Report on the conference *Thinking the Human in the Era of Enlightenment* (7-9th July 2010) for the Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities and the Arts.

The conference *Thinking the Human in the Era of Enlightenment* was held from the 7-9th July 2010 in the theatrette, The Sir Roland Wilson Building. It was co-organized and convened by Alexander Cook and Shino Konishi of the School of History and Ned Curthoys of the School of Cultural Inquiry. The conference was intended to be an interdisciplinary forum exploring conceptions of humanity in the long eighteenth century in a variety of discursive and social fields ranging from Europe to the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. The conference attracted world-renowned scholars from a variety of disciplines including history, philosophy, literary studies, musicology, and political science. Participants include eminent scholars such as Vanessa Agnew, Peter Cryle, John Gascoigne, Ian Hunter, Jonathan Lamb, Iain McCalman, Jon Mee, Sankar Muthu, Lisa O’Connell, and Gillian Russell, ensuring that it was one of the strongest Enlightenment themed conferences held in Australia in recent times.

We were very pleased with the originality and quality of the papers presented at the conference, which contributed to historiographical debate over the ambiguities of Enlightenment conceptions of humanity and the historical legacy of those conceptions. We believe the papers given represent cutting edge work in fields such as European and indigenous contact history, Pacific and Australasian studies, French literary and intellectual history, European philosophy and aesthetics, musicology, and German studies. Many of the papers impressed with their comparative scope, erudition, and willingness to challenge conventional paradigms of interpretation. Vanessa Agnew’s keynote address ‘Songs from the Edge of the World’ revealed the importance of music in the eighteenth century as a medium of inter-cultural dialogue and ethnographic speculation. Sankar Muthu’s keynote address on the ideal of ‘commercial humanity’ and its tempering by a growing late eighteenth century awareness of colonial malfeasance and the iniquity of the slave trade was very well received and stimulated lively debate. To our knowledge very few of the papers presented at the conference have been published; rather they represent new and emerging fields of interest. For example the papers of Vanessa Agnew, Bruce Buchan, Laszlo Kontler, Iain McCalman, Jon Mee, Sankar Muthu, Gillian Russell and Hsu-Ming Teo were part of ongoing, innovative research projects.
We believe that the conference will result in two exciting publications whose integrated themes and wide-ranging analysis of eighteenth-century culture will make a significant impact on Enlightenment studies. We are pleased to announce that we have an arrangement with the ERA ‘A’ ranked journal *Intellectual History* to publish papers from the conference in a forthcoming issue to be guest edited by the three of us. Contributors to this issue include Bruce Buchan, Alexander Cook, Ned Curthoys, Bronwen Douglas, Ian Hunter, Laszlo Kontler, and Lisa O’Connell. Papers will range over topics such as the anthropological transition from Enlightenment conceptions of man to racialist materialism, the philosophical underpinnings of the marriage plot in the sentimental novel, and the revolutionary political thought of C.F. Volney.

We are also in productive negotiations with the publisher *Pickering and Chatto* about publishing an edited collection based on the conference in their internationally renowned *Enlightenment World* series. We have already confirmed Vanessa Agnew, John Docker, Kate Fullagar, Shino Konishi, Kader Konuk, Jonathan Lamb, Iain McCalman, Jon Mee, Gillian Russell, Nicole Starbuck and Hsu-Ming Teo as contributors. It promises to be an excellent interdisciplinary collection with possible thematic sections on the Pacific ‘contact zone’, representations of Islam and the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, and representations of sociability and the ideal of ‘conversation’ in the long eighteenth century.

We believe that a thematically focused journal issue and a more broadly conceived edited collection reflecting the eclectic interests and cross-cutting scholarship evident in the conference will make a strong contribution to scholarly debates about the relationship between the eighteenth century and our contested modernity. We thank the HRC and RSSS for their financial and logistical support for the conference.

Yours Sincerely,

Alexander Cook, Ned Curthoys and Shino Konishi

October 5th 2010