This was the first Postgraduate Advanced Training Seminar arranged for the ARC Network for Early European Research. It was convened by Stephanie Trigg at the University of Melbourne, as Team Leader for the Cultural Memory theme.

The seminar was arranged as a sequence of “masterclasses”, practical workshops and discussions of current and future research projects. All were plenary sessions, and the group quickly developed a productive and co-operative dynamic. Presenters were asked to suggest several chapters and readings for discussion, and one presenter circulated a copy of a formal paper that was the basis for his discussion. This ensured that we had some conceptual vocabulary and subject matter in common, given the diversity of student interests, and many students commented how useful this was.

Numbers were restricted, to keep discussion feasible. We had 23 registered participants, plus a staff member from the Baillieu library who helped organise the venue and who is a researcher in the area. Most of the speakers attended several sessions in addition to their own.

The first day was theoretical in orientation. Stephanie Trigg opened discussion with an overview of the kinds of research topics in medieval and early modern studies that might fall under the “Cultural Memory” umbrella. John Frow and Valerie Krips spoke as scholars working outside the “Early European” field, both discussing the work of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora and others on collective and cultural memory.

After lunch, the group divided into two: half joined Margaret Manion at the National Gallery to look at several illuminated medieval manuscripts; the other half joined Stephanie Trigg and Wallace Kirsop at the State Library, with the assistance of the rare book librarians Des Cowley and Pam Pryde. Stephanie introduced the VSL’s substantial collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer; Wallace showed books from the VSL and his own collection, talking about the provenance and collection of these items. Shane Carmody, Director of Collections and Access, and a member of NEER’s Management Committee, came along to welcome the group.

The final session on Friday saw James Simpson presenting a formal paper – a critique of those versions of English medieval studies that privilege synchronic interdisciplinarity at the expense of longer historical perspectives that might interrogate the relationship between pre- and post-Reformation constructions of the medieval period.

The day concluded with a drinks reception at the School of Graduate Studies that coincided with a launch of antiTHESIS forum #3, selected proceedings of the Once and Future Medievalism conference held at Melbourne in September, 2004. This reception was sponsored by the Department of English at Melbourne. A casual pizza meal in Lygon St, Carlton, followed the launch. This was an inexpensive cash transaction: speakers who attended paid for themselves.
Saturday’s proceedings were more practical in orientation. Charles Zika and Stephanie Trigg spoke about various of their projects that extended across different historical periods. Megan Cassidy-Welch used an essay by Miri Rubin to lead a discussion and group workshop on the practice of cultural history.

The final session involved workshopping proposals for future research projects submitted by two participants, and broadened out into a discussion of some strategies for applying for ARC post-doctoral fellowships. It became clear in this session that many students had little or no understanding of how to prepare for this next stage in an academic career; were not aware of the need to publish their research during their PhD enrolment; and had little idea of how to prioritise journals to send their work to, and so forth. I would **recommend**, therefore, that most NEER events, whether symposia, training seminars, or conferences, include a day or a half-day dedicated to postgraduate development, giving students a further venue for testing out their ideas and proposals. Larger universities and departments with stronger postgraduate and research programmes should be encouraged to share resources and expertise here, in terms of grant mentoring, pre-professional development, etc. (Such sessions might take some pressure off the e-consult scheme.)

Many participants expressed a desire to stay in touch. It will be great to have the NEER website maintained more actively, and some form of online discussion established.

Participants were asked to fill out a survey that was sent directly to the NEER convenor. Without wishing to pre-judge their responses, the mood of the two days was collegial, pleasant and constructive. Seven students have already written to say how useful they found the seminar.

A few **procedural** issues arose, that might be of use for convenors of future seminars.

It was great having NEER handling requests for finance and registration, etc. The coordinator sent me the students’ contact details and applications, though in the transition from Anne to Claire, these lists didn’t always match up, and at least one application was left off the original list. I knew about this because it was a Melbourne student, but it’s obviously going to be important to have efficient records, to minimise the extra time taken in checking and double-checking lists.

Similarly, it took a while to establish our protocols for paying speakers. We agreed that NEER participants would not be paid, so it was only James Simpson and Valerie Krips who were paid ($225 for a 90 minute seminar, paid as expenses, rather than salary, so as to avoid tax). Wallace Kir sop will be sent a $100 book voucher for his shorter session, since he had no expenses to claim. This was managed by NEER sending a cheque for $550 to the Department of English at Melbourne, which is processing the paperwork (collecting banking details, etc.). After the seminar, Margaret Manion raised the issue of whether retired participants might receive some remuneration, and it has been agreed in consultation with Andrew and Claire that this is appropriate.
Many students commented gratefully on the excellent food. We were not extravagant, by any means, but it was important to punctuate two days of intensive work, in the same room, with a varied and appealing menu. Again, transfer of funds was slightly problematic: the caterers demanded an early deposit, which the Department of English paid; NEER will send re-imbursement.

Costs were kept to a minimum through the generosity and enthusiasm of Andrew Stephenson of the Baillieu Library at Melbourne. Andrew arranged for us to use two rooms in the Library free of charge, and offered to organise any AV requirements. This saved the cost of hiring rooms which can be expensive at Melbourne; and importantly saved the overtime costs of security personnel on the weekend.

None of the interstate visitors expressed any interest in the possibility of a homestay with local postgraduates: this idea does not seem to have much of a future!

Even with NEER’s assistance, there was a fair amount of work involved in coordinating local arrangements. I ended up using my own research funds to employ a research assistant, Philip Thiel (one of the participants in the seminar) to liaise with the caterers, organise name tags, track down and make photocopies of the readings for the Melbourne participants, and to organise the Friday night reception and dinner, etc. Perhaps it is a sign that I am over-committed to other projects, but I found myself unwilling to spend too much of my own time on these practical matters. This is something other team/theme leaders may want to think about. I would also like to give notice that when I make my formal proposal for a Cultural Memory symposium in Melbourne next year, I will be applying to NEER for an allowance to pay a conference assistant. Running a conference or seminar is very rewarding, but there is no allowance in NEER’s budget, I think, for the time commitment of the convenors and team leaders in conferring with speakers, venues, caterers and participants, and in the preparation of the many emails and documents necessary for things to run smoothly.

Overall, discussion at the seminar was energetic and engaged; and the atmosphere was collegial and constructive. I think we all felt privileged to be there and sharing a single purpose. Thank you, NEER!

Stephanie Trigg
26 May, 2005