We Call Upon the Author to Explain: Theorising Writers' Festivals as Sites of Contemporary Public Culture

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We Call Upon the Author to Explain is a song title by Australian lyricist, musician and prose writer Nick Cave commenting on the public's appetite for authors to be today's soothsayers. The song opens: 'What we once thought we had we didn't, and what we have now will never be that way again. So we call upon the author to explain' (Cave). Fittingly, these lyrics express the assortment of topics authors could be asked to speak knowledgably and often personally about in the public forum of writers' festivals. Writers' festivals, moreover, are sites where the relationships between authors, the media and the wider public are most visible and where literature's overlapping literary, civic, and commercial roles and functions operate in concert.

This paper addresses a gap in research on writers' festivals where past and current commentary on these events privilege analysis of the literary and the figure of the literary author at the expense of analysing the events' broader civic and commercial functions. To illustrate this point, the paper examines the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival in detail, and analyses the Festival's contribution to public culture in terms of five prominent themes, namely; the local (in this case, Brisbane); the nature of the literary; broad political issues; party political issues; and the nature and function of celebrity. To distinguish between the literary and these broader ideas about what constitutes public culture (or likewise the public sphere[1]) of writers' festivals, Alan McKee's distinction between modernist and postmodernist cultural attitudes is useful.

A modernist or traditional attitude towards culture, McKee asserts, can be linked to Jürgen Habermas' idealisation of literature's role in the eighteenth century public sphere, where the live in-the-flesh discussion of literature's aesthetic and moral value was thought to facilitate self-realisation and progress society's democratic functioning (Habermas). McKee describes Habermas, who first wrote about and popularised the concept of the public sphere, as modernist in as much as he believes: 'The public sphere should ideally deal only with serious issues of real importance—only party political, and not celebrity issues, sport or entertainment. It shouldn't be sensational, easily accessible or commercialised' (14). Core to this modernist attitude is a view of the media as a commercial, manipulative and trivialising force (Kellner). In contrast, McKee contends that a postmodernist idea of public culture would consider any commercial 'trash' in the public sphere a good thing, because it makes ideas and debates accessible to citizens 'trained in popular forms of culture' (McKee 94). Furthermore, McKee contends that there are many public spheres, including the media sphere, which do not preclude the blending of public spheres, or a serious engagement with political culture (154). This paper asserts that commentary on writers' festivals tends uncritically to recruit a

longstanding modernist attitude toward culture to establish its claim over what ought to be included in these events.

Theorising writers' festivals as sites of contemporary public culture expresses a postmodern attitude towards culture. This attitude encompasses modernist attitudes, in recognition that there are many public spheres within culture. David Carter and Kay Ferres mobilise a similar postmodern definition of literature's place in public culture, where the value of literature lies 'in the "work" that literature does in the public sphere outside, but also through, its aesthetic credentials' (141), and 'as part of an industry, as a commodity with various exchange values and as an object of government interest' (142). They argue this definition to be more convincing and productive than a narrow aesthetic conception of literature's public role, which in making 'literariness' and its moral credentials paramount, ambiguously claims that literature 'transcends culture and innately subverts dominant structures' (141-142). Importantly, Carter and Ferres also define literature's role in public culture as 'something interconnected and extended through the media', highlighting literature's increasingly interwoven relationship with the media in contemporary life (not least because the major publishing companies are owned by media conglomerates). Contemporary public culture, therefore, affords a more productive account of literature's dissemination across literary, civic and commercial realms. Significantly, it also provides a democratic premise for analysing the breadth of content now typically presented in writers' festivals.

As previously indicated, current commentators on writers' festivals, from both academic and popular contexts, analyse literature as having a narrower role in public culture than that outlined by Carter and Ferres. Indeed, the range of content now typically presented in these festivals, and especially their participation in forms of celebrity culture, has led many commentators to assert that writers' festivals contribute to both the decline of literature and the public sphere (Dessaix; Starke; Lawson; Lurie; Meehan). Academic Michael Meehan, for example, goes as far as to claim writers' festivals 'de-industrialise'[2] the literary arts. He suggests a form of 'surrogate literacy' has grown up around them, in which physical closeness outranks a knowledge of texts: 'I've not read James Ellroy, but I have seen James Ellroy; I have not read Arundhati Roy, but I have touched the hem of her garment' (5). Similarly, academic Ruth Starke laments that Adelaide Writers' Week now 'dumbs-down' the festival to meet the commercial interests of publishers rather than engaging in the 'serious stuff of writing' (251); author Robert Dessaix publicly protested that 'authors now have to tap dance as well as write books' (qtd in Starke 251); and literary agent Caroline Lurie criticised the overly festive nature of writers' festivals, saying their 'demographic [now] expands beyond passionate lovers of literature to a more general and well cashed-up audience who wants to hear and see the latest Booker winner, the spunk author whose sexy novel was made into a film and the new black chick on the international circuit' (12). While some academics have critically addressed the rise of celebrity in the public life of literature (Ommundsen, 'Sex, Soap and Sainthood'; Ommundsen, 'From the Altar to the Market-place and Back Again'; English and Frow; Moran), they rarely examine the range of values this content can be attributed within public culture. Rather, the blending of celebrity and literature has served again, as Ommundsen argues, to foreground the literariness of authors in an attempt to promote

literary celebrities as distinct from everyday celebrities 'whose looks, lifestyle, behaviour and sex scandals display a monotonous sameness' (Ommundsen, 'Introduction' 3).

Rather than suggesting the enterprise of writers' festivals be abandoned altogether, Meehan, Starke, Dessaix and Lurie, among others, call for the organisation of writers' festivals to return to traditional, or modernist, literary values. This paper argues against this proposition, proposing that it is no longer adequate to examine and attribute value to writers' festivals exclusively in literary terms. Rather, the paper examines writers' festivals as engaging the public (representative of those who attend, read or hear about writers' festivals in live or mediated contexts) in literary ideas as well as ideas of broader interest to society, and addresses the values expressed by these discussions and debates in a more diverse range of ways than current commentators on writers' festivals are able to, or are willing to, consider.

Employing the above theoretical considerations, this paper draws on a substantial empirical study of the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival[3] to make a case for writers' festivals as significant sites of contemporary public culture. Speakers at the Festival represented staggeringly diverse worldviews and connections to the written word. Speakers included an expert advisor on al-Qa'ida, a Chaucerian rapper, a Mongolian shaman, a magician, lyricists, novelists and academics, and other political and social commentators. Writing was variously realised as rap performances, chants, poetry, television, film, theatre or blogs, in books of literary fiction and non-fiction, and in essays, manga, graphic novels, erotica, mystery and thriller writing, or journalism. This diversity is now typical of flourishing writers' festivals worldwide. The largest writers' festival is the Edinburgh International Book Festival[4] which boasts a comprehensive program of song writers and comedians as well as literary prose writers and poets. In addition to these eclectic festivals, however, there are a select few which have preserved the rarefied 'literary' space of early festivals, such as Toronto's International Festival of Authors.[5] While these festivals also claim to be increasingly 'democratic' events (Bynoe), compared to the Festival detailed in this paper, their focus on the ideas and interests of prose and poetry writers narrows their ability to function as diverse and accessible sites of a contemporary public culture. The 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival, on the other hand, discussed a wide range of topics, including the five I will focus on here: Brisbane and Brisbane-ness, the nature of the literary, broadly political and party political topics, and celebrity.

THE LOCAL

The 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival panel titled 'The Brisbane of Our Imagination' was the most prominent Festival event to have discussed a local topic about Brisbane and Brisbane-ness. The panel constructed a reading of the city moving both forward and back in time and traversing a range of accounts of the city including aspects of its history, people and literature. This discussion illustrated one of the civic roles of the Festival. It is a role A.K. Ekman describes as distinct to most festivals as 'arenas where local knowledge is produced and reproduced, where history, cultural inheritance and social structure, which distinguish one place from another, is revised, rejected or recreated'

(Ekman 283, qtd in Quinn 929). In the following segment from the opening of the 'Brisbane of Our Imagination' panel, the multiple and layered ways the Festival engaged in debates over the meaning and cultural significance of 'the local' is evident.

The panel commenced with academic Patrick Buckridge proposing that the Brisbane of the imagination was markedly different across generations. Using the results of a short survey he had conducted (among people in their late teens to their thirties), he reported that the essence of their Brisbane was inner urban: 'the river, Southbank, Riverfire, fireworks, the Citycat, the Botanic Gardens and public transport'. Immediately, in this set of descriptors, Buckridge identified one pronounced deviation from the predominantly suburban established literary identity of Brisbane evident in the most recognised works of 'Brisbane fiction' including David Malouf's *Johnno* (1975), Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* (1984), John Birmingham's *He Died with a Falafel in His Hand* (1994), Nick Earls' *Zigzag Street* (1996) and Venero Armanno's *The Volcano* (2001). Also absent from this portrait of Brisbane, Buckridge pointed out, was a Queensland and Brisbane of the 'dark days'—a Brisbane of political repression and unfettered urban development characteristic of the period of Joh Bjelke-Peterson's leadership of the Queensland Government—and the city presented, for instance, in Janette Turner-Hospital's *The Last Magician* (1992) and Andrew McGahan's *Praise* (1992). The question Buckridge posed for this panel was: What is Brisbane today when the city's literary representations are not widely shared experiences or imaginings of the city?

THE LITERARY

The second topic prominent at the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival was the discussion and debate of literariness; a topic that, on a global rather than local scale, has always been part of writers' festivals. Some Festival authors asserted literature's role as a custodian of higher moral truths, and claimed literature to be negatively impacted by today's media. The Festival's foregrounding of these traditional literary merits was illustrated in the opening address of the Festival's printed program in the statement: 'The Brisbane Writers Festival examines the relationship between ourselves as individuals and our society; our moral, philosophical and religious frameworks' (Campbell, *2007 Brisbane Writers Festival*). This phrase portrays how the Festival actively 'constructs' a language for talking about the longstanding literary values of morality and truth.

At the Festival, author and moral philosopher Raimond Gaita (interviewed by Ramona Koval for *The Book Show* on ABC's Radio National) discussed issues of morality and truth in literature and responses to it. Gaita proposed that it is often in the arts that the moral questions of life—like understanding what it is to live another's life—are finely enough formed to be experienced and perhaps understood. However, Gaita also considered the capacity for literature to foster a relationship between individuals and society to be 'near absent' in today's mediatised culture, claiming today's culture lacks a shared intellectual premise. Here, Gaita exhibits a modernist attitude towards culture and how public culture should be structured. For Gaita, those not yet brought up to the standards of 'high' culture are unequivocally considered to benefit from its civilising force. Gaita's participation in the Writers' Festival, therefore, announced the Festival as

an exclusive site in society where deeper thinking can occur and where the written text remains the privileged and pre-eminent site for the revelation of the 'truth'. Exemplifying this attitude, Gaita spoke of his frustrations with the wider public's poorly considered emotional responses to his autobiographical book *Romulus My Father* (1999) and what he believed to be their failure to comprehend the truth he intended.

Damon Galgut's presentation was also characteristic of the Festival's discussion of literariness. Galgut stated that his role as an author of literary fiction was to facilitate a process of self-realisation in the reader: 'I don't see myself, first and foremost, as political. I am concerned primarily with a psychological situation with literary potential'. Like Gaita, Galgut situated literature as an elite form of culture, stating that it 'reintroduces complexity in the world that is consistently reduced by the media to very simple truths [where] invariably, in any human situation, morality is much more complex'. In contrast to Gaita, however, Galgut did not exclusively position the 'truth' as something gained in an individual's comprehension of the written text. Galgut also portrayed himself as possessing an independently inspired 'truth', and in doing so, embodied a centuries-old Romantic tradition of the 'sentimental' author, where an author's emotions are considered a valid source of aesthetic experience and knowledge.[6] An author's sentimentality, Galgut said at the Festival, is an attribute that demonstrates 'perception and responsiveness toward something, especially the emotions of another'. At Festival appearances and in media commentary, Galgut defended the long-established belief in the sentimental author by presenting himself within a common, and as Nick Cave's song asserts, desired role, as one of society's soothsayers. The Festival audience's vigorous applause for Galgut's opening address, where he performed in accordance with the literary values of morality and truth, illustrated the public's craving to have authors fulfil this role.

BROADLY POLITICAL

Similar to the Festival's literary discussions and debates, one of the Festival's political topics, described in this paper as 'broadly political', positioned authors as privileged sites for the revelation of the 'truth' in relation to socio-political issues. This discussion and debate focused on topical and current affairs issues. The circulation and further elaboration on these topics in the media is critical to the Festival's civic role as a site of contemporary public culture. While current commentators privilege modernist ideas about literature's role in public culture, and describe the media as a trivializing force contributing to the decline of public culture, this paper contends that the media in fact extends the Festival's public culture function.

The most comprehensive example of broadly political topics enunciated at the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival was a series of incidents involving British author of Pakistani origin, Abdel Bari Atwan.[7] Atwan, author of *The Secret History of Al-Qa'ida* (2006), is the last Western journalist to have interviewed Osama bin Laden. Atwan arrived late to the Festival after delays in receiving his Australian visa. David Marr (a past presenter on ABC television's *Media Watch*) investigated Atwan's visa delays and revealed to Festival audiences that the process was held up by the Australian Security Intelligence

Organisation (ASIO) which had undertaken a 'character assessment' of the author. Atwan's visa problems generated media headlines in most continents, and the government's alleged racism was keenly reported from different points-of-view in more than fifty Australian and international news articles. Some articles defended the Government's lengthy processing of Atwan's visa, while others claimed British visas are usually approved within days and that the Australian government's delay until after the Festival had commenced was an act to silence Atwan, demonstrating Australia's fear of, and discrimination against, his race and religion.[8]

The discussion of such immediate political content between Atwan, Marr and the live Festival audience, and its mirroring in media content, demonstrates how the Festival operates as an arena of the public sphere. Atwan's discussion of the 'important issues' of race, religion, war and nationhood took up a traditional democratic mandate of the public sphere by making political power subject to wider public opinion (Habermas; Kellner). Yet the voices of government authorities were missing from the live Festival discussions; their case for delaying Atwan's visa was reported only in the newspapers or on radio.[9] This relationship between the Festival and the media highlights the limitations of the current demand that writers' festivals return to live discussions of exclusively literary topics. The alternative view—that there is potential within the processes of public culture today for productive debate and for the media to play a democratising role—posits that the Festival's engagement in socio-political ideas is a civic form of public culture that can operate, and is arguably most effective when it does operate, between live and mediatised sites.

Furthermore, the media's circulation of information about the incidents surrounding Atwan and the ideas and issues he presented had its own (including commercial) outcomes. The relationship between content that is at once framed as a moral public good and which could in the same instant be viewed as a manipulative form of publicity, is illustrated in Atwan's own response to the events: 'They [the Australian Government] owe me an apology, but to be honest I am grateful to Mr Andrews [the Minister for Immigration] because delaying my visa helped me a lot, it was extremely good for the Festival, it was well publicised and my book was the best seller at the Festival' (3). Thus the media's engagement with the Festival had dual effects: one of extending the Festival's public culture function and the other of promoting the Festival and authors in a way that might also realise their commercial interests.

PARTY POLITICAL

Party-politics was the other key political topic discussed at the Festival. Commentary suggesting writers' festivals are a syndicate of self-affirming, left-leaning interests is not atypical. *The Australian* newspaper, for instance, published a 2006 article claiming that 'some critics, half seriously' believe all Australian writers' festivals 'to be seditious hotbeds of left-leaning luvvies, that a conspiracy of organisers is discriminating against the Right and thereby distorting the balance of free speech' (Waldren 24). In part, the claim of a 'Leftist' politics at writers' festivals has been cited by Festival Directors as

evidence of the public's distrust of the media, and even as evidence of the media's right-wing bias (Llewellyn).

A survey of the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival program would seem to support the established 'Left' view of writers' festivals. The panels' participation in forms of party politics almost invariably featured speakers whose political position could be argued or perceived to be Left-leaning.[10] For instance, the Howard Government (the 2007 Australian federal election was still two months away) was discussed in the Festival panel 'Looking Back, Looking Out: John Howard's Australia on the International Stage'. Here, Mungo MacCallum argued that there had been no 'looking out' in Howard's Australia, only 'looking in'. According to MacCallum, an excess of sins was committed under the direction of Howard's own 'misguided nostalgia for the elegant simplicity of post World War II 1950s Australia'. Howard's list of sins was then expanded on by fellow panellist Alison Broinowski,[11] and then again by Raymond Evans. Evans stated that the Howard government would prefer to 'wallop historians as professional purveyors of guilt, possies of political correctness, as bearing the fangs of the Left, or as the architects of the "black arm band" history of Australia'. In the brief media coverage of this panel event, this Left bias was scrutinised by Gerard Henderson, a conservative commentator for *The Australian*, who remarked:

> Seldom in the history of public debate have the allegedly silenced been so vocal. … It was one of those familiar taxpayer-subsidised events where members of the Left intelligentsia gather to have their prejudices confirmed. … On this occasion the Australia Institute Executive Director, Clive Hamilton, essentially agreed with the social researcher Hugh Mackay, who essentially agreed with the journalist David Marr about contemporary Australia. (17)

The Australian newspaper's critique of the Festival's 'Left' bias, like the media's engagement in other Festival topics, rather than making invalid the Festival's role as a site of public culture, instead affirmed it by arguing the merits of one political sphere against the other. It was through the media then, that the opinions expressed at the live Festival events reached a wider public forum.

CELEBRITY

The final topic prominent at the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival was that of celebrity. Celebrity is often symbolised by reference to 'star' authors and synonymous with the public's interest in the author's life and personality in addition to—if not more than—their writing. Publishers and authors alike increasingly view writers' festivals as inexpensive marketing tools that transform the in-the-flesh presence of authors into celebrity content easily incorporated into today's image and personality driven media (Turner; Turner, Bonner and Marshall). This mode of presenting authors draws on the public's desire to engage with authors within a Romantic tradition of the sentimental author, which as previously stated, promotes the author's emotions as a valid source of aesthetic experience and knowledge. As a consequence, the discussion of authors' lives

and personalities at writers' festivals is routinely criticised for no longer engaging intellectually with the content of books, but rather the passion and enthusiasms of celebrity culture (Dessaix; Starke; Lurie; Meehan).

In contrast to the above criticism, this paper argues that the presentation of authors as celebrities operates within its own articulating framework, meaningful in the lives of those who consume and reproduce celebrity content. This postmodern attitude toward celebrity is important to the wider concept of public culture because, as Sean Redmond argues, celebrity is the dominant form of contemporary culture today (27). Likewise, Jonathan Gray argues that the current centrality of celebrity is important because commentary in the public sphere is often primarily constructed through the products of publicity and perhaps only secondarily through the actual text, if at all ('Television Previews' 48). This postmodern view of celebrity as a dominant and valid part of contemporary public culture foregrounds the Festival's celebrity content as a site where a range of ideas and debates (connected to authors' lives and personalities) is of interest to audiences because it generates meaning in their own lives. This attitude toward celebrity links, once again, to McKee's idea that celebrity is important to the public sphere precisely because it makes ideas and debates more accessible to citizens, and furthermore, because it acknowledges that there are multiple public spheres within culture (94).

The forms of celebrity typical of the content circulating at the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival are best described as operating within recognised strategies for generating meaning. The Festival's marketing of literary author Damon Galgut and public intellectual Abdel Bari Atwan, for instance, mobilised particular celebrity discourses as strategies for 'selling' their books; strategies premised on the author's unique cultural capital (Moran; Ommundsen, 'Sex, Soap and Sainthood'; Ommundsen, 'From the Altar to the Market-place and Back Again'; Carter; Williams, 'Academostars').

However, the most prevalent form of celebrity at the Festival focused on the lives and personalities of authors. For example, this was the form of celebrity represented by author and athlete Michael Collins whose life off the page was discussed at greater length than his story on the page. In his 'spotlight' event, Collins' history with the Irish Republican Army, his exile to America, the millions he made working for Microsoft and his career as a marathon runner (running across the Sahara Desert and Antarctica) were all topics discussed at greater length than those arising in his writing. On the rare occasion when his literary thriller *The Secret Life of E. Robert Pendleton* (2006) was discussed, it was in relation to how he balanced the writing of the book and his running career.

Another celebrity strategy is to have the author satisfy the audience's desire for the 'real', somehow to authentically embody the literary text, or, as Michael Meehan phrases it, for authors to 'stand in dramatic equivalence to their text' (5). Louis Nowra's discussion of himself in relation to the writing of his book *Bad Dreaming* (2007)—about sexual abuse in Australian Indigenous communities—is a case in point. Nowra opened by stating:

> I'm a housing commission boy from a rather violent community. My first taste of violence was when my Dad would get on speed and get out his .303, he would give me ten seconds, which I was always grateful for. Most fathers wouldn't have.

In this session, Nowra traced his early years of violence, poverty and abuse through to his career working on Indigenous films; in particular, he spoke of his depression while writing *Bad Dreaming*. This retelling of his story afforded him an intimacy with the audience, generating an equivalence between the author's writing and his own biography. It is a strategy which at the same time adopts the mode of the celebrity confessional that Jo Littler describes as the empathic space where 'the audience is invited to feel with the author' (18).

Other celebrity performances at the 2007 Festival were those explicitly produced within an entertainment or infotainment format—in contrast to the Director's claim that the Festival countered the 'unstoppable urge in TV and newspapers towards providing infotainment' (Campbell, 'Making Sense of Our World' 10). The most popular of these events was the 'The Chaser Interviews', featuring Julian Morrow from television's political satire series *The Chaser's War on Everything* with seven of the Festival's guest authors. Rather than having the author directly perform in dramatic equivalence to the text, this event required the audience to construct their own broader reading of the event based on their existing knowledge of 'Julian' as a celebrity host, the genre of television news satire, current affairs, and perhaps, knowledge of the Festival authors' writing. Interestingly, this event attracted a younger, more gender-balanced, audience distinct from the typically older female writers' festival audiences.

The above 'intertextual' approach for generating meaning, where audiences are likely to be familiar with some but not all of the content presented, is theorised as a strategy for 'acclimatising' audiences to new material (Gray, *Television Pre-views and the Meaning of Hype*); in this case, the Festival 'acclimatised' audiences to authors and their books by having them interviewed in the popular (and comfortable to the audience) format of television news satire by 'The Chaser'. Significantly, the use of an intertextual approach suggests that the process through which celebrity develops meaning for audiences is not at all 'trivial' or straightforward; rather, it necessarily draws on multiple interwoven sets of knowledge in the creation of new knowledge: a view illustrating Gray's postmodern attitude toward culture and what he believes to be the audience's knowledge of, and ability to critically synthesise, intertextual codes (*Television Pre-views and the Meaning of Hype*).

CONCLUSION

This paper details a premise for theorising today's writers' festivals as sites contemporary public culture. Importantly, this premise critiques past and current commentary on writers' festivals which seeks to reorientate them around narrow literary ideals. Theoretically, the analysis of the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival demonstrates that even though the Festival promotes itself as a literary event, akin to the traditional literary focus

of these events, the wide range of topics actually discussed at the Festival, the variously productive ways these topics are circulated and explored, and their often direct commercial impact, illustrates that a more nuanced theoretical premise based on a contemporary concept of public culture is required to sufficiently interpret these events.

The paper expands on existing research on writers' festivals by demonstrating the productive civic and commercial values that can be attributed to writers' festivals alongside their literary values. As Nick Cave's song *We Call Upon the Author to Explain* observes: society increasingly looks to authors to explain what is not known or understood. For example, at the 2007 Festival authors Damon Galgut and Abdel Bari Atwan demonstrated the opposite of writers' festivals traditional literary expectations to be true: they embodied a moral literary role at the Festival, but as commentary on them circulated in the media, they also became celebrity figures who were the most commercially successful authors (in terms of book sales) at the Festival.

The 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival then, in common with the majority of writers' festivals today, lays claim to being a site of contemporary public culture that is as important as it is popular. The Festival engages in a wide range of ideas and issues of general interest to society as well as those specific to literature. The accessibility and diversity of the 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival illustrates that foregrounding the media as an important site of culture is key to theorising the increasingly popular role that writers' festivals now occupy within culture. Furthermore, the paper illustrates the importance of the concept of public culture in the analysis of writers' festivals, suggesting that festivals that retain a narrow literary focus (and therefore are less likely to generate local or political discourses as well as certain kinds of celebrity discourses) are also the festivals less likely to exhibit the democratic qualities of accessibility and diversity that writers' festivals increasingly make claim to.

NOTES

[1] The ideas expressed in the term 'public culture' have much in common with the concept of the 'public sphere'. Both have a normative interest in democracy and the promotion of democratic futures. Both are interested in the distinctions between high and popular culture, the role of institutions, the function of different regimes of value and consumption, and questions of class, race and gender (see Bennett and Frow 135). Public culture, however, does not necessarily share the same commitments, expressed in some public sphere research, to deliberation through consensus, rational norms of debate, or the necessity for particularised arenas of public activity (see Habermas; Kellner).

[2] 'De-industrialisation' is a concept Meehan employs to explain how the novel was first involved in a process of industrialisation, where it became a depersonalised commercial product via its mass reproduction, whereas writers' festivals, conversely, are a process of reassuring the reader of authorial presence.

[3] The empirical study was undertaken in 2007. Data gathered was largely drawn from digital recordings of 2007 Brisbane Writers Festival events and collected Festival media, marketing and publicity materials. In addition to this, historical and archival research on the Festival was undertaken as were interviews with past Directors of the Festival (except Carol Davison who was not available) and relevant scholarly research (see Stewart, *The Culture of Contemporary Writers' Festivals*, PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 2009).

[4] The Edinburgh International Book Festival attracted more than 200,000 visitors in 2007. It is important to note, however, that audience numbers are only broadly indicative of a Festival's popularity as each festival employs slightly different formulas for calculating attendance.

[5] Toronto's International Festival of Authors' mandate is to 'present the best of the world's literature to the city' and the event has built an international reputation as the world's most lavish and prestigious writers' festival. The Festival attracts approximately 10,000 visitors annually (see *Readings at Harbourfront*: <http://www.readings.org>).

[6] While the Romantic tradition of authorship could be seen to have its origins in the orators of ancient Greece, the notion of the sentimental author more specifically associated with this tradition draws upon a history of the 'novel of sentimentalism' embodied in literary works such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774).

[7] Abdel Bari Atwan is the editor-in-chief of the London based pan-Arab newspaper, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*. He has lived in London since 1978, and is a British citizen. Incidents involving Atwan are reported in detail for the purposes of this paper. However, there were a variety of other topics that engaged in broadly political discourses including the topics of colonisation, migration and immigration as well as environmentalism and globalisation.

[8] Articles supporting Atwan and Marr's claim regarding the Australian Government's racism include: 'British Writer Claims Australian "Islamophobia" Behind Visa Delay' (*The Australian*, 13 September 2007: 7); 'Visa Delayed on Racist Grounds' (*Associated Press Newswriters*, 14 September, 2007: 3); 'Journalist Warns of Muslim Backlash over "Delayed" Visa' (*The Courier-Mail*, 4 August, 2007: 27); 'London Palestinian Editor Contests Australia Visa Refusal' (*New Zealand Press Association*, 13 September, 2007); 'Visa Delay for Author–Writer Says Race and Religion to Blame' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September, 2007: 2); 'A Palestinian Author Who Almost Missed the Brisbane Writers Festival Because of Visa' (*Australian Associated Press General News*, 15 September, 2007); 'Bin Laden Writer Arrives in Australia' (*The Australian*, 17 September, 2007: 7); 'Al-Qa'ida Authority Arrives at Right Time' (*ABC News*, 2007); 'Visa Row Author Draws Festival Crowds Al-Quds Al-Arabi Editor Abdel Bari Atwan' (*ABC News*, 16 September, 2007); 'War Makes Australia a Terror Target: London Author' (*Sunday Tasmanian*, 16 September, 2007: 2); 'Are We Ruled by Racism?' and 'Racism Running Riot' (*Brisbane City News*, 20 September, 2007: 3), among others.

[9] Government responses to Atwan and Marr included: 'ASIO Ban on Terrorism Expert' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September, 2007: 2); 'The Federal Government has denied it has refused a visa to editor Abdul Bari Atwan' and 'Dr Abdel Bari Atwan, a Leading Palestinian Author, has Accused the Department of Foreign Affairs of Racism'

(*Federal Government Broadcast Alerts*, 12 September, 2007); Journalist "not refused visa"' (*SBS World News Headline Stories*, 12 September, 2007); 'ASIO has not Blocked Atwan's Visa' (*News Zealand Press Association*, 13 September, 2007); 'A Palestinain Author who almost missed the Brisbane Writers Festival because his visa…', 'A leading Palestinain writer, Abdel Bari Atwan, will be coming to the Brisbane Writers Festival', and 'The Fed Government has granted Abdul Bari Atwan […] a visa' (*Federal Government Broadcast Alerts*, 14 September, 2007).

[10] For example: Clive Hamilton, Hugh Mackay and David Marr in 'The Role of the Public Intellectual'; Greg Barns, Christian Kerr, Margaret Simons and Graham Young in 'Political Reporting and the Internet'; Alison Broinowski and Mungo MacCallum in 'Looking Back, Looking Out; John Howard's Australia on the International Stage'; Greg Baxter, Martin Crotty, Manda Page, Raymond Evans and David Andrew Roberts in 'The Great Mistakes of Australian History'; Christian Kerr and Mungo MacCallum in 'The Crikey Guide to the Election'; and Raymond Evans, Jackie Huggins, Robert Kenny, Sam Watson and Michael Williams in 'Captain James Cook was the Best Thing to Ever Happen to Black Australia!!!'.

[11] On the world stage, Broinowski reported, Australia ranked as the thirty-third nation for peacefulness; was equal to Zimbabwe on Amnesty International's rank for international human rights abuses; failed to meet millennium goals on providing international aid; and failed to sign the international protocol for the rights of the child, the declaration of women against discrimination and the draft intervention of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, Australia failed to sign the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, committed serious acts of corruption such as revealed by the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) scandal and used the nation's armed forces in an unprecedented manner for the illegal invasion of Iraq, for detracting asylum seekers from coming into Australia and for the militarised reconstruction of Australian Indigenous communities.

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