

Repositioning the prefix: Post-graduate studies and the post-colony

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Probably the most overused and frequently applied prefix in contemporary academic scholarship is the word 'post'. We are all too familiar with its uses in daily discourse and have internalised it in our thinking and writing. In putting together *postamble* Vol II we have paused to think about this, strategically isolating the word, looking for possibilities that suggest alternative ways of thinking about our work. What happens then when one attempts to reposition the prefix? How do our understandings of terms shift if we either add or remove the word from its daily usage? How do we find languages that cross discourses?

Removing 'post' from terms such as post-apartheid, post-colonial or post-modern suggest a return to prior contexts of thinking about the world around us. This seems almost inconceivable, impossible even. So, by way of contrast, what happens when we pause and think about the uses of 'post' or if we play with new uses? We have taken two such instances and thought around these in the production of *postamble* Vol II.

The first concerns the space of writing in scholarly journals and in particular 'writing spaces' such as the one we have created in *postamble*.¹ What does it mean, for instance, to be writing as 'post'-graduate scholars? How does this space differ from the spaces of knowledge production as undergraduates or academics within the academy? What are the issues around access to publication in peer reviewed journals as postgraduates? Are these any different to other spaces of writing?

These are some of the many questions that led to the establishment of *postamble*. As postgraduates, we found ourselves in the awkward in-between space, of being accomplished enough as scholars to be conferred the honours of degrees, yet somehow not yet fully qualified in the formal sense of passage through the academy. Many of us, particularly at doctoral level, also find ourselves juggling the tensions between working as lecturers, tutors or in practice while still studying. There are many ways in which universities have made spaces for us – as 'junior researchers', 'emerging researchers' or in 'development posts' – yet somehow these spaces have had their own difficulties as we have battled to break out of these categorisations to self confidently establish ourselves and our work 'post' gaining higher degrees or experience.

Running in parallel with this have been the burdens of working our way into established spaces of publication, of establishing publication records, and gaining experience in peer review, seminar presentation and the like. We like to think that *postamble* is a self initiated space of writing that fills the 'gap' to create a formal space in which scholars such as ourselves can formally exchange ideas. The papers presented in this edition point to exciting new sites of knowledge and, we hope, may perhaps shift conceptions of postgraduate work from notions of the incomplete to new positions in which work 'post' graduating is viewed as the cutting edge of new research and discourse. This may be a cheeky move to reposition work in the postgraduate space from existing in a state of 'becoming' towards a more confident state of 'being' in the

academy and especially in the academies in the post-colony we find ourselves in, but one that we feel is overdue.

This brings us to our second point. That of playing with the prefix 'post'. Central to the stated intellectual intention of *postamble* has been to present work from different disciplines in one space of writing. This has brought with it the many prefixes attached to the word discipline – we are familiar with notions of multi-disciplinarity, interdisciplinary studies and more recently the word trans-disciplinary has crept into discussions of intellectual projects which combine knowledges in interesting ways. Many fields of study claim this 'altered' disciplinary approach – cultural studies, gender and feminist studies, African studies, landscape studies, science studies, urban studies, public culture studies, rhetoric studies, heritage studies and many more. What then does this mean for disciplines? What are the methods of 'speaking' across discourses and how do we give voice to diverse languages governed by strict codes of practice, presented in different registers?

This has been the subject of much debate recently in academic and research circles – the Graduate School in the Humanities and the Centre for African Studies hosted a panel discussion on interdisciplinarity, the National Research Foundation held an on-line seminar.² Applied disciplines use notions of multi-disciplinary teams in presenting new ways to tackle problems of practice and design, and it is more generally accepted that there are useful ways in which humanities based thinking can be applied in the sciences.³

Borrowing from the Carol Breckenridge in the Introduction to the first edition of the journal *Public Culture*, where in 1988, she suggested that a new space of scholarship might be opened up if we start to consider that the old categories are no longer applicable as tools for thinking with and that we need to interrogate new ways of thinking in cultural studies.⁴ We similarly "...intend to proceed with a deliberate naiveté, to mix observers and theoreticians, vignettes and opinions, debates and controversies from as great a multiplicity of voices and places as we can."⁵ More recently at a meeting in July 2005 at the International Institute of Sociologists in Stockholm it was provocatively suggested the idea of the 'post'-discipline might open up precisely this type of new space for scholarly work.⁶

So, what happens if we remove the usual prefixes attached to 'discipline' and add 'post'? We have wondered about two aspects of this. Perhaps, by way of reflecting, in our fervour for working across disciplines, not enough attention has been paid to detailed considerations of how disciplines operate – both on their own and in relation to each other. At the same time many of us find in our own work that there is a need to reconsider the ways in which we use different knowledges and methods. This is especially highlighted in studies relating to Africa and the post-colony.

We think that the papers included in this edition somehow challenge established ideas about working across and within disciplines. In this edition we have included work produced by students from Architecture, African Studies, Geographical Studies, Political Science, Photography, and Social Anthropology. Additionally, there is a research database *Images and the archival trace: tracking colonial ethnographic photography at the NLSA* collated as part of the Internship course in the Public Culture in Africa Masters course work which we hope will be an

informative resource to scholars interested in the Bleek-Lloyd archive. We have also started a book review section in which *'Under Construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today* edited by Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn is reviewed by a postgraduate student. Lastly in keeping with *postamble's* commitment to profiling work produced in the many genres in which we study, there is a photographic essay 'think piece' by a fine arts student.

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We look forward to publishing your work in the future.

¹ The term 'writing spaces' is borrowed from C.G.Cryslar, *Writing Spaces, Discourses of Architecture, Urbanism and the Built Environment, 1960–2000*, Routledge, Architext Series, New York and London, 2003

² In May 2005, the Graduate School in the Humanities and the Centre for African Studies hosted a Panel Discussion, *Interdisciplinarity in the Academy' with papers by Crain Soudien, Steven Robins and Dave Cooper*. The National Research Foundation (NRF) hosted an on-line seminar on Interdisciplinarity in April 2005

³ See forthcoming CAS seminar series, *Knowledge, Disciplines and Translation*, September to November 2005

⁴ C. Breckenridge, 'Editor's Comments', in *Public Culture, Bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies*, Vol 1, No 1, Fall 1988, pp.1-4

⁵ Breckenridge, p.3

⁶ The Seminar was attended by CAS academic Nick Shepherd who planted the idea of the 'post-discipline' in our minds.