

Excursions

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Thomas Houlton, "Preface"

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Thomas Houlton

Chief Editor

Preface: *Excursions Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 2 'Purity': Publication of Proceedings

Along with the rest of the *Excursions* editorial board (both past and present) I feel like I have been living with 'purity' for quite some time now. When we first came up with the idea it appeared, on first glance, to be an almost benign word, something that perhaps wouldn't give us enough 'traction' in our Call for Papers. However, once conceived of it proved a difficult term to dislodge from our conversations—something about the concept demanded our attention. As an idea it seemed to travel and expand almost limitlessly through the sciences and humanities to encompass, define and embody what *Excursions* is always looking out for: connections.

It wasn't until we collated the submissions for the conference that we quite realised what a rich diversity of papers we had received. Academics working across a wealth of disciplines aptly demonstrated that purity is a real concern in research today. We received abstracts about topics as disparate as the Breivik attacks in Norway; sexuality and teen movies; honour and duelling in Renaissance drama; environmental purity; Julia Kristeva and religious purity;

Confucianism in contemporary China; eugenics in 1930s America; (im)pure noise; and many more besides. I hope when you read the full conference programme you will see what a range of papers we were lucky enough to engage with over the two days of *Purity*.

From the beginning we had decided that as an interdisciplinary journal we should encourage creative engagements with the theme: again, we were not disappointed by the submissions we received. Iris Zaki's film *My Kosher Shifts* (2011) is a witty and thought-provoking documentary filmed from behind the reception of a Jewish hotel in North London—I strongly urge anybody who has not seen it to do so. Janice Pariat's sensitive reading of her short story '19/87', set in her native Shillong province in India, looked at political and religious divides which caused devastating 'ethnic' conflicts in that region. Caitlin Hayward-Tapp's coruscating performance of her feminist poetry was truly inspiring in its provocations, intimacy and humour. Matthew Atkinson's noise performance was a similarly absorbing piece, using a mixture of media to produce a pure/impure soundscape. And lastly, Charlie Duncan Saffrey provided an erudite and humorous end to the evening with his own unique blend of 'Stand-up Philosophy'.

I mention the creative portion of our conference in such detail because it provided a truly essential area of reflection; resonating, overlapping and contrasting with the more 'traditional' academic panels either side of it. It showed us how creativity, humour and performance can enrich and further discussion in a manner entirely harmonious with formal academic concerns.

Some words of thanks are due, firstly to our two keynote speakers, who were both incredibly generous in their time and enthusiasm for the project.

Susan Currell, from the Department of American Studies at the University of Sussex, provided us with an opening paper examining the little-discussed legacy of eugenicist policies in New Deal America. Sue's examination of these issues was sensitive and revealing, but perhaps even more arresting was her own questioning of the methodologies we take for granted, the pitfalls we as researchers can so easily fall into, and how we must begin to explore our own practice. As an opening keynote to an interdisciplinary conference, it was perfectly judged and implemented a conversation about the 'purity' of our research which informed all our subsequent discussions.

Robbie Duschinsky, from the University of Northumbria, showed great enthusiasm and commitment to the subject, and his closing remarks, a beautifully judged synthesis of all the conference papers, was a much-needed moment to pause and reflect upon the wealth of material we had listened to over the previous two days. His article, co-authored with Ian Robson (also of Northumbria), is modified to include only the papers published in this issue.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the 'Purity' participants, and hope that they are as delighted with this special issue as we are.

Special thanks must go to Matt Knight at the Creativity Zone in the University of Sussex for hosting us so efficiently; Paul Roberts, Sarah Robins-Hobden and Julie Carr in the University of Sussex Doctoral School; Will Barker in the University of Sussex Print Unit; and all the other members of staff and services who provided us with support and encouragement. Thanks also to James Burt, Neil Dooley, Laura Joyce and Jo Wood who were involved in planning for this conference in its early stages.

Conference Organisers

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