

## Editorial

Anne Brunon-Ernst

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- 1 Part I of the special issue on ‘Panopticons in Australia’ ended with a call for more detailed investigation in the areas of gender relations. Part II partly aims to answer this call in offering first to fill the gap with a paper by Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart on female convicts in Australia.
- 2 Secondly, the significance of the sequel is to reassess the influence of the Panopticon, by focusing less on architecture than in Part I, and more on surveillance networks in the colony. This is one of the achievements of Frost and Maxwell-Stewart’s and Matthew Allen’s contributions. Both papers show the relative failure of closed systems of surveillance (be they in Tasmanian female factories or in metropolitan Panopticon projects) compared to what Allen calls a ‘remarkably comprehensive system of surveillance which sought to constantly monitor, discipline and record [convicts]’. The success story of convict surveillance in Australia is not to be read in its ability to emulate the design of the prison panopticon, but in developing a network of ‘bureaucratic surveillance’, as Frost and Maxwell-Stewart label it, outside the walls. Ironically, this bureaucratic surveillance is also panoptic in its principles, as Bentham also believed that surveillance networks could be effectively monitored outside the panopticon architecture.<sup>1</sup>
- 3 Thirdly, as Claire Wrobel and Matthew Allen remind us, the Panopticon writings fit into in a complex argument against transportation. Therefore, the shadow of convicts in New South Wales is never far from the rhetoric used to convince contemporary readers and decision-makers of the advantages of closed incarceration over the open-air penitentiary of the Antipodes. Wrobel takes the argument a step further by highlighting the Gothic motifs used in relation to transportation to New South Wales by Bentham to buttress his arguments in favour of the alternative option: Panopticons. The penal colony is turned into a Gothic dystopia which was, in Wrobel’s words, ‘a state of “depravity”, [where] crime remained unpunished and convicts could not be reformed’.
- 4 There is still much which remains unsaid about Panopticons in Australia in relation to colonial studies, penal theory, migration studies and race. Indeed, Western-centered

academia should not forget that punishment, race and displacement stand at the core of the panoptic archipelago that develops from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., as Graeme Dixon laments in relation to the plight of indigenous convicts incarcerated in the colonists' penitentiaries:

Shipped to an alien place  
Where the icy, death wind blows  
Imprisoned by the cruel regime  
not understanding why<sup>2</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Jeremy Bentham, *Pauper Management Improved*, in *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. J. Bowring (Edinburgh, 1843), vol. VIII, 398f.
  2. Graeme Dixon, *Holocaust Revisited* (Crawley; WA, Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts, School of Indigenous Studies, University of Western Australia, 2003), p. 77.
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## AUTHOR

**ANNE BRUNON-ERNST**

Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas and Centre Bentham