

TEXT Volume 23 No 2 October 2019

Editorial

ERA 2018 results and the challenges of collegial and strategic peer review

The long-awaited Australian Government's Excellence in Research Australian (ERA) 2018 National Report has been released and for the four-digit Field of Research (FoR) code 1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing, over twenty-one million dollars in research income was reported, as well as more than 5000 research outputs, produced by a full-time-equivalent of 556 researchers. Non-traditional research outputs (NTROs) accounted for 50% of the outputs in this FoR. While it is difficult to distinguish the performance of creative writing as a stand-alone discipline in a four-digit FoR that also encapsulates music and performance studies, there are some interesting conclusions as well as some significant concerns relevant to all three disciplines that we can draw upon now that this, the third round of ERA, is complete.

There were 26 institutions or units of evaluation (UoEs) assessed under the 1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing code in the ERA 2018 exercise, and one of the issues being debated among disciplinary leaders nationally at the moment is that the vast majority of these (18 out of 26, or 69% of those assessed) received an ERA ranking of 3 (at world standard) or less. Only one institution nationally (4% of those assessed) has been awarded a rating of ERA 5 (**well above world standard**) for 1904, while eight institutions (27% of those assessed) were given a rating of ERA 4 or **above world standard**. These figures do not compare favourably with the figures across other fields nationally, where approximately 36% of Units of Evaluation (UoE) at the four-digit level received a rating of 4, and 30% of those assessed received a rating of 4 or above world standard. Nationally, 31% of UoEs received a rating of 3 or less at four-digit level. This problem of not having many institutions performing at the higher ranks is not generic to the 1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing field of research; rather, it is a problem relevant to many of those fields of research that rely predominantly on peer assessment rather than metrics as the primary mode of evaluation.

Peer assessment is *the* common factor in fields of research that rely heavily on NTROs as a significant percentage of overall research outputs. The two-digit FoR 19 Studies in Creative Arts and Writing by far outweighs any other two-digit field for the number of NTROs reported (5950 NTRO outputs), and the largest four-digit contributor of NTROs was 1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing, which contributed 2660 of those outputs. Further, by far the largest NTRO output type reported within the 19 Studies in Creative Arts and Writing two-digit code was Original Creative Works (3211). The 1904 Performing Arts and Creative Writing field of research contributed many of these Original Creative Works; the other key contributor was 1905 Visual Arts and Crafts.

In a provocative article for the June 2019 edition of *NiTRO*, the journal published by the Australian Deans and Directors of Creative Arts, Professors Jen Webb and Ross Gibson, of the University of Canberra, compared the results for the two-digit field 19 Studies in Creative Arts and Writing across all three ERA exercises (2012, 2015, 2018) and found:

- 18 of FoR19 units of evaluation (UOE) have received exactly the same rating in each cycle, while in other codes, results show some or significant variation;
- Only three of a possible 42 UOE) have improved their FoR19 ratings over the period, compared with eight UOE) in FoR20 (Language, Communication and Culture);
- Worryingly, only two of the FoR19 UOE) have been rated at 5 (well above world standard) at any point in the review cycle, while 18 in FoR02 (Physical Sciences), and 7 in FoR21 (History and Archaeology), have been so rated. (Webb & Gibson 2019)

‘This is surprising,’ they concluded, ‘given that – at least in Anglophone nations – Australian creative practice-led research is recognised as world-leading.’ Webb and Gibson pose three potential reasons for this situation. The first is that it is possible that individual artist academics are failing to make a convincing case for their work as research; the second is that evaluation methods remain science focused; but it is the third reason that is perhaps most alarming. Webb and Gibson argue that it is quite likely that as peers in the creative arts, we are judging one another too harshly.

The question arises, then: what to do? How do we look seriously into the validity of this reasoning. Are we, indeed, too tough on ourselves? Should we be more strategically collegial as a discipline when it comes to these kinds of national quality assessment exercises? And if so, how might we train one another better in how to peer review in a manner that assesses fairly but *also* advocates for the genuine quality of our field on the international stage? These questions require much debate.

The *TEXT* digital renewal project: an update

As outlined in our April 2019 editorial, we are implementing some exciting new changes at *TEXT*. Our digital renewal project is now well underway and scholarly contributions to our October 2019 edition were handled very successfully by our new Scholastica academic journal management platform (see Information for contributors: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/send.htm>).

We are happy to say that we have already seen dramatic improvements in the turn-around times for referee reports and revisions to articles, and our editors are particularly happy with new efficiencies afforded them by the digital interface. We remind contributors that as part of our new approach, we have now advertised strict reading periods for scholarly article submissions, and we will be closed for submissions for some parts of the year. Please take note: submissions for scholarly articles for our April 2020 edition will open on 1 November 2019 and close on 31 January 2020. The reading period for the October 2020 issue will be 1 May through to 31 July 2020. We suggest contributors plan ahead accordingly.

At the mid-year AAWP Executive Meeting, our colleagues offered full support for the continuation of the digital renewal project and we will now roll on to Phase 2. Our intention is to handle the full submission and publishing process of *TEXT* through Scholastica commencing with the April 2020 issue. As we've outlined previously, the AAWP will still be publisher, and the editors will still be fully involved in preparing MSS. Author copyright arrangements won't change, but HTML and PDF versions of *TEXT* issues will be handled by Scholastica. These changes will make the journal fully compliant with 21st century digital scholarly publishing requirements, while retaining our independent, high quality, open access status.

At the November 2019 AAWP AGM, the *TEXT* editorial team will formally propose the introduction of a new *TEXT* Levy of \$20 for annual membership renewals for our salaried members and \$50 on three-years renewals for salaried members. The *TEXT* Levy will be used for the sole purpose of publishing *TEXT* via the Scholastica academic journal management platform. We encourage members who would like to find out more about Scholastica to read more about it here: <https://scholasticahq.com/>

We look forward to the support of members via a full and open discussion about our plans at the 2019 AGM in Sydney. There are more services Scholastica offers, including the archiving of old editions of the journal, and we will continue to investigate the options.

—Julienne van Loon, Ross Watkins and Nigel Krauth

In this issue

The October 2019 edition includes scholarly contributions that espouse a wide variety of relationships between form, function and the writer – from the literary fragment, poetic form and interpretation, essaying with food waste, and explorations of narrated futures of place, to error, failure and the past self as 'other' in memoir, the contemporising of medieval forms, and a revision of screenwriting pedagogy.

Nigel Krauth's (Griffith University) energising article, 'Fragmented narratives: Minding the textual gap', places the historical development of the literary fragment in relation to aspects of writerly process, particularly the 'minding' work of writers who craft texts that, arguably, may better reflect our thinking and experience of the world due to their non-linear narrative structures. Krauth connects the aphorism and the feuilleton to contemporary hypertext to explore how the writer of fragments constructs a manipulated reading of the text, impelling the reader to undertake a considerable role in making meaning of the 'gaps' opened between fragments.

Continuing the focus on structure and interpretation, in 'Does function follow form? Openness and formal association in the early poetry of John Forbes' Aidan Coleman (University of Adelaide) analyses versions of Forbes's writing to arrive at an understanding of the poet's methodological use of form. Forbes, Coleman argues, strived for an interpretive openness in his work, while simultaneously leveraging both the fluid and fixed formal features of his poetry to arrive at what he once called 'formal association' – a balance of openness and closure.

University of Northumbria's Tony Williams introduces *TEXT* to *Íslendingasaga* in 'Grettir in Sheffield: Rewriting Icelandic saga as a contemporary novel'. Williams's 2017 novel *NUTCASE* is a purposeful contemporary rewriting of the medieval *Saga of Grettir the Strong*. He critically reflects on the challenging aspects of his set task and how problems were resolved, ultimately arguing that such projects are a means to revitalise both contemporary writing practice/forms and those of the past.

'Group-devised screenplays and film projects in Higher Education curriculum', by Marilyn Tofler and Ekaterina Pechenkina (Swinburne University of Technology), furthers *TEXT*'s stock of articles that focus specifically on the unique qualities of screenwriting practice as a collaborative process. Tofler and Pechenkina offer interesting insights into group work dynamics for screenplay writing within a university setting, a particularly problematic space typified by high levels of conflict and dissatisfaction. The article discusses group work in Higher Education broadly, before detailing their research into the use of student feedback to redesign the structures of group-devised industry projects, forming a transferable model of pedagogical practice.

Prompted by classroom discussions where Master of Creative Writing students queried claims of 'truth' in autobiographical texts, Paul Williams (University of the Sunshine Coast) writes against assumptions of the collapsed identity of author, narrator and protagonist in autobiography and memoir. 'Writing the self as other: *Autrebiography*' focuses much of its exploration on Coetzee's 'autobiographies' *Boyhood* (1998), *Youth* (2003) and *Summertime* (2009), as well as Roland Barthes's *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977), to expound the various autobiographic – or autrebiographic – strategies writers use to position the past self subject as 'other'.

Also on ways of witnessing the 'I' of memoir, Frankie Hanman Siegersma (La Trobe University) presents a lively and compelling exploration of the messiness, sexiness and potential power of poetic error, queer failure, and pleasure and pain as methods of defamiliarising the self. Reading Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love* as a failed cancer memoir, 'A great, upwelling flux of mutability: Failure and error in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *A Dialogue on Love*' regards these concepts as productive ways to bear witness to one's self through hybrid modes of expression.

'Making recipes: Essaying with mess and embodied knowledges' furthers the dialogue on mess and embodied knowledges, as Sophie Langley (RMIT University) merges the essay with recipes for the productive use of food waste as a mode of critical enquiry. Langley proposes that this hybridised form of writing – a performative experiment with theory, physical practice and metaphor – allows us to think anew about our response to the urgency of current environmental considerations.

In another neat segue, Brigid Magner (RMIT University) and Emily Potter (Deakin University) seek to situate the writer within a literary history of place, in 'Kurangk/Coorong atmospheres: Postcolonial stories and regional futures'. South Australia's Kurangk/Coorong region is the meeting place of the Murray River and the sea, a distinctive landscape that joins water and land. Magner and Potter propose a methodology of 'atmospherics' – without hierarchy and a point of origin – to entangle the region's colonial and postcolonial literary histories. Assembling these stories in this way, the authors aim to renew and make fluid the future narratives of the Kurangk/Coorong.

We offer our thanks to all authors and peer reviewers who contributed so generously to this edition, and trust that *TEXT*'s readership will find these articles just as thought-provoking as we do.

—*Ross Watkins and Julianne van Loon*

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