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Foreword "Contacts, Frictions, Clashes: Modes of Construction of Anglophone Culture"

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*Contacts, Frictions, Clashes:
Modes of Construction of Anglophone Culture*

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of Anglophone Culture**

In memoriam Danielle Bruckmuller-Genlot

Avant-propos

*Clashes or Frictions? Approaches to Linguistic Contact
in Medieval Britain*

Spenser, Donne, I. A. Richards and the Limitations of Practical Criticism

*Some Reflections on the Place of Aesthetics and Politics
in American Studies*

The Strange Case of John Martin's Dinosaurs

*The Impossible Prison? Crime, Penal Policy and Society
in Nineteenth-Century England*

Contact, Friction, Exclusion: Australia's "Utopian" Federation

*« Superhuman inhumanities »: paradigmes et paradoxes
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*« Sourire quand même »: La reconstruction des Gueules Cassées
de la Grande Guerre en France et en Grande-Bretagne*

*Contacts, Frictions and Clashes in British Musicians' Opposition
to the Thatcher Governments, 1979–1990*

Nature en ville et conflits urbains

*Femmes et hommes migrants en provenance des nouveaux
États membres de l'UE dans le monde de l'emploi en Irlande*

*Upsetting the Body Politic(s): Witches as Enemy Agents
in Rupert Goold's Macbeth (2010)*

*"They want more conflict? I'll see what I can do...": Reality TV
and the Transfiguration of the Commonplace Image in Reality Show*

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Université de Strasbourg

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recherches anglaises et nord-américaines

**Contacts, Frictions, Clashes:
Modes of Construction of Anglophone Culture**

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N°49/2016

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Contents / Sommaire

<i>In memoriam Danielle Bruckmuller-Genlot</i>	
Hélène Ibata	5
<i>Foreword</i>	
Anne Bandry-Scubbi	7

Theoretical Frictions

<i>Clashes or Frictions? Approaches to Linguistic Contact in Medieval Britain</i>	
Fanny Moghaddassi	15
<i>Spenser, Donne, I. A. Richards and the Limitations of Practical Criticism</i>	
J. B. Lethbridge	29
<i>Some Reflections on the Place of Aesthetics and Politics in American Studies</i>	
Philipp Schweighauser	43

Frictions and Clashes in History

<i>The Strange Case of John Martin's Dinosaurs</i>	
Muriel Adrien	57
<i>The Impossible Prison? Crime, Penal Policy and Society in Nineteenth-Century England</i>	
Neil Davie	73
<i>Contact, Friction, Exclusion: Australia's "Utopian" Federation</i>	
Marilyne Brun	87
<i>"Superhuman inhumanities": paradigmes et paradoxes de la Première Guerre mondiale dans la poésie britannique</i>	
Yann Tholoniati	101
<i>« Sourire quand même » : La reconstruction des Gueules Cassées de la Grande Guerre en France et en Grande-Bretagne</i>	
Marjorie Gehrhardt	119
<i>Contacts, Frictions and Clashes in British Musicians' Opposition to the Thatcher Governments, 1979-1990</i>	
Jeremy Tranmer	131
<i>Nature en ville et conflits urbains</i>	
Sandrine Baudry	143

Twenty-first Century Frictions and Clashes

<i>Femmes et hommes migrants en provenance des nouveaux États membres de l'UE dans le monde de l'emploi en Irlande: réalités rugueuses</i>	
Marie-Jeanne Da Col Richert	157
<i>Upsetting the Body Politic(s): Witches as Enemy Agents in Rupert Goold's Macbeth (2010)</i>	
Artur Skweres	173
<i>"They want more conflict? I'll see what I can do...": Reality TV and the Transfiguration of the Commonplace Image in Reality Show (Showtime, 2012)</i>	
Sébastien Lefait	189
Book Reviews/ Recensions	201
Abstracts/ Résumés	207

Foreword

ANNE BANDRY-SCUBBI ♦

This volume examines the theme of “Contacts, Frictions and Clashes” from a variety of points of view, which, considered together, provide an insight into the resonances of these concepts in the English-speaking world.

The interplay between these three notions was chosen by SEARCH as its focus for the period 2012–2017, being deemed a relevant approach to look at societies and cultures which presently seem obsessed with conflict. This issue of *RANAM* gathers the contributions of scholars invited by the research group to explore facets of the interaction between contacts, frictions and clashes. The three notions were first examined in *RANAM* 47 in terms of dissonance and disharmony. A companion volume results from the conference organized in 2014 on “Contacts, Frictions and Clashes” and considers the spatial dimension of contact (Moghaddassi, Potriquet & Bandry-Scubbi 2016).

Contact is defined in the *OED* as “the state or condition of touching; the mutual relation of two bodies whose external surfaces touch each other” (1.a). The Latin verb from which the word derives, *contingere*, suggests the threat that contact can lead to “contagion”: most articles in this volume deal with contacts perceived as something negative. However the earliest example of the term in the *OED*, taken from Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum*, points to a more positive sense which is set off by the noun the philosopher combines it with, “conjunction”:

As for Loue, the Platonists, (some of them,) goe so farre, as to hold that the Spirit of the Louer, doth passe into the Spirits, of the Person Loued; Which causeth the desire of Returne into the Body, whence it was Emitted: Whereupon followeth that Appetite of Contact, and Coniunction, which is in Louers. (Bacon, 1626: §944)

Interestingly, the *OED* bowdlerizes the quotation,¹ possibly wishing to attenuate the physical, sensorial dimension of contact and foreground Bacon’s more general interest in “appetites of matter” (Gigliani, 2010: 152). This occurrence of the

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1 As of May 2016, this definition has not been updated and the quotation reads: “The desire of Return into the Body, whereupon followeth that appetite of Contact and Conjunction” (*Sylva Sylvarum*, 1626; *OED* 1.a).

word “contact” is the last of three in *Sylva Sylvarum*. If the second has similar connotations,² the first endows it with a causative sense: “contact of Cold Bodies” is a “cause of Cold” (Bacon, 1626: §69).³ This is developed in the chemical sense of “contact action” as catalysis (1836, *OED* 5). Scholars contributing to this volume have investigated what ensues from chosen or forced contiguity, along with the actual modalities of contact.

Associating the term with “frictions” and “clashes” directed analyses towards situations of aggressiveness, the confrontations of rival views and the ways in which the ensuing changes this provokes came about. “Frictions” therefore lose the positive connotations envisaged in *RANAM* 47 (“the process through which mismatched elements are put together creatively,” 9, 176)⁴ or the curative virtues they were used for in early medicine (“the action of chafing or rubbing,” *OED* 1.a). They take on the harsher sense of “attrition” (*OED* 2), of “the jarring or conflict of unlike opinions” (*OED* 4) when tensions resulting from contact cause undesired change. Thoreau advocated the use of such force to bring down noxious systems:

All machines have their friction; and possibly this does good enough to counterbalance the evil. [...] If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth—certainly the machine will wear out. [...] but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. (Thoreau, 1849)⁵

When frictions embody resistance, clashes can occur, “hostile encounter[s]” (*OED* 3a), “conflict[s] or collision[s] of contrary arguments or opinions” (*OED* 3b). The first, more concrete meaning of “clash” however, suggests entropy: “the loud sound of collision made by a heavy stroke or blow, the first impact of which is firm and hard, but is followed by a confused sound of many looser and lighter impacts”

² “The nearest Approach of [Copulation], is between the Hee-Palme, and the Shee-Palme; which, (as they report,) if they grow neare, incline the One to the other: In so much as, (that which is more strange,) they doubt not to report, that to keepe the Trees vp|right from Bending, they tye Ropes, or Lines, from the one to the other, that the Contact might be enjoyed by the Contact of a Middle Body” (Bacon 1626: §608).

³ Not without unwitting irony as Bacon’s death has been said to result from experiments with cold (Tadié, 2014: 10).

⁴ Such an outcome is also suggested by the nonce-combination Sterne uses to evoke the influence of one’s hobby-horse: “the same process and electrical assimilation [sic] [...] through which I ween the souls of connoisseurs themselves, by long friction and incumbition, have the happiness, at length, to get all be-virtu’d,—be-pictur’d,—be-butterflied, and be-fiddled” (Sterne 1759: II.3).

⁵ I am indebted to Sandrine Baudry for this reference.

(*OED* 1a). Contacts, frictions and clashes all imply change and therefore are useful to understand the modes in which culture is elaborated.

The thirteen articles forming this volume constitute probes into historical or contemporary situations and cultural objects from our present vantage point. Spanning from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century, they examine the ways in which contacts took place, were negotiated or prevented, frictions were accepted or suffered, clashes were endured, implemented or avoided in Anglophone contexts.

The first part of this volume consists of theoretical views, with three analyses showing the influence the cultural environment bears on the development of critical theories. In contrast with earlier nationalistic conceptions of the development of languages, Fanny Moghaddassi deals with the present relevance of the concepts of frictions rather than clashes in order to explain the process of hybridization which resulted in modern English. The next two papers challenge literary critical theories: Julian Lethbridge contends that the perception of poetry initiated by I. A. Richards's practical criticism bars the appreciation of "sparse" and "rhetorical" verse such as Spenser's, while Philipp Schweighauser argues that a contextually aware aesthetic take on literary texts provides a more informed comprehension of their ideological dimensions than readings solely focused on political considerations. All three papers give prominence to frictions between theories.

Frictions and clashes in history constitute the second section of the volume, with case studies demonstrating how the often violent contact between what seemed to contemporaries to be irreconcilable conceptions of a particular problem or situation led to new cultural and political forms. These are first exemplified by an encounter between science and art which makes a connexion between the theme presently investigated by *SEARCH* and its previous one, "Reprise, Recycling, Recuperation" (*RANAM* 45 and 47). Muriel Adrien's study of "The Strange Case of John Martin's Dinosaurs" combines the concepts of *déjà vu* and authenticity with those of contacts, frictions and clashes to show that the success of the artist's spectacular representations of the gigantic creatures newly reconstructed from fossils derives from conciliating competing versions of Earth history rather than from adopting one of the rival religious and scientific views. Neil Davie insists more on the process which brought about what is now perceived as a "Victorian" institution, the convict penitentiary emblemized by Pentonville: the frictions at work in the "prison debate" during the first half of the nineteenth century reflect the ideological divisions of the period over the possibility—and the desirability—of reforming human beings whom society wanted to punish. Experimentation is also at the heart of Marilynne Brun's article on Australia's "Utopian Federation." She focuses not so much on contact between ideologies as on the construction of an absence of contact between races in the settlement colony that was implemented by the White Australia Policy (1901-1970s).

World War I constitutes one of the greatest clashes in modern human history, and is the subject of two articles.⁶ Examining poems by Owen, Sassoon and Brooke, in conjunction with Paul Nash's 1918 *The Menin Road*, Yann Tholoniati shows the violence of the break with the tradition of presenting a soldier's death as heroic; this is emphasized by the painter's ekphrasis of the work with which he represented "the most frightful nightmare of a country more conceived by Dante or Poe than by nature." Marjorie Gehrhardt deals with what Tholoniati calls the "deformation of the human fabric" ("la déformation de la pâte humaine") in a very literal manner by focusing on the differences between the reconstruction and reinsertion, in Great Britain and in France, of the facially disfigured or *Gueules Cassées*, as the French war invalids called themselves.

Closer to us in time, Jeremy Tranmer analyses "Contacts, Frictions and Clashes in British Musicians' Opposition to the Thatcher Governments" between 1979 and 1990 using the Gramscian concepts of "war of manoeuvre" and "war of position"; he concludes on the importance of frictions exerted by groups politicized to varying degrees, the "constant chipping away at the edges of Thatcherism." Sandrine Baudry shows how such dynamics of attrition often, but not always, triggered the greening of cities, notably in the 1970s: "Nature en ville et conflits urbains" also points to the modes in which hygienist and capitalistic ideologies instrumentalized urban gardening, with the resulting gentrification, as exemplified by New York's High Line.

The last three papers raise ethical questions by examining frictions and clashes in the twenty-first century, for which we have less perspective. Using press articles and official reports, Marie-Jeanne Da Col Richert looks at recent immigration from new European member states to Ireland and the rough reality they are confronted with because of an inhospitable political context. The aggressiveness which seems to prevail in current Western societies is then worked through in the analyses of a film and of a TV series. Artur Skweres' "Upsetting the Body Politic(s): Witches as Enemy Agents in Rupert Goold's *Macbeth*," argues that the increased place given to the Weird Sisters in this 2010 adaptation, because it is perceived by viewers but not by characters, deprives the latter, and particularly Macbeth, of their agency. Should this be understood as signifying the powerlessness of traditional political agents, be they evil, in our contemporary environment? Manipulation also forms the main point of Sébastien Lefait's study of the 2012 TV series *Reality Show*. In "They Want More Conflict? I'll See What I Can Do," he combines the well-known need for frictions and conflicts in the making of a story with the post-modern postulate of the blurring of fiction and reality in order to look into the status of reality TV and the difficulty present society has to disentangle different levels of images and information.

⁶ The contributions from which they are derived were delivered in a public seminar at the Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire in partnership with the 2014 exhibition "La Mort des poètes."

By unravelling representations of conflicts, be they once removed through fiction or more direct through confrontations in the “real” world, past or present, this volume aims to help nuance the *clichéd* but still influential view of the “clash of civilizations” (Barker, 2013). The election of Sadiq Khan as the new mayor of London gives more room for hope than the threat of Brexit.

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