? Are aspirations to cosmopolitanism still, as Simon Gikandi suggests, ‘an essential mark of bourgeois identity and privilege’?

This conference invites participants to explore cosmopolitanism, both as a utopian project and as an object of critique. While the focus of the conference is on literature and literary criticism, we welcome papers addressing theatre, the visual arts, popular culture, translation and other forms of cultural expression in either contemporary or historical settings. We also strongly encourage contributions from creative writers. Presenters may choose to focus on Australian cosmopolitanisms or address broader categories such as the postcolonial or the transnational.

Topics for discussion might include:

- old and new cosmopolitanisms (including the influence of classical, medieval and early modern texts on more recent understandings of the cosmopolitan)
- cosmopolitan sensibilities in colonial, postcolonial and diasporic literatures
- cosmopolitanism and class
- cosmopolitanism and the metropolitan/regional
- feminist engagements with cosmopolitanism
- cosmopolitanism and sexuality
- cosmopolitanism, advertising, popular culture and everyday life

- transnationalism and globalisation, parochialism and provinciality
- cosmopolitan readerships and politics; the role of translation
- creative practice and the cosmopolitan
- the text as a cosmopolitan space
- utopianism and cosmopolitan futures

The convenors welcome abstracts from postgraduate and early career researchers working in any field of the humanities, particularly literary studies, creative writing, theatre studies, history (including art history), cultural studies and translation studies. Please forward an abstract of no more than 250 words to viewfromaboveconference@gmail.com by **Monday 19 May 2014**.

Co-convenors:

Dr. Katie Hansord

Catherine Noske

Lucinda O'Brien

Dr. Jay Daniel Thompson

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