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Editorial: Writing from the Fringes

This special issue of *TEXT* is primarily an outcome of the 2023 AAWP conference held at the University of Canberra. The theme of that conference, “We Need to Talk”, facilitated part of a wider conversation, locally and globally, about the role played by creative thinking and practice/s in navigating some of the wicked contemporary global problems with which we presently grapple. The challenges associated with navigating the contemporary world – especially those faced by marginalised and “fringe-oriented” communities – seem to be gaining in complexity and momentum. At the same time, ongoing debates and controversial questions prompt many of us to reflect on matters of personal identity, especially as they relate to communication, creative thinking, and the exploration of liminal places in art. Such issues (and why they matter) lie at the heart of Writing from the Fringes.

We are delighted by what has been compiled here; the contributions are as varied as they are innovative and thought-provoking. The number of outstanding submissions we received was remarkable, and, unfortunately, we were not able to accommodate everyone who should have their work published. We wish all those who submitted the best of luck with having their work appear elsewhere.

Thematically, this special issue takes a deep dive into the difficult conversations, exploring themes, topics and creative strategies/devices related to writing from the fringes of our world. The idea of writing from the fringes is a somewhat slippery concept; the word itself suggests notions of margins and, therefore, experiences of marginalisation. Marginal communities live on or outside the fringes of a typically hegemonic centre; related processes (and socio-political responses) may involve ghettoisation or, equally, living in communities characterised by intersectionality. This important term refers to the complex constellation of factors and contingencies that shape identity and the places and spaces each individual occupies.

Developed in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, the theory of intersectionality was first deployed to challenge what the single-axis framework that dominated anti-discriminatory law within the United States. Since then, the concept of intersectionality has been widely adopted as an analytical tool to develop a better understanding concerning the dominant discourses of power, privilege, oppression and discrimination.

Significantly, and in keeping with the theme/s explored within this special edition of *TEXT*, the framework of intersectionality can be used to identify the myriad of complex processes that perpetuate social inequality; it reminds us to consider how dominant systems often attempt to silence or marginalise those whose ways of living might be regarded as somehow “different” and, thus, as a threat to the mainstream. Intersectionality, therefore, provides an epistemological lens via which the complexities, inter-connections and overlaps related to global power structures – and their impacts upon individual identity – can be explored, deconstructed and, ultimately, challenged. Indeed, writing from and about the margins of contemporary existence might provide a theoretical and creative point of origin from which to offer a critique of systemic oppression, to push back against the precarity and suffering rendered by dominant and powerful forces at the “centre”.

In light of this special issue’s themes, we have endeavoured to capture ideas and conversations from the widest possible perspectives. More specifically, we have included scholarly papers along with creative and hybrid submissions that blur expected boundaries/conventions associated with form, aesthetics, mode and genre. In this respect, we believe this special issue to be brimming with important and experimental forms of artistic and intellectual expression.

We assert that it is within the “fringes” of art that innovation flourishes, as evidenced by the contents of this issue.

Fiona Druitt’s essay, “My Double-Diaspora”, presents a fascinating discussion, providing (and engaging with) updates regarding concepts behind C. P. Snow’s 1953 Rede Lecture, “The Two Cultures”. The author explores, in both critical and creative terms, what it is to live and work across, and between, two scholarly cultures – STEM and HASS – with their shared concern for intellectual rigour but frequent incapacity to understand each other’s “languages”. Druitt investigates the complexities of living on the fringes – or within zones that demarcate each domain’s “edges” – and suggests the potential of metafiction to open each domain to the other.

“Fringe Dwelling in Autobiographical Memory – Writers’ Perspectives” – the outstanding paper by Julia Prendergast, Dominique Hecq, Rose Michael, Gabriella Munoz, Julianne van Loon and Jen Webb – discusses findings related to the brain/neural activity experienced by participants undertaking a creative writing workshop. Conclusions related to tracked activity in the brain (as it occurred during different stages of the workshop) are as ground-breaking as they are insightful. The workshop prompted participants to draw upon a long-term memory and then use it as a dynamic springboard for creative thinking and writing. An important outcome

of the study is the collation and presentation of the participants' widely varied "voices" expressed via their creative responses. To the best of our knowledge, the design and findings of the study are unprecedented; thus, the authors address an area of inquiry presently residing within/upon the fringes of science. Ultimately, the contents of this paper contribute important knowledge to multiple disciplines, including science, philosophy and the creative arts.

Paul Magee, Paul Collis (Barkindji), Jen Crawford, Ursula Frederick, Wayne Knight (Barkindji/Kunya) and Emma Philips with Denis Holyoake have produced an innovative piece titled "2CUZ-FM" that blends poetry and photography with forms of oral storytelling (and a radio interview) to present complex issues concerning Country as faced by Australia's traditional owners. As stated in their abstract, the authors:

are using a mass-media setting and technology – radio, and now print – to discuss and send out messages about Barkindjiness, Country, history and modernity. It's about using the master's tools to dismantle the master's preconceptions. By bringing poets Jen Crawford and Paul Magee into the discussion and space, we are investigating communication between Barkindji Country and Barkindji people with white societies. The discussion was broadcast live.

This is a fascinating and complex hybrid creative artefact that defies categorisation and commands the reader's attention.

In the hybrid work by Anne M Carson, Kimberly K Williams and Angela Costi, titled "Suture: Women's Stories Voiced through Memoir and Poetry", the reader is prompted to consider the position of women artists/writers who contribute works of art from the fringes. As advised in their abstract, Aka, an imagined diplomat, provides the "voice" for the piece and is both an acronym for the authors' first names and a pseudonym (AKA); this approach references the many women who use aliases or noms de plume for their public work. "Suture" moves seamlessly across three nations and three sets of practices to illustrate how women operate – as writers, embroiderers, pioneers, and survivors – to illuminate women at work in the world.

Anne Brady-Clark, Dante DeBono, Kendrea Rhodes, Stef Rozitis, Chloe Cannell, Eugene Tabios and Steph Daughtry – members of the Critical Creative Reading and Writing Collective (CCRWC) – offer a compelling discussion about creative expression and what it means to write, draw and think creatively for those living with a disability. Heterogeneity is the underlying logic, and the insights the essay provides through scholarly engagement are exemplified by the creative response presented by each contributing collective member.

Also involved in the CCRWC, Stef Rozitis, Dante DeBono, Anne Brady-Clark, Evan Jarrett, and Amelia Walker share how this collective meets monthly to discuss insights from the group's readings while also engaging in brief writing activities. In this way, the CCRWC has established a "community-of-practice" that uses arts-based practices to engage in inquiry-through-making together (Sandford et al., 2024, p. 6). This paper elucidates the workings and outcomes of this kind of community practice, illustrating how intentionality in both the design

and process of collaborative creative acts generates room for the examination of “the value of story” in making ontological meaning for humans and “more than humans”.

On a different but certainly fringe-oriented note, two papers in this special issue study the realm of the Gothic in unexpected and delightful ways. The superb piece “Strange Dreams and Unforgiving Landscapes: Australian Gothic and the Prose Poem” by Paul Hetherington, Cassandra Atherton and Alyson Miller reverberates with Gothic elements that prove revelatory. This paper prompts the reader to consider *if* and *how* works of Australian Gothic might stand apart from the English Gothic tradition, finding a most hybrid contemporary form, the prose poem, as a point for elucidation. The authors use both prose poems and the work of others to fashion new and interesting grounds for exploring the Australian Gothic.

In his submission “From Eco-Thriller to Eco-Horror”, Julian Novitz explores eco-themes as presented according to a contemporary Antipodean perspective; Novitz channels this perspective via reference to Eleanor Catton’s *Birnam Wood* (2023) and investigates the continual expansion of the Gothic genre (now in its fourth century). The author also addresses notions concerning EcoGothic narratives, noting their inherent themes concerning anxiety. Novitz’s contribution is a prime example of the unexpected intersectionalities of form, genre, mores and era – as they relate to creative practice – and as explored across this special issue.

Elements of the “beyond” are also captured within Ola Kwintowski’s paper “Exploring the Writer’s Relationship with the More-Than-Human by traversing Mabi Forest: Towards an Integrated Perspective in Middle-Grade Eco-narratives”. The author investigates the intersection of human creativity with the more-than-human world, focusing on Place and Sense of Place; she ponders how writers might meet, represent and dwell within storytelling Place, particularly through conscientious interaction with the physical and historical space. Kwintowski’s crisp descriptive writing and evocative photographs illustrate how authorial choices can affect children’s perceptions of the world, behoving the writer with a duty of care with regard to creative content and the related representation of Place.

Sliding into the borderline space of prose poetry, Antonia Pont’s “Clever” presents on the screen/page like a sublime poetic stream-of-consciousness record concerning her narrator’s quirky and deliciously Freudian-oriented modes of perception and experience. As Pont’s narrator speaks from the “outside” – somehow, someplace – the reader is inevitably dragged across the threshold of “normality” and into the realm of the hauntingly beautiful. Overall, this piece captures the complex and, at times, unfathomable nature of human existence.

Eugen Bacon’s “Epistles to Our Mother” is a piece of speculative fiction that is an exemplar of storyworld building and impactful characterisation. Set in an unfamiliar land that is quintessentially “other”, Bacon’s imaginative and innovative contribution explores the possibility of shifting planes of existence. Rich in themes concerning the “in-between” (and what might lie therein), the narrative invites the reader to imagine and embrace unfamiliar and strange possibilities. The author blends the “weird” and “fantastic” with startling results,

deploying a “constructed” language along with rhythmic neologisms that draw the reader ever-deeper into the “otherness” of her exceptional storyworld.

Also wonderfully poetic, Dominique Hecq’s contribution is an example of autofiction and part of a larger work in progress about her dog, Artaud. In a highly lyric voice – sometimes presented by Artaud, sometimes by the owner/trainer – the essay takes readers through the O/Other of liminality. Hecq’s work demonstrates the limits of human language and expression through brief readings of Derrida, accounts of dog-training sessions, and experiences of being in the (more than human) world.

Shifting further towards the realm of realism, C. M. Stone’s “August in Translation” investigates the ethics of engaging with poetry written after mass social trauma (Witness Poetry). Stone’s piece presents a creative methodology that fosters a compassionate relationship through translation and response poetry. To initiate engagement, Stone offers a translation from the German of a Witness Poem, “August” by Sarah Kirsch. Stone’s poetry follows as a response to the translated poem, becoming – and contributing to – “a tool for opening the response to the original Witness Poem” and “coming to terms with the risk of translation and feeling through [the translator’s] own position of being-on-the-fringe to another’s poetic testimony”. The layers and complexity afforded by this methodology are astonishing, becoming a prism with refracted expression.

Perhaps best categorised as short autofiction/prose, “The Part Removed” by Oscar Davis relays an engaging family anecdote concerning his childhood “tantrum”. The author explores the experiences of rage, frustration and disempowerment that so often impact children. Underscored by a moving contemplation on memory – and related vicissitudes of mourning, grief and healing – this anecdote immerses the reader in rich and evocative realism that skirts aspects and experiences of “otherness”.

On a similar thematic note, the short story “Dead Batteries” by Sarah Giles proves entirely relatable and entertaining, delivering themes related to human connection, familial relations, love, isolation and forgiveness. The reader is invited to vicariously experience the fringe-like experiences navigated by the narrator/protagonist as she strives to piece together pieces of a fractured personal history and, thus, consolidate her identity.

Finally, Christina North, Kate Cantrell, and Camilla Cripps explore the theme of non-fiction editors’ “duty of care” when publishing contentious material. Carefully examining the controversy that arose following the publication of Kate Clanchy’s memoir, *Some Kids I Taught and What They Taught Me* (2019) – criticised by many for pertaining to a harmful representation of minority groups – the authors explore the often-overlooked role of editors; often betwixt the writer and the reader, professional editors have a unique set of obligations as to what they bring into the world via publication. The paper considers the complexities of this particular controversy, with related conclusions remaining widely applicable and relevant to practices and ethics in the larger 21st century publishing world.

The discerning and often lyric-oriented exploration and depiction of the complex spaces inherent to the fringes – which, by their very nature, exist “beyond the margins” of the mainstream – is an aesthetic strongly exhibited across this special issue. The writing and visuals invite the reader to consider topics that are psychologically, emotionally and, at times, intellectually complex. As we wade into such territory, it’s worth pausing to consider the repercussions (if any) for pursuing and experiencing such creative practice. What might we express “creatively” when skating across (and reading/writing about) life’s outer edges? And *how* might our creativity best be expressed as we traverse these spaces? These questions are always relevant to creative practitioners who wish to stretch boundaries and break with convention. The contents of this special issue are a testament to the power of a curious and self-reflective approach towards poesis that, we contend, sparks the sort of internal reflection required to achieve original creativity and daring innovation. Ultimately, we hope to have generated a space in which “other” and ‘othered” voices can be shared.

Assembling this issue, we were struck by a realisation: when marginalised spaces are cracked open, the sheer power and diversity of creative expression that results is astonishing. The concept of “writing from the fringes” has culminated here in a steady flow of innovative, creative, scholarly and hybrid works that bravely traverse boundaries and conventions to carve out new creative ground.

Reading the work in *Writing from the Fringes* reminds us that although a single perspective might be at once tenuous and contextual, a gathering of perspectives – like those collected here – can begin to acknowledge, honour, and build better-informed understandings of the wide range of experiences, not just for humans but well beyond, including other-than-humans and the environments in which we live. Such a perspective highlights that we are all interconnected, even if aspects of one’s identity don’t quite gel with what might be deemed “the norm”.

We thank all our contributing authors and artists whose compiled work now amounts to this eclectic collection of engaging, intellectually rigorous and delightfully creative material. We hope you enjoy reading this collection wherein strange, liminal spaces beckon.