



2015 Seminar Series

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Mind the Gap: Toward a Political History of Habit

Professor Tony Bennett

Abstract

Habit has become a lively topic of debate across a range of contemporary fields of inquiry: in affect theory, sociological accounts of reflexivity, the neurosciences, cultural geography, actor network theory, aesthetics and philosophy. This has paralleled its increasing prominence as a matter of practical concern in debates focused on the need for new and/or transformed habits in relation to racism, waste management, climate change, the routes and routines of urban life, and so on. In this paper I bring these two concerns together by examining the ways in which authorities of various kinds (philosophical, sociological, psychological, neurological, biological, and aesthetic) have constituted habit as their points of entry into the management of conduct. I shall be particularly concerned with the ways in which varied strategies of intervention into the 'conduct of conduct' developed since the mid-nineteenth century have posited a gap or interval in which the force of acquired or inherited habits is temporarily halted. It is this gap that opens up the possibility of re-shaping habits providing, in some accounts, scope for practices of freedom and self-determination that escape the constraints of habit, understood as a form of automatic repetitive conduct. At the same time, this gap provides an opportunity for conduct to be re-shaped by being brought under the direction of epistemological or aesthetic authorities which aspire to 'mind the gap' that is produced when the mechanisms of habit are temporarily stalled. The point of entry into these questions will be provided by recent post-Deleuzian programs for 'minding the gap', particularly those of Catherine Malabou's conceptualisation of the relations between aesthetics and neuro-plasticity. However, these will be considered against the longer histories of habit as these have been figured by the relations between Western philosophy and the empirical disciplines.

Biography

Tony Bennett is Research Professor in Social and Cultural Theory in the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney. He is a member of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and of the Academy of the Social Sciences in the UK. His main books include *Formalism and Marxism* (1979), *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (1987, with Janet Woollacott), *Outside Literature* (1991), *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (1998), *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (2004), and *Making Culture, Changing Society* (2013). He is also a co-author of *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures* (1999) and *Culture, Class, Distinction* (2009).

Date

Thursday 14 May

Time

11.30am – 1pm

Venue

EA.G.15 Parramatta (South)
Campus