

Central Queensland University and Southern Cross University

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Taste and, and in, writing and publishing

TEXT special issue number 26 presents a range of papers on the theme of ‘Taste and, and in, writing and publishing’, edited by *TEXT*’s Special Issues Commissioning Editor, Professor Donna Lee Brien and Dr Adele Wessell from Southern Cross University. This special issue has an interesting genesis, arising in association with the editors’ creation of an issue of another widely-read open access journal, *MC Journal*, on the one-word theme of ‘Taste’.

When we received an overwhelming number of submissions for that issue, it was clear that a large number of the articles were focused around writing. This was a surprise as, due to our current research interests and, especially, our convening of the online collaborative Australasian Food Studies Network, we expected the majority of the papers to be connected with culinary taste. We had constructed our call for papers with this in mind, hoping to broaden out from matters of food and flavour and, indeed, noting in our first line that taste ‘can refer to both aesthetic sensibilities as well as a gustatory sense’. We continued by balancing the culinary with other dimensions of the term:

While inquiry about taste has tended to evoke its role in making judgments about what is good, proper and beautiful it also refers to the experience of flavours and preference. Questions about whether organic food tastes better, how to change children’s food choices, the impact of food branding on taste preferences or the way geography and climate impart certain qualities to food are often raised in contemporary debates and controversies around food as a means of addressing serious political, social, economic, ethical and environmental concerns. Taste can also function as a tool of social distinction and through its association with consumption also has a political dimension.

We also noted that taste preferences ‘varies over time and across different groups taste is clearly open to change’ and ‘Who gets to define standards and preferences and the processes for this ... is open to debate.’ We finished our call for papers, moreover, by underlining that we wanted authors to ‘explore taste in the broadest sense of the word’.

Embedded in our list of possible areas for investigation was ‘Taste in writing and publishing’ and it was perhaps what caught the eye of so many researchers working in this broad area. As many of these articles were interesting examples of new scholarship on this theme, but we had to include a broad range of disciplinary perspectives in the *MC* issue, we asked authors to develop these further for *TEXT*. Not

all agreed, but those who did have created works which have contributed to a fascinating selection of new work on this theme. It has also brought a range of new writers, voices and research perspectives to *TEXT* journal. It also reflects on the variety of research that can be encompassed under the umbrella of writing and publishing.

In 'Pauline Kael and the western genre as critical displacement of self & nation: Metaphorics and affects of 'taste' in American film criticism', for instance, Patrick West discusses how Kael has become one of the most influential American film critics of the second half of the twentieth century. Acknowledging that he is joining a number of scholars and biographers currently writing on Kael's work, West notes that the full impact of Kael's work has not yet been established, and then unpacks the mechanisms and operations of 'taste' in Kael's writings by using two notions drawn from Roland Barthes' observations about another key figure of current cultural critique, Julia Kristeva. In this, West focuses on how Kael used the concepts of both 'taste' and 'dis-taste' to draw her readership into a field of what might be termed 'permanent dissent', and concludes by proposing why Jewish-American Kael's taste might endure in the networked, Internet age.

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire looks to another form of writing, in this case the literary, in his 'Identified by taste: the chef as artist?', to discuss the role of taste among the senses. His first focus is fictional depictions of taste – including Proust's madeleine episode, Suskind's *Perfume: the story of a murderer*, Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate*, Harris's *Chocolate* and Blixen's *Babette's feast*. These are used as the basis to unpack three historical case studies that highlight how individual chefs have been identified by the individualistic taste of his or her cooking.

In 'Food bloggers and the democratisation of taste', Alison Vincent moves us to the contemporary world of online writing, in this case of food bloggers, in order to discuss their influence and, as noted in her title, the way these writers are contributing to a democratisation of taste and taste making. Tracking the restaurant reviewer's role in taste making back to Grimod de la Reynière's *Almanach des Gourmands* (1803–1812), Vincent then moves to today, where anyone with access to a computer can publish their opinions of restaurants and other eateries and project these to a global audience of potential readers. Vincent defines the work of these bloggers and assesses the part they play in disseminating and shaping notions of good taste.

Memoir and creative non-fiction are important fields of creative writing research and are well represented in this collection. In 'Using autoethnography to create narratives to understand musical taste and the experience of collaborative music performance', Judith Brown notes that a number of insightful memoirs have been published by collaborative pianists, providing an insider's perspective on the art of piano accompaniment. Brown offers her own work in writing autoethnographical narrative, which incorporates elements of creative writing such as direct speech and descriptive scene setting to recreate the experience of collaborative music performance, as a means of both allowing readers to gain some insight into its creative process, and for both reader and writer to thus understand elements of musical taste and how this

impacts on the experience of collaborative music performance. In arguing that this methodology provides an appropriate way to examine such subjective experiences, this discussion provides much of value for researchers in other artforms, including creative writing.

In a refereed creative work (presented with a research statement), Dallas J Baker's creative non-fiction 'Sugar, baby' explores notions of 'taste' in relation to memoir writing, applying Kristeva's notion of the abject to a sequence of memories around sense experiences of 'gendered taste'. As memory is fluid and changeable, this means that the application of these ideas to specific memories effectively 'rewrites' them, or at the very least provides a new context for understanding them. Given this, Baker concludes, writing memoir can be seen as the rewriting of memory. Offering a further reflection on how taste can function in memoir writing, Bambi Ward's 'A taste of Herend Hungarian porcelain: Aesthetics, object biography and writing memoir' illustrates how object biography can be used to enrich and inform life writing. Ward investigates how objects not to one's personal taste, that is, not aesthetically pleasing to the writer – in this case, pieces of world-famous Hungarian porcelain – can still have great personal and narrative value, specifically here, when they are used to represent the story of important landmarks in family history.

In a quite different, but related, investigation, Gail Pittaway's 'A Greek culinary odyssey to New Zealand, the furthest shore' maps how Greek cuisine both reached New Zealand, and then influenced taste on those distant isles. In this piece, migration and other memoirs underpin the investigation as rich, primary source materials for charting the development of taste and how it can relocate across hemispheres. The piece includes a series of revealing archival images.

Charmaine O'Brien's 'The taste of class: Colonial Australian food writing, fact or fiction?', also uses writing – this time from early Australia and since – as source material for investigating taste in a certain location, but O'Brien also interrogates how that writing has been understood since then. In presenting how writers of Australian history, including food history, typically present the same negative stereotypes of colonial eating habits with little attempt at holistically examining and explaining the context and circumstances informing food choices in the period, O'Brien posits how social class may have influenced period reportage on the cookery and eating practices in Australia in the nineteenth century.

Continuing this focus on texts and how they can reveal the taste of a certain place and time, Jillian Adams considers one specific hitherto unconsidered Australian work *Women's World* (1958), a comprehensive training manual for women. In '*Woman's World*: taste, agency and consumerism in post-war Australia'. *Women's World* offered to give women access to whole-of-life training, operating as a textual 'finishing school', in which making a good impression was paramount, and to do this, women needed to have what was described as 'good taste'. Adams' examination reveals, moreover, that much of the information in *Women's World* was provided by companies, and thus uses *Women's World* as a window into not only the link between taste and consumerism, but also to investigate the agency this mobilisation of taste

brought women in post-war Australia.

Contributing co-editor of this issue, Donna Lee Brien, also picks up on what particular publications can reveal about taste, in this case literary taste. In her article, Brien considers what thinking about food writing as a literary form can add to both our consideration of this popular genre and our thinking about writing in general.

As always, we would like to acknowledge that such journal special issues are the product of a wide range of energies and effort. They could not be produced without the efforts of the writers, their institutions for supporting their research, the too-often unsung efforts of a large number of generous peer reviewers. We also continue to thank and praise *TEXT* journal, and especially Editor-in-Chief Professor Nigel Krauth, for continuing to provide the space and support for *TEXT* to host the results of such inquiry. We would also like to thank Dr Dallas Baker for his ongoing special issues editorial assistance. His keen eye and grace under pressure have made a key contribution to the quality and editorial integrity of this issue.

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Adele Wessell is Senior Lecturer in History at Southern Cross University. Her recent publications include co-editing with Donna Lee Brien special issue of M/C Journal on the theme of 'Cookbook' (2013) and 'Taste' (2014), with whom Adele also co-founded the Australasian Food Studies Network, an online network of food scholars and other interested individuals and groups. She is currently engaged in a project with the Landed Histories Collective on biographies of land related to changes in food production. (see, <http://www.landedhistories.org>).