



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT SPECIAL ISSUES

Number 63 October 2021

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

Introduction: The thing as writing prompt

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To cite this article: Saward, M. & Wain, D. (2021). Introduction: The thing as writing prompt. In M. Saward and D. Wain (Eds.) *Writing through things 2: The thing as writing prompt*. TEXT Special Issue 63.

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Introduction: The thing as writing prompt

‘We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.’
— Sherry Turkle (2007, p. 5)

When writers start thinking about their relationship to things, ideas grow. When we put the call out for papers for this theme, we were so overwhelmed by the response that it became two special issues rather than one – the ideas, and enthusiasm, had grown beyond the bounds of an individual issue.

This issue specifically looks at writers and the ways in which objects operate as prompts – and in our case, not just as a prompt for creating new work and compiling two special issues, but the start of a friendship beyond the academic relationship that developed through the process.

Melanie: In 2019, sitting in Deb’s presentation at the AAWP conference, my mind whirred with ideas. Her thesis fascinated me, as did the use of the thing as a writing prompt. It was the first time I have ever raised my hand in a conference question session, and the first time I sought out a presenter in networking time to continue the conversation.

Deb: I pursued a paper on Things and Thing Theory because I acknowledged that both had been pervasive throughout the process of constructing my creative practice PhD thesis, and yet, owing to the need to pursue other theoretical underpinnings, they were excluded from the final write up.

Melanie: I had been using things as writing prompts for years: using postcards to build characters; writing memoir about objects from my childhood like a biscuit tin that magically found its way back to me after my nan died; and imagining the lives of the people who once owned the vintage objects I furnished my home with. Being introduced to the wonderful world of Thing Theory added a dimension to my obsessive antiquing and the ways in which I thought about objects and the way writers use them as prompts.

Deb: The very beginnings of my thinking on my PhD topic had centred around the Things of my mother’s and grandmother’s kitchens. In particular, the books that were important to the functioning of these kitchens, such as the *PWMU Cookbook* and handwritten collections being kept in a kitchen drawer, as a utensil, rather than on a shelf, as a book. They existed, as Bill Brown explains, in a ‘certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the

nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable' (2001, pp. 4-5).

The writers in this issue have explored the ways in which things can be used as writing prompts: some by creating their own poetry, prose, and hybrid art; others by analysing published works. They have shown appreciation for the role of the Thing in their creative and analytical research, reinforcing, as suggested by Donna Haraway, objects as 'frozen stories' (2000, p. 107) and as noted by Sherry Turkle, 'objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought' (2007, p. 5). Brown says, 'As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things' (2001, p. 4), but by their work, these authors have provided more than a glimpse, and have furthered our understanding of the objects that make up our environments. We hope you will find them as interesting, valuable, and as thought-provoking as we have.

References

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Acknowledgements

Our many thanks go to all of the contributing authors as well as to Sue Joseph, Craig Batty, and Liz Ellison for their endless leadership, support, and patience as we compiled this special issue. Our thanks also to Emma Doolan and Kate Cantrell for their editorial expertise.