



Australasian  
Association  
of Writing  
Programs

# TEXT SPECIAL ISSUES

Number 61 April 2021

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://www.textjournal.com.au/>

## *Introduction*

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To cite this article: Wain, D. & Seward, M. (2021). Introduction. *TEXT Special Issue 61, Writing Through Things: Writing the Past and Broken Things*, 25 (April), 1-3.

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### Introduction

The object can hold an unexplored world, containing within it memory, emotion, and untapped creativity.

The scholars who present their work here in this Special Issue on Writing Through Things: Past and Broken Things were invited to contribute their research in the form of a traditional article or creative work that explores the fission between the arena of the mind and the concrete, tangible things of the world around us; to explore that ‘unexplored world’ of ‘memory, emotion, and untapped creativity’ (Pollack, 2011, p. 230).

The events of 2020, lockdowns and self-isolating, meant that we were, perhaps more than ever, surrounded by our own things, offering an opportunity to see these things differently and maybe more clearly. Bill Brown explains that

[t]he work being done... under thing theory is addressing how it is that the inanimate object world helps to form and transform human beings. Part of that is to say: how does our material environment shape us? (Brown, 2012)

We, as writers and researchers, are concerned with that which forms and transforms us and the world around us. These catalysts of formation and transformation can be people, experiences, landscapes, and sometimes they can be the seemingly everyday objects that surround us. As Brown points out, the things that impact on us do not have to be those of ‘economic value in Marxist terms’; they can be ‘small things’ of ‘symbolic value’ (Brown, 2012).

As Sherry Turkle and the authors who contributed to *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* explore, the idea of ‘evocative objects’ addresses concepts of ‘objects as “companions to our emotional lives” and as “provocations for thought”’ which brings into sharp focus the ‘inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things’ (Turkle, 2011: 5). The critical and creative papers collected under the banner of this special issue honour such thoughts and such feelings. The meanings, importances, evocations, and transformations attached to the things here are also linked specifically to their roles in either the researchers’ or our collective pasts and to their potential brokenness. As Turkle reminds us, ‘some objects are experienced as part of the self...Other objects remind us of people we have lost’ (Turkle, 2011, p. 7).

The objects of our past are imbued with significance owing to their ability to represent places we have come from both literally and metaphorically. Broken objects have, according to Brown, enacted their ability to disrupt or interrupt our tendency to not notice them. They have become ‘excessive’ and made us aware of their ‘thingness’ in doing so (Brown, 2012). They have made us pay attention in a way that works to ‘assert their presence and power’ and they have done so with a ‘suddenness’ (Brown, 2001, p. 3) that can either startle or spark our creative output.

In a practice of academic and creative paying attention, the authors of the pieces collected in this special issue acknowledge the significance of past and broken things. They have used them to form, transform, and inform. They acknowledge the thing as ‘an object of meaning’ (Pahl et al 2010: 90), and they acknowledge that, as per William Carlos Williams, there are ‘no ideas but in things’ (Williams in Allison et al, 1983, p. 949).

Our enthusiastic thanks go to the contributing authors for their responses to our theme. We would also like to thank Liz Ellison and Craig Batty for their support and leadership in our editing of this special issue.

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