

University of New England and University of Sydney

Rosemary Williamson and Rebecca Johninke

Introducing Australasian magazines: New perspectives on writing and publishing

To introduce this special issue of *TEXT*, we begin with an activity:

Here is an experiment to try; it comes in two parts. First, pick a newsagent, any newsagent. Look around. On some kind of stand in the foreground you will see a dozen or so newspapers. Look around again. On a different stand, or stands, you will see dozens, scores or possible hundreds of magazines, depending on the size of shop you have selected. Now, take yourself to a library, preferably one with an academic connection. Fire up the online search and look for books about newspapers, then look for books about magazines. The search results are likely to be in inverse proportion to the result of the newsagent survey. Hundreds of books about newspapers, perhaps a couple of dozen about magazines; if you are in a good library (Holmes 2008: viii).

So begins Tim Holmes' introductory chapter to *Mapping the magazine* (2008). Holmes, from the University of Cardiff, writes from a UK perspective but his experiment has wider relevance. It translates easily to an Australasian context, although the 'couple of dozen' books on magazines is likely to be far fewer if the library search is confined to books on Australasian magazines.

The dearth of scholarship on Australian magazines has been noted in both *TEXT* (Williamson 2008) and elsewhere (Griffen-Foley 2007; Williamson 2014), as has the potential relevance of such research to those who teach writing, or who work in the creative industries. That magazine studies can be positioned within writing as a discipline may surprise some readers, given that research on magazines and newspapers has often been bundled together within the separate, albeit cognate, disciplines of journalism or media studies (Holmes' *Mapping the magazine* originally was published as a special issue of the journal, *Journalism studies*). Yet magazines have multi- and interdisciplinary relevance, both as repositories of written text and as products of the publishing industry. This is a point made consistently in this special issue as each contributor grapples with the interdisciplinary nature of magazine scholarship and how to locate our practice as writers, scholars and teachers. The construction of communities of readers has relevance not only as a popular subject in magazine studies but is also one we grapple with in our professional lives. Latham and Scholes (2006) not only acknowledge this multi- and interdisciplinary relevance but also identify it as a characteristic of periodical studies, which they identify as a new and emerging field of scholarship. They also draw attention to the many new possibilities that digital archives bring to the researcher. In Australia, the best example

is the digitisation of the first fifty years of the iconic *Australian women's weekly* by the National Library of Australia.

Our aim for this special issue, therefore, was to view magazines from perspectives relevant to writing, and to enrich the knowledge of those in writing, whether as teachers, practitioners or scholars. To stimulate ideas, we listed in our call for papers the types of papers that we envisaged:

Pedagogic/curricular perspectives, for example:

- Development by higher education institutions of curricula and/or pedagogy relevant to magazine writing, editing and production
- The didactic dimensions of magazines about, and for, writers or other creative practitioners

Industry perspectives, for example:

- Magazine histories, and the emergence of niche titles and new markets
- The impact of new technologies on magazines and readerships
- Evolutions (or revolutions) in writing, editing and production processes
- Professional histories, including of magazine writers and editors

Analytical perspectives, for example:

- Perceptions of self and community: the rhetorical dimensions of magazines that shape identities around pastimes, lifestyles, places and events
- Perceptions of others: the rhetorical dimensions of magazine content that serves to exemplify community norms, aspirations or taboos
- Emerging or dominant magazine narratives during times of change or crisis

This was our wish list, and we were delighted with the results. The ten papers that comprise the special issue fall into three types: those that draw attention to the changing nature of magazines, and the study of them, as we move further into the digital age; case studies of particular titles or genres; and those on pedagogic approaches to magazines, which draw on experience in Australian universities.

The first section, 'What magazines are and how we study them', begins with the fundamental – and daunting – question of what a magazine is. Le Masurier ably takes up the challenge of defining 'magazine' by investigating what magazines have been, what they are and what they can be at a time when digital publication takes readers beyond the limitations previously imposed by the printed page. By drawing on representative online titles, Le Masurier provides an international context in which studies of Australasian magazines may be situated. Likewise, where magazine studies sits in relation to periodical studies is a complex question and one that she tackles in both of her contributions to this special issue. Fiona Giles similarly takes us beyond the printed page in her examination of the feature article and its future in the digital realm. She examines online magazines that commission features, as well as feature aggregator and disaggregator sites, and considers the feature article's status as both journalism and writing. Then Kerry Kilner provides an overview of the AustLit resource, including its holdings of Australian magazines, and foregrounds, by presenting illustrative examples, the types of research projects that may be undertaken

on those magazines. Kilner also draws attention to the ongoing expansion of the database, and the opportunities it provides for further scholarship.

The second section, 'Case studies', is based on studies of particular titles. Jeremy Fisher begins with a meticulous tracing of the origin, growth and decline of a niche area of publishing – gay magazines in Australia – and once again our attention is drawn to the inescapable effect that online publication has had on publishing histories. Rosemary Brewer, in her study of letters sent to 'agony aunt' 'Lou Lockheart' in the *New Zealand woman's weekly* in 1950, shows how the letters pages in magazines are far from inconsequential, anchored as they are in the social mores of the time. Donna Lee Brien (*MasterChef magazine*) and Rebecca Johninke (*Fitness first magazine*) both contribute pieces about custom magazines, transmedia marketing and the relationship between advertising and editorial. Rosemary Williamson continues her work on Australian quilting magazines with an essay about the role of the profile in special interest magazines and how, through its narrative dimensions, the profile repeatedly articulates the values and aspirations of communities formed around magazines.

The third section, 'What magazines are and how we teach them', takes us into the classroom and, coincidentally, both pieces are collaborations. Carolyn Lee and Jennifer Martin open this section with an article that draws on their own experience in teaching literary/narrative feature writing, from micro- and macrostructural perspectives, at postgraduate level. Like Giles' earlier piece, their article also considers the possibilities that the digital realm opens up for writers willing to incorporate audio, visual and multi-media elements into their work. To conclude this section and the special issue overall, Megan Le Masurier and Rebecca Johninke write about their respective experiences in designing and delivering curricula on magazines, from which emerge key points about the field of magazine studies, some of which echo points made in other articles included in this special issue.

We have reproduced our call for papers above not only to provide a context for the special issue but also as something of a call to arms. Even though we are delighted with what resulted from this call for papers, we wish to encourage more work that supplements our knowledge of Australasian magazines. This is particularly so at a time when digital publication, which can make geographical borders irrelevant and can blur boundaries between writer/reader/editor, is shaking the foundations of the traditional, print-based magazine. The very notion of how 'magazine' is manifest, and how it and its content differ from other publications, are similarly disrupted. Also to be done, as has been recognised elsewhere (Griffen-Foley 2007; Williamson 2014), is more work on magazine histories beyond iconic titles such as *Australian women's weekly*, and extending to small-circulation niche titles and their conventions.

Another area of enquiry is that of professional histories of magazine writers and editors. Popular interest in these histories, colourful as they may be, has been shown by the recent television mini-series *Paper giants: the birth of Cleo* (2011) and *Paper giants: magazine wars* (2013), which through the dramatisation of histories of iconic titles, and the working lives of the editors behind them, bring Australian magazine publishing history to a general audience. Also attesting to popular interest in the magazine editor are fiction and non-fiction works based on the rise, and at times

spectacular fall, of the editor. Fiction titles include, for example, *Be careful what you wish for*, a novel by former *Cleo* and *Dolly* editor Gemma Crisp (2013), and *Tongue in chic*, by former *Vogue Australia* editor Kirstie Clements (2013b). Non-fiction titles include, for example, *Nene*, the biography of former *Woman's day* editor Nene King by Peter Fitzsimons (2013); the autobiographical *The Vogue factor*, again by Kirstie Clements (2013b); and *Sex & money: how I lived, breathed, read, wrote, loved, hated, dreamed and drank men's magazines* (Dapin 2004), described on its back cover as 'an insider's view of men's magazines in Australia', by former editor-in-chief of *Ralph*, Mark Dapin. Such titles are based on experiences with the mass-market magazines or 'glossies', but there is plenty of scope for other work, whether for a popular or scholarly readership, on editors/writers beyond the mass-market titles. To give an example, the *Sydney morning herald* recently published an obituary (Feldman 2014) for Jules Feldman, co-founder in 1954 of Modern Magazines Pty Ltd, which sketched the obviously significant contribution made by Feldman to motoring magazines, a highly successful yet little researched niche market.

We would like to mention one other specific area – scholarship on magazines that are intended to support the efforts of those who wish to build successful careers as writers. Quite apart from well-known 'little' literary magazines like *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Overland*, *Kill your darlings* and *Wet ink*, there are publications such as *Australian author* magazine, *Australian book review*, *Australian poetry*, *The Australian writer magazine*, *Storyline* and the *Australian writer's marketplace*, through to magazines produced by writers' centres. What is their contribution, and what are their conventions? We hope that some of you take us up on this question.

We hope, then, that this special issue offers both good reading and inspiration. In closing, some acknowledgments must be made: the *TEXT* editors, including Commissioning Editor for special issues, Donna Lee Brien, for the opportunity to publish this special issue; our reviewers; and Sean Sidkey for his help with copyediting. Finally, special thanks are extended to our contributors for their engaging essays and their willingness to do 'just one more copyedit'. Happy reading.

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Dr Rosemary Williamson (BA (Hons) Qld, GradCertArts (Creative Writing) QUT, PhD UNE) teaches writing and rhetoric in the School of Arts, University of New England, Australia. Her research interests include the magazine industry in Australia, and the ways in which magazines function as rhetorical texts, especially those magazines that respond to and shape members of communities bound by a specialised form of creative practice.

Dr Rebecca Johninke is a member of the Department of English, The University of Sydney, Australia. She is also the Director of Student Support Programs in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Her interests include creative non-fiction, magazines, Australian film and popular culture, and street narratives (from masculine car cultures to street cultures more generally), and she has a specific interest in the figure of the flâneur. She has taught writing and rhetoric for many years.