

# Preface: Unfinished Business: Apology Cultures in the Asia Pacific

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**T**HIS SPECIAL SECTION OF *AUSTRALIAN HUMANITIES REVIEW*, ENTITLED 'UNFINISHED Business: Apology Cultures in the Asia Pacific', arose out of a Monash University Arts Faculty Interdisciplinary Research Project of the same name. This project brought together an interdisciplinary team across the fields of Literary Studies, History, Film, and Cultural Studies, encompassing aspects of law, human rights and ethics. The project sought to understand how various forms of cultural practice and narrative mediate our comprehension of the past and of ongoing human interactions within and between nation-states, in particular, of past, present and future social and cultural interactions that coalesce around the material and symbolic consequences of apology in the Asia Pacific region.

Official apologies by nation states to peoples and countries they have wronged have become a deeply current issue. The view that this phenomenon is now a significant social force is widely held across a number of scholarly disciplines such as politics, history, law and human rights studies. These studies have yielded important knowledge about *why* apologies are given or refused. Yet to date there has been remarkably little attention paid to the question of *method*. Our central hypothesis was that narratives and memories of past traumas transmitted through mass cultural forms (such as autobiography, historical dramas, television documentary) are crucial to understanding the politics of

official apologies. Our aim over the course of the project (which included two research workshops, one in Prato, Italy and one in Melbourne) was to produce a new interdisciplinary methodology, encompassing the study of film, history and literature influenced by Tessa Morris-Suzuki's notion that 'it is helpful to think about "reconciliation as method"—not as an end-point in which consensus on history is achieved, but rather as sets of media, skills and processes that encourage the creative sharing of ideas and understandings about the past.'

The two workshops helped to develop an approach that sought to account for the material conditions of the production and reception of texts that contextualise national apologies/non-apologies and mediate remembrance and recognition. The first workshop established broad parameters for the project that enabled individual researchers to consider their own disciplinary approach within the context of inter-disciplinary perspectives. The second workshop, led by Tessa Morris-Suzuki (who has written the Introduction to this special section), focussed on the notion of 'reconciliation as method', and it is from this workshop that this set of essays has emerged.

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