TEXT Vol 17 No 1 (April 2013)

Prose and poetry contents

TEXT prose

Kate Elkington

In Pieces

Look over there. Beyond the newsstand. He's next to the older man who's flicking through a fishing magazine, flicking the pages fast. A blur of reels and rods and marlin and motors catches Jimmy's eye. He replaces his offroad magazine for a fishing one. And he flicks too. He stops at a page and nudges the older man to see. A woman, a girl really, reclines in a game fishing chair, gripping a long rod that's wedged between her naked, retouched thighs. She's barely dressed. See how Jimmy nudges the man again and raises a pale eyebrow. No bite. The older man wedges his magazine back in the rack and leaves. It doesn't matter. That man isn't important, and Jimmy isn't bothered.

He leaves the newsagency. It's 29 degrees Celsius out there. Blue sky, thin puffs of cloud with fish-like scales. Pretty nice.

There on the right, next to the van. The grey car with the rear window taped in black plastic. That's Jimmy's. Don't worry about what happened to the window. It's irrelevant. The car is a sedan. Not fit for offroad, although he's tried. Took it to Moreton Island once. Didn't make it far off the barge. The back seat is covered in cheap fabric the shade of frostbite with a stain in the shape of an axe where a small child might have let go of their bowels in a sweaty protest. Jimmy doesn't have kids. No air conditioning. A bumper sticker: 'Don't make me use my…'. The rest of the sticker has been peeled off. Not by Jimmy.

He sits at his computer and types. Jimmy is a writer. Note the setting here.

A white room facing west. During summer, Jimmy can only write in the mornings. Wide, pine floorboards and a double sash window overlook the vacant block on Furley Street. Squint and it could be an olive grove. Or a French battlefield. Maybe. The ceiling is high and a small wasp's nest in the far corner draws the eye. Like a cat's turd on snow. A low bookshelf against one wall is filled with various titles of various genres. Jimmy hasn't settled on his style yet. The computer is old. He wanted a typewriter for its truth, but he could only afford an electric one from the seventies. Instead he has a 1995 desktop computer that emits a startling series of beeps when he tries to save his work. Two timber photo frames sit on his desk. In one, a blonde woman eyes the lens wearily, a doughy toddler arching in her arms. It is obviously an old picture. He does not know them, but he wishes he did. The other photo is more recent. A beaming black man shakes Jimmy's hand. Jimmy is younger and wears a striped tie. His face is blotchy as if he has peeled strips of sunburned skin from his big forehead. You can see here how the vitiligo has spread over recent years.

He is typing. It is nearly afternoon.

Can you hear that? Jimmy can, but he ignores it. He keeps typing. A man is yelling from the street. Hammering on Jimmy's front door, 'Fucking thief.' Adjective. Mrs Hancock is peering over the lillypillies.

Watch as Jimmy gets ready. He doesn't know what to wear. He chooses the striped tie. Again.

'We are concerned,' says the man who may have a deep cleft in his chin. Jimmy doesn't know who 'we' is. They are on the telephone. The man has the first three chapters of Jimmy's new book. Jimmy imagines the man is in a white room with high ceilings and a window that stretches from wall to wall overlooking a green park with a wooden bridge over a creek. There are no wasp nests in the corners. 'On the merits of your first novel, we expected more,' says the man with a cluster of short, grey whiskers in his cleft that escapes the razor's sweep. That novel is problematic for Jimmy. See how he clenches his buttocks, how his white patches blanch as his neck flushes.

It is a Wednesday, and Jimmy sits at the bus stop. He has been to the library, and now his car is not working. It appears the bus is not coming. Jimmy has forgotten there is a rally in the city. There will be tents and flags and shouting and television cameras, and there is no room for buses. An old woman sits on the bench. Jimmy tells her that he thinks the bus is not coming. She smiles at him and nods. He feels there is something more he should say.

The taxi takes a shortcut and Jimmy does not pass the Harrington Writer's Retreat. He is relieved. Brian might be there.

The nosy neighbour carefully prunes her glossy hedge as she patiently hopes for another scandalous visit.

The animal shelter is busy on Saturday morning. Fat children push against wire fences as skinny dogs lick tomato sauce off their puffy chins. The cage at the far end of the concrete compound is the one Jimmy goes to first. It smells no worse than the other cages. Inside, a grey dog sulks in the corner. Bandit. A cattledog cross. The dog has one brown eye and one bright blue one. You'd imagine this would appeal to Jimmy, but see how he turns his head and walks away.

There are a lot of adjectives in Jimmy's new book. He is overly fond of adverbs too. There weren't many in his first novel, the one Brian calls *his*. Differential coefficiency is Jimmy's main defence. He likes the way it sounds. Brian cannot afford to sue and hasn't written anything since.

A bird is feeding its baby in a nest outside Jimmy's window. He thinks it could be symbolic of something. Jimmy was married once. That's another story.

Jimmy is left-handed. This makes some things difficult for him such as wearing a regular watch, peeling potatoes and writing with ink. He is also apparently unable to throw a boomerang. Fortunately for Jimmy, he does not like potatoes and has no interest in physical recreation. Even fishing. However, lefties are supposedly more inclined to be divergent thinkers. Look this up. You'll see it means he is creative, and this pleases him.

There are twelve houses in his street. Four are brick, five are timber, and three are made from a combination of materials. They all have gently gabled roofs. Most of them have fireplaces, although they are only used for a few weeks in July. During this time, the houses resemble steaming apple pies sitting on a sill.

He keeps typing but nothing much has happened, and Jimmy is bothered by this. But the banging at the door and the threatening letters have stopped. Jimmy goes to buy socks and can't find his novel in the bookstore. It used to be there.

This is the part where Brian is dead. A significant event.

The actual details are sketchy; the Writers Retreat didn't tell Jimmy much for he is being spurned, but you will get the general idea: a locked garage; a running engine; a wheezing wife in a thin, blue nightdress flapping around the hallway; an overweight, black dog whining and weeing and scratching on the garage door; Jimmy's novel – Brian's novel, if you are the type who automatically assigns innocence to the dead –lying open on the passenger seat. The car is expensive. So is the house. So Brian wasn't upset about the money.

Jimmy's fingertips are very white. The skin above his distal inter-phalangeal joints has now lost its pigmentation. It looks as though he has dipped his hands in bleach, and he has taken to sniffing them regularly.

He visits the museum, the new one with giant humpback whales suspended by wires. Jimmy hurries through this section without looking up. He does not look at their chalky, rippled bellies with their barnacles and carefully peeled patches of grey. Did you know that the world's only albino whale has skin cancer? Jimmy also goes to the art gallery but does not see anything he likes.

Today is different from yesterday. His white fingertips scurry across the keyboard, and he does not pause to smell them. Aside from the tapping, it is very quiet. Jimmy has started a new book and is already up to chapter seven. The plot came to him as an epiphany in his sleep, if you believe that, and his lips now shape the words he types like a magical incantation.

Jimmy writes the story of a vanishing writer. The writer noticed himself fading bit by bit, and he was frightened. He embarked on a quest to create a salve that would restore his missing self, a pulpy ointment made from words. In a giant processor, the writer forces *Dubliners* down toward the blades and pours in a litre of water and a little oil until a glutinous ball forms.

In the meantime:
Milk sours in the fridge;
Mrs Hancock buys a new hose reel;
New people with cats move in at number twelve;
The regional solar heating salesman goes home despondent.

The Decameron and *One Thousand and One Nights* help give the writer's mixture a pastier quality. He works for days, blending and balancing, until he feels his very bones start to dissolve. It isn't important to know how the story ends, but it's 24 degrees Celsius when Jimmy finishes. Slightly overcast. He goes to bed in the afternoon and sleeps, dreamless, in greasy sheets.

Jimmy wakes, ready to print the new novel that he hardly remembers writing. It isn't exceptionally long, but it is long enough. He will take it to the store in the city that has sixteen different coloured binders to choose from and coffee while you wait. He will take the bus for his car is still broken, and he wants to rediscover the world. He will then post it to the man with short, grey whiskers in his cleft.

But he cannot see his story. Jimmy stabs at the keyboard and the screen is now black. Jimmy looks under the desk and twiddles with the wires behind the hard drive. He presses the big round button at the front. A loud sound tells us

something is not right. Another sound now. A small, quick hiss as the odour of charred metal wafts up Jimmy's mottled nostrils.

Next door, Mrs Hancock's sprinkler strafes Jimmy's wall. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat. She cannot hear him cry.

Kate Elkington is an emerging author currently undertaking a Doctor of Creative Arts (Creative Writing) at the University of the Sunshine Coast examining the composite novel in Australian literature. She has also completed a Master of Creative Writing and a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism), and is teaching Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast. In recent years Kate has completed a novella and a range of short fiction and is currently working on her own composite novel.

TEXT
Vol 17 No 1 April 2013
http://www.textjournal.com.au
General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy & Enza Gandolfo
text@textjournal.com.au

GRIEF BY NUMBERS

My mother told me grief doesn't get smaller. You reconfigure your life and you build anew, but it never hurts or means less.[3] You live through the lens of grief for the rest of your life.

Dad was 42 when he died, the answer to the wrong universe.[4] My share house in Melbourne is also no. 42 and the numbers reversed make my second favourite number, the day of my birth; a baby on the cusp of Leo and Virgo. Incidentally, 4x2 = 8 (not that you need a maths lesson[5]) and eight is my favourite number, lovely curvy thing.

What is the function and value[1] of extranarrative[2] literature and how does it interact with critical discourse?

Extranarratives demonstrate an interplay of thought, emotion, memory and experience in a distinctly performative manner, allowing readers to experience and direct their own interaction with a text. These narratives also interrogate the role of authenticity, narrative voice and alienation in literature. Ultimately, the power of extranarrative literature is its ability to engage and communicate as insistently and passionately through form as through content.

Extranarratives allow for an overt exploration of the complexities of human history and interaction. Simone de Beauvoir said that 'by following the sequence of time, I put it out of my power to convey interconnections...I [fail] to give my past hours threefold dimension' (7). Extranarrative, in refusing to adhere to traditional narrative structure, can be viewed in a similar respect. In *Diary of a Bad Year,* when J.M. Coetzee introduces a second narrative (and voice) and soon

[1] It is helpful to imagine how extranarratives might exist in a traditional narrative structure. Perhaps there would be alternating chapters or distinct sections encapsulating the different 'voices' of the text, rather than a presentation of them as insertions and interruptions on the page. Coetzee's *Diary* might exist as a novel with three distinct and separate sections covering J.C.'s 'Strong Opinions,' J.C.'s narrative and Anya's narrative. David Foster Wallace's (F.W.) footnotes in stories like 'Octet' or 'The Depressed Person' might be inserted into the text as brackets, or within dashes (both devices he already employs prolifically). In discussing meta-narrative, Peter Barry mentions that 'frames' can be intrusive where 'the embedded tale is occasionally interrupted to revert to the frame situation' (228). In this sense, extranarratives function as a constant interruption. This sustained interrupting and the tense struggle for power, in experiencing the narratives as competing structures on the page, would be lost in a conversion to traditional literary structure. The performative nature of the extranarrative form would be only a vague and implied shadow – a suggestion, rather than a visceral and challenging perfomance of human and literary connection.

[2] Literature in which additional narratives exist outside of, in contrast to and in competition with the 'main' text of a page. Where Genette frames meta-narrative as 'a narrative within the narrative' (228), extranarrative operates as a narrative outside of the narrative, an intrusion or interruption of the main text. It might also be helpful to frame extranarrative against the structuralist contention 'not to interpret literature, but to investigate its structures and devices' (Culler 8), whereby extranarrative seeks to interpret literature *through* its structures and devices – in a way an extended version of Genette's interpolated text (217).

[3] She told me because I asked her about Dad.

[4] See Douglas Adams' *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and read it immediately. It's hilarious.

[5] Years after I was diagnosed with Diabetes (an unfortunate bi-product of Cystic Fibrosis [a genetic illness stemming from a faulty salt-transfer gene that can affect the lungs, pancreas, digestive system and liver]) a Diabetic Educator was assigned to teach me about carbohydrate counting. I was 19. She brought out a piece of paper with pictures of an apple, a piece of bread and a glass of milk. The pictures had numbers next to them - their 'carb count' for one serve. Part of me wishes I had

Eight[6] is tilted infinity, feared and exulted, forever happening, happened and going to happen.

Freud would insist these numbers don't correlate to anything – they are arbitrary connections I have made in order to feel more mysticism in my life.[7] He might be right. These connections may well have been created by an overly imaginative and emotional brain.[8] However, I do think the numbers mean something.[9] What is life but a whirling chaos of connection? People are referential creatures, bound up together in trauma, success, denial, love… all the delicious, terrifying things.

At the end of 1992, Mum was 43, Anna was 18, David was 7 and I was 4.[10] Hours after the horror of finding Dad in the paddock, I turned to Mum and said,

after that a third, he illuminates the difficulty of combining and understanding differing experiences, reactions and personalities – as much in life, as in literature. This difficulty is reflected in the struggles described within the narrative, and infinitely echoed in the competing structure of the three narratives on the page and the three, or possibly more, distinct voices in the reader's head. The reader interacts with the political theorising of J.C.'s opinions; with the wasting man who is forcing these words out and his interaction with these opinions, as well as his thoughts about and interactions with Anya; and with Anya's perspective on their friendship, on his 'opinions,' and on her own history; and finally with the once-removed perspective of Anya's partner Alan, through Anya's narrative. The framing of these stories as extranarratives demands that each set of ideologies and morphing characterisations be held in the mind at once, that we may experience each of their voices discretely, while also reading them as part of a unified voice (perhaps that of the author, real or imagined, behind the text or even the page itself, that finite and infinite, living and static thing). In the struggle to both condense and pull apart these voices and their interconnections, we echo our attempts to understand (to over-simplify, to connect, to deconstruct) any piece of writing – and any person.

The burden (or delight) of choosing a route through these competing narratives is with the reader. One narrative must always take a primary role, whether the reader purposefully focuses on a particular narrative before another, whether they will

told her I didn't understand. Would she have given up at that point? She asked me to add up how many carbs there would be if I had two serves of bread and one apple. I managed, with more difficulty than I had ever experienced, not to sneer. I said five. She asked what if I had one apple and a glass of milk, plus three pieces of bread. I asked, is this was a mathematics lesson? I wasn't particularly polite. She stared, and I decided it was time to go.

[6] I've long had a strange relationship with numbers, agents of mathematics, most hated school subject, but also marker of life, ticker down of time, counter up of joys and loves.

[7] Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. (I must admit, my knowledge of Sigmund is limited. I'm told wasn't as pragmatic as I imagine.)

[8] And it's number 8!

[9] The number 17 chases me as well (in a cheerful, friendly way) and that too has its own memories and meaning, stemming mostly from my first love, who introduced me to these kinds of number contortions.

[10] It is poor etiquette to type numbers below ten as a digit rather than the full word, but I think it looks silly to have the 43 and the 18 digitised while the seven and the four are words. Are numbers even words when they're typed as digits? They're certainly words when we say them out loud. Do they only become words when they're transformed into letters?

[11] A friend told me she never reads footnotes until the end of a work (if at all), which meant in her experience of my work, the second reading was as new as the first and told an entirely different story. Her admission reminded me of my own historical engagement with footnotes, which was not at all. In fact, I avoided anything that distracted me from 'the story' –

'It's too horrible, I can't think about it anymore. I'm going to play.' And I turned and closed the sliding doors of the playroom behind me.[12]

At 16, I was slammed by memories of his death, of my brother's lost wandering, of Anna saying 'he's not dead' over and over again when we found him, and of my Mother's incredible strength and the terrible price of her love.

I overheard her tell my sister to make sure she never put all of her hopes and love and heart with one person, to always keep something for herself, *because you never know what might happen*. They might be strangled to death by their own machinery whilst making a new fence at the top of their farm and be found by their seven-year-old son who would interrupt his mother making pizzas five days before Christmas to say, 'Dad's fainted.'

I have always been afraid of losing people and this is not a revelation. I lost one of the most important people in my life

jump across to an extra-interruption (which might be in the form of a footnote[11], a secondary narrative or an intra-textual reference) or whether they trust the primacy of the page itself and will read everything on it before moving on, despite the fact that a particular narrative may carry on for some time from a previous page (Coetzee's entire novel functions in this manner and David Foster Wallace's famous footnotes do the same – his fifth footnote in 'The Depressed man' runs over six pages). Whichever route has been taken, extranarratives constantly demand the reader double back, question and realign their experience of the text.

Gerard Genette would frame this kind of textual analysis as a 'ripping apart…an unavoidable violence' (215), yet it might more helpfully be framed as an unfolding – a wilful vulnerability. The reader is invited to see inside, underneath and through extranarrative texts. The power is given to the reader to discover meaning, to imagine what the point of these competing narratives is – to find their own truth. There is no untouchable dictation of meaning, but rather an invitation to interact. F.W. is the master of this technique in that he does not simply imply this interaction, but breaks the fourth wall entirely and demands it. In 'Octet,' the entire second footnote (which is also in brackets and thus functions as an extranarrative of itself) discusses at length F.W.'s desire to speak directly to his readers and the inherently performative and potentially 'false' effect he imagines this might have. He ends the note (which has taken up more than ¾'s of the page) with the declaration that it 'might well ought to get cut. It may be none of this real-narrative-honesty-v.-sham-narrative-honesty stuff can even be talked about up front' (147). F.W. uses extranarrative to question the reader, and himself, and in so doing, indirectly questioning the mechanics and authenticity of literary representation. Complicating matters further, in responding to reactions he imagines readers might have, he creates yet another (unwritten) extranarrative – that of the reader themselves at the moment of

footnotes, endnotes, forewords, commentaries…

[12] A dear friend, and former teacher of mine, told me young children often do not have the vocabulary to describe their grief. Which, of course, does not mean they do not feel it. I can look back now, and I can see the twisting lines of hurt and fear and anger that trapped me. I wanted him back so badly and knew it was hopeless; that he could never come back, that I could never go back in time to save him, or spend one more day with him, or talk to him one more time, or have one more hug; and it was so *unfair*, because sometimes people actually got the things they desperately wanted, but I never would. And why had it happened, why did he have to die, why him? And why us?

before I knew a thing about him. I still don't really know anything.[13]

I do remember some things: sitting next to him at the breakfast bar and asking for spoonfuls of his cereal;[14] hearing him get up in the morning, no matter how quiet he tried to be and running to join him, or demanding he come and stand in the doorway of my room, 'Daddy come and look at me!'; sitting in front of him on the four-wheel-drive motorbike, careening down green corridors, icy fingers of wind pinking my cheeks;[15] taking a running leap onto him as he play-fought with my brother and the distinct, low 'Ooof' as I landed.[16]

He wrote diaries. Years of diaries from the farm, from before my brother and I were born, from his travels through Africa when he was 23.[17] There is a video of him giving a speech as well, but I've never been able to get past the first few minutes. He's there, a whole person on that tape and in those diaries. Reels of plastic and decaying paper know him as I do not. I have not-known

reading. Extranarrative allowed F.W. to create texts that were self-conscious and (potentially) manipulative, whilst also being vulnerable and naïve, displaying the fears and tension he feels within and for his own work. If this kind of extranarrative analysis is 'violent,' then it is a delicate and poetic kind of violence.

Part of the power of this form is in the simultaneous engagement of an intellectual reaction with an emotional response. In Genette's words, this is a passing 'from analysis of statements to analysis of relations between… statements' (213). While we might feel touched and emotionally engaged by Anya's final letter to J.C. (and her accompanying narrative reflecting on her relationship with the old writer and hoping she can be there for him in his final days), we must also question why the narrative space previously occupied by J.C. is now taken up by a recitation of Anya's letter. One possibility is that J.C. has in fact died and Anya's letters (and memory and voice) are all that is left to represent him. The dominance of Anya's voice in both her own and J.C.'s narrative 'space' might equally function as a comment on her own power and endurance – where she perhaps appeared vapid and insignificant when we were first introduced to her. Coetzee successfully presents an emotionally fraught narrative, whilst also engaging in an intellectual analysis of the mechanics of the page and the possible meanings behind those mechanics. I have struggled with this concept of presenting a work that is deeply emotional and personal, yet that also engages in linguistic play and divisiveness and removes the reader from the emotion of the narrative at the moment when they most want to be engaged. I fear that these devices create a false or misleading impression and in drawing so much attention to literature's inherently constructed nature, it will no longer be possible to trust any part of it.

Yet literature is, by its most fundamental nature, a construction. It is a physical embodiment of con-

[13] People have told me things (my family, his friends, his family), but their words aren't the same as knowing him myself. Nothing will ever be the same.
[14] I hate cereal now. I don't know if this was a natural progression (cold, milk-logged slop = distasteful) or if I stopped eating it because he was no longer there.
[15] I tumbled off the motorbike on two different occasions. Apparently I was fine.
[16] After he died I became very concerned with who would play-fight with us.
[17] I am 23. I haven't read the diaries yet. I don't know if I can. I don't know how to face him, or myself.

him so well for 20 years; I don't know what it would mean to know him now.

In 2008 for a creative writing class, I wrote about a parent forgetting things about a child who had died. A woman in the class said a friend's young daughter had died and her friend could never forget a single thing about her - she thought about her every day and would never forget. I know her words were meant as a reprimand[18], but all I could think was what an exquisite and agonising gift her friend endured.

Mum still finds it difficult to talk about my father. It would have been his 61st birthday not long ago and she and I spent the day together, gentle supports for shared moments. I cried that day and she sensed my frustration that the loss of him was still so raw. She told me that she cried every day for eight months after he died. Sometimes when she was alone, but sometime before friends, who would curl and twist in apology.[19]

We left the countryside two years after Dad died. Mum had been trying to manage

cepts, emotions and thoughts that only exist inside the mind. Drawing attention to this construction is embracing literature for the construction it is, which seems ruthlessly honest, rather than false.

As for removing a reader from emotion at the moment they want to engage with it, we reach an interesting conundrum. As I wrote 'Grief by Numbers' I was aware of needing to look at what I was writing from out of the corner of my eye. If I faced it directly, I would be lost in it (or it would be lost in me). The extranarrative features of the work are not necessarily a removal from the emotion of my story, but a physical embodiment of my fragmentation, confusion and difficulty in facing my own past. Furthermore, the extranarrative form is a way for me to talk about the fact that I have dealt with grief by intellectualising it, by connecting it to literature, to other memories, to other people and by sidling past it, never quite letting it block out the light.

However, this moment of 'emotional engagement versus intellectual analysis' is exactly the point where a reader may choose to read the text *as they desire*. A footnote does not reach off the page and physically drag the eye down. It can be ignored. The central story can be followed through if a reader so desires, as can the story of the footnotes, the story of the interruptions or the story that is told in the white spaces of the page.

Extranarrative destabilises and challenges, and this struggle is an important part of the message the form communicates. It presents alternate and competing elements on the unified, yet fatally divided, page and in doing so, creates a dialogue and a tension that echoes a struggle within the narrative itself, whilst also referencing a struggle between traditional and alternative forms of literature and even the struggle of the 'self' to understand the contradictory elements of its own existence and the challenge of bringing that contradictory self in line with other contradictory selves. The form raises many concerns: which narrative will be read first; which narrative will compel the reader to read on, ignoring the other elements; which narrative communicates the

[18] I still find it strange that anyone would attempt to critique another person's experience of grief. Is grief limited to the old and the wise? Can it be graded?

[19] She said she told them it was okay to cry, that it wasn't their fault. The tears came just as often when Dad was not mentioned. She told them it is healthy to grieve and to do so before the people who love you. I still don't cry well with others.

[20] I saw the beautiful wooden deck and the view over a big green park which Mum must have chosen for that reason (but

the farm alone, as well as look after two grieving children and herself, who was suffering something far worse – her own grief, that of her little people, and the invisible loss of our family's stolen future. I didn't want to leave,[20] but it meant David and I received an education beyond our little school[21] sooner rather than later, which probably wasn't a bad thing. We left our tree-hut, the long driveway past the tennis court up to the single-floored house, the deck that Dad built the year before, the trampoline behind the fence in the front paddock, the green upon green upon green as far as you could see, the frosts after winter nights which would briefly immortalise our footprints in the grass before the day melted them away, the stars that burnt from every corner of the sky. We left our beautiful, deadly farm behind.

strongest message; and how do we unify all of these elements and read them as a complete work of literature? These different elements might be understood through the lens of Lacan's 'valuing [of] the modernist or postmodernist text, where…a novel plays with the devices of the novel' (Barry 109). The emphasis there is play – yet extranarrative uses this play to refer back to a deeper human experience of literature, and of living. Extranarrative literature says: we are creatures of struggle, why should we not interrogate our competing natures, our lack of understanding for one another's histories or behaviours and our constant quest to find the understanding we lack? Extranarratives present contradiction and confusion[27] in order to make sense of the universal struggle to understand one another, and our world.

We might also categorise extranarratives in light of Barthes' 'declaration of radical textual independence,' (Barry 63) – though we must quickly thereafter differentiate from other aspects of post-structuralist thought. While this kind of work can be seen as a 'tissue of textualities' (Barry 61) and to be 'carry[ing] a plurality of significance,' (69) that tissue and that plurality (or disunity), does not automatically mean they 'betray' themselves, and prove literature's disconnect from the individual and from society. That way of thinking gives power to the fallacy that only traditional forms of literature present an accurate rendering of the human condition. And what is tradition, but a historical construction based on the way things have always been and therefore are, rather than the way things could[22], or even should, be? If we accept that we are not perfectly unified creatures, that we are full of contradictions,

which was like a toy in comparison to the farm) and I said, 'Where's our lawn?'

[21] There was one classroom and 13 students by the time we moved in 1994. It has closed down now. They amalgamated three schools in the area and built a better, more attended, school. There was a plaque on the grounds of the old school in front of a tree that was planted when Dad died. I was so angry when they returned it to us. I know it was better that they send it back to us than that it be lost. But I suppose I had imagined the tree and its dedication surviving far beyond us, far beyond Dad. I suppose I thought of it as a version of him, and somebody dug it out of the ground and posted it back to us in the mail.

[22] At 10, my teacher told me I was not *thinking* the right way. She described this incorrect way of thinking as 'Sian-language,' which was apparently a lateral, but unacceptable, way of thinking.

[23] With the constant questioning of voice, agency and truth that extranarrative invites, the form might be seen as perilously close to suffering from what Jean Baudrillard called a 'loss of the real' (Barry 84). Does extranarrative, in its simulation of academia, its inversion of traditional creative writing, its problematic use of 'the author' as a voice at once within and outside of the text, move so far from 'reality' as to be a simulacrum? A page with text, in which the text is imagined? In some ways the fear is one that could be applied to any form of literature, which is always an attempt to repackage reality and represent it in some *original* way. If extranarrative is a simulacrum, it is not of reality, but of litera-

My Mother has endured more than I could ever truly understand and she is one of the brightest, most positive and loving people I have ever known. A large part of realising my own grief has been realising a shadow of what she went through, and the incredible strength and vulnerability she has inside her, to live outside the dictatorship of despair. Nineteen years ago the life she was meant to have was stolen, but she chose to survive.[24]

My grief has grown with me, it has grown bigger inside me and sometimes it seems to billow far out of my body. But mostly it fits perfectly inside my skin. It has changed me, but I have also changed it. I imagine that won't ever stop. I'm still trying to understand what it means that he died and we lived. I'm trying to understand what it means that life must go on without him. I'm trying to understand that I could lose everything (again), and I have to love and trust anyway.[25]

confusions and battles, then representing disunity[23] is not a removal from a grounded subject, but a more accurate and honest depiction of that subject.

Extranarratives also invert Barthes' contention that 'writing is the destruction of every voice' (1466). F.W. and Coetzee both create a multiplicity of voices through their extranarrative writing. F.W. constantly comments on and narrates his own narration in what we assume to be 'his' voice, existing as it does outside of the story he tells. When he footnotes 'that might not be the right word – too pedantic; you might want to use the word *transmit*, or *evoke* or even *limn*' (155) it is the intimate voice of a writer, assumed *the* writer (though admittedly a constructed version of his voice on the page), questioning his work. Coetzee's (assumed) voice in *Diary* is deeply present in his inclusion of a character so like himself, even carrying his initials. Admittedly this voice is decidedly *not* Coetzee. However, the possibility remains that this character is Coetzee's own imagined version of himself or an alternate self who might have responded as described to the situation in the novel. It could be argued that Coetzee's construction of a narrative that leads the reader to ask these very questions absolutely means his voice as 'the author' is present. Extranarrative engages directly with concepts of agency, narrative voice and direct address, and presents a powerfully voiced (multiply-voiced) extranarrative of the perceived author.

This kind of self-reflexive and self-referential dialogue between an author and their text must be questioned. It introduces the problematic issue of an author conferring trust in their narrative by an air of transparency that might actually be misleading. Coetzee has created a character conceivably so close to himself as to appear indistinguishable. There is an element of authority and trust conferred by this trading on his own name, yet if the 'narrating situation of a fictional account is *never* reduced to its situation of writing' (Genette 214) then we are being falsely

ture, which questions the validity and veracity of any creative output that seeks to represent 'reality' as something simple. This undermines Baudrillard's claim of a 'panic-stricken production of the real and the referential' (1736) in that extranarrative calmly and playfully suggests 'truth' might be in the imagined space. Thus, the simulacrum of literature allows a true representation of reality, reality which the simulacrum then suggests is best represented by the imagination.

[24] She said, 'I chose to believe that I would get through and that I would be happy again.' Her choice saved all of our lives. It's still saving mine now.

[25] There is a part of me that still doesn't believe these words. It is a part that fears joy as much as grief, a part that looks at both sideways as if they are wild things and might lunge for my throat.

led. It cannot truly be Coetzee speaking through J.C. in *Diary*, if Genette is to be believed (though perhaps he shouldn't be?). F.W.'s use of footnotes also introduces a possibility of misappropriated authority.[26] There is an implied authenticity in the footnote form, with its historical connotations of academic reference, that F.W. is perhaps trading on to gain the trust of the reader. Both devices (that of inserting a possible 'self' into the text as a fictional character and using a structural form that implies trustworthiness) serve to question the agency of the author and invite the same questioning from readers. These texts request and expect that we mistrust them and in mistrusting them, we must mistrust all forms of authority, of which authorial intent (and supremacy) is a good place to start. Yet the texts also claim we are inherently multiplicitous creatures and that these extraneous, extracted and extreme constructions accept and explore humanity's true nature. Indeed they are transparent almost to the point of faultlessness – if they do not (cannot) hide anything, then perhaps there is nothing to do but trust them, which should probably make you a little suspicious…

Extranarratives re-imagine the boundaries of literature. They perform the complexity of narrative life versus human life versus the invisible life in-between. They might be postmodern or poststructuralist, or they might be neither. They exist in a self-created space, above, around, within, marginalised and imagined by the literary page. They alienate to familiarise, they perform to speak the truth; they do not accept that people or the literature they create must always follow the rules. They declare that form can have just as much to say as content, maybe even more.

For three days before the funeral, Dad lay in his coffin in our house. Having him there felt like we were still a family, like he hadn't died yet.[27] I would drag a chair next to his coffin so I could see inside and I would touch his hair and his face and stroke the satin lapel of his suit. We filled the coffin with photos and books and trinkets and we each soaked up his presence, soaked up the sight of him.

Dad was not a singer, but he did sing to me. He would cup my hand, and while I squirmed in terrified delight, he would draw teddy bear circles on my palm, round and round and round, getting slower and slower before the 'one step, two step, tickle you under there!' Mum said that for the three days I had his captive attention, when I climbed onto the chair next to him, I would sing to him.

Now it seems sweet and desolate, and I don't remember doing it at all.

I can only imagine that little girl, as if she is someone in a photograph who I haven't met. I see her skinny legs poking

[26] Lisa Samuels explores the agency of footnotes in her essay 'Relinquish Intellectual Property.' She dissects the merits of academic referencing, the appropriation of ideas and the possibility of ever truly having an original thought. The essay is 18 pages long and contains only two sentences. Ten of its 44 words are footnoted.

[27] Mum said I was excited when the coffin was due to arrive because, 'Daddy's coming home!' She had to remind me it wouldn't be like before.

out the bottom of her red dress[28] with the embroidered front that flares out to her knees. I see her little round tummy and her flushed cheeks and her pale brown ringlets.

I see a little girl who climbs up to watch her Father's pale face, his still hands, his black suit with the satin lapel, his old cap pulled over his black hair – because he didn't look like himself after they blow-dried him.

And I don't know why she sings to him. I don't know what her voice sounds like or if she remembers all the words.[29] I don't know if she thought he was lonely and sad – like everyone else – and needed cheering up; or if she thought he might reach out and take her hand again; or whether she thought he might still be able to hear her.

[28]A dress for twirling – which was a favourite activity. I still like it now.

[29] I have two niecelings. One is five and three-quarters (quarters are very important at this age) and remembers all the words when she sings, though she is gorgeously out of tune, which is sweet especially because my sister is such a beautiful singer. The other is two and half and she gets distracted about half the way through most recitals. She'll generally keep humming along, or sing in nonsense-language (she must take after me). When I think of my nieces and the little girl in the picture – the one looking into the coffin – I feel acidic with rage, as if that will be enough to protect them from being hurt (as if that could re-write what happened to the girl in the photograph).

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TEXT prose

Anne Rutherford

William Kentridge's Black Box: The Cog that Turns the Wheel

Abstract
This article is a piece of creative non-fiction that explores the construction of place in the multimedia installation work of artist William Kentridge. The article explores the installation Black Box, an acclaimed miniature theatre work that traces the roots of the racist ideology of the Nazis back to the German massacre of the indigenous Herero in south-west Africa in 1905 and the methods of racial management that prefigured the development of the Nazi concentration camps. Through the exploration of the German colonial adventure, the article raises questions about the links between German colonial policies and those developed in Australia.
The installation is an experimental work and the article works with a performative writing style to evoke the dynamics of the artwork as it oscillates between historical detail and audiovisual phantasmagoria. As such, the piece experiments with structures of rhythm and repetition and the use of excess in a way that mirrors the kaleidoscopic montage that characterises the installation.
Keywords: William Kentridge, multimedia installation, creative nonfiction

If you want to kill a man, draw a rifle.
If you want to kill a people, draw a map.

A black box, two metres square, sits atop a wooden frame, one side open as a stage. Thirteen painted flats carve it into depth: side drops and top flats that fill the square with a proscenium. The third flat back is a blackboard, dropped down at the beginning, with the title scratched on it in chalk: *Black Box*. The blackboard lifts. A projector at the front throws images across the scene; from behind more images stream forward to collide in a tumult of conflicting sights.

How can this box be a place? Does it carry the traces of its history like the grains of sand built over time into a mighty desert, etched across its face in rippled sediments? Does it carry the memories of the people who have passed through this space and made it their own? Does it smell of the bodies that have sweated in it, of the blood that has been shed into its earth?

A black box is a dark hole. It hides its secrets inside. But this Pandora's box started to crack open in 1985. Now we can hear the whine of the hunter's bullet, the shrill cry of the sergeant major. We can see the mute figures hanging limp on the gallows. We can feel the anguish of the children as they slowly die of thirst, hunted into the pitiless Kalahari.

A mechanical puppet trundles out from the wings, a paper cutout megaphone on wheels, and creaks its way around to confront us with a placard: *Trauerarbeit*. Grief work: this is a work of mourning.

*

In 1884, the great powers of Europe held a conference in Berlin to carve up the territories of Africa and decide who would take dominion over the new colonies. Germany was allocated the right to carry the flame of the European Enlightenment into the dark corners of the Southwest, which became German Southwest Africa. Germany was crowded and the influential minds of the day argued that, in order to grow and prosper, Germany needed space. Thus was born the policy of *Lebensraum*. Southwest Africa had land; its people needed civilizing. All the Prussian Empire had to do was join the dots. Germany was in the fortunate position of having great thinkers who had already drawn the lines that would make this picture whole. Not least among these was the Social Darwinist, Eugen Fischer, whose pioneering work on 'racial hygiene' would become indispensable to the racial hierarchies of the National Socialists. So began the great influx of German settlers into the lands of the Herero and Namaqua pastoralists. The ensuing struggle over land would lead to the first genocide of the twentieth century — the extermination of up to 100,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama. The bones of the Herero still lie strewn across the Kalahari desert. Vast tracts of unmarked graves appear like an ocean of tiny hillocks as far as the eye can see, pockmarks laid out geometrically like dots on a matrix across the landscape of current day Namibia.

Source: *Genocide & The Second* Reich, BBC Four, dir. David Olusoga, 2004
Photographer: Jaff Gaydish

Germany had confronted its world war two genocide. Few countries have faced their own history with such courage and integrity. But this other dark shadow on Germany's past was kept hidden away. Denied or hidden under the carpet for nearly a century, the massacre was recognised as attempted genocide by the United Nations in 1985 and finally acknowledged by Germany in 2004. *Black Box*, commissioned by the Deutsche Bank, exhibited in the Deutsche Guggenheim in the heart of Prussian Berlin in 2005, aimed to bring this other shame into the light of day. The installation was produced by the acclaimed South African Jewish artist, William Kentridge, known for many works confronting the assumptions of racial supremacy that underpinned the system of apartheid.

*

Inside this box, the smallest gesture carries the weight of the world, everything reduced to crystalline form. The box is a miniature theatre run by motors and wheels. Mechanical puppets appear like schemata — a carved metal figure on a bicycle, the creak of its pedals scratching across the stage. A woman. Black paper cutout for head and headdress. A tall metal rod for a torso, straight and proud. A metal coil for legs. The body shrouded in light gauze. Three articulated joints. The woman glides into the frame, bends her body forward sixty degrees, slowly, excruciatingly slowly returns to upright and arches back impossibly far, the head tilted low as if the back will break. A theodolite — the tripod of the surveyor — shuttles across the stage, arms waving manically, now a semaphore man, now a praying mantis, now a swastika.

Maps on the flats tell us we are in Africa, but the images projected from in front and behind take us from Africa to Berlin and back. Images fly in from the wings: big game hunters in the jungle, the murder of a rhinoceros, rallies in Berlin, Nazi insignia, black faces, maps and more maps, images spinning on discs. A bird materialises in the frame and two giant hands make a shadow play as they become a puppet, a bird, a butterfly. The hands close down the bird and pull it back up, transforming it into a lamp with a stand. They push the lamp head down into the stand and pull it back open and hoopla! Now the lamp has become a showerhead. Water streams from the shower. In a miraculous genesis this is what is born of the light. A nozzle with water, or is it gas? And now we are at a gallows and two black bodies hang by the neck. Strange fruit born of the light.

Grids, measuring scales, tools of calibration. A dancing rhinoceros. Severed heads. And everywhere a skull juggles its mandible open and closed like a giant forcep.

Words spin out: *Zwischen den Razzen*: between the races; *Vernunft*: Reason; *Totenlisten*: Lists of the dead.

Lists proliferate: the quotidian bureaucracy of annihilation.

Totenlisten.

The surveyor’s tool carves up the land, measures the land with precision as clearly as any accountant’s ledger. Five pounds of Herero land, two pounds of the flesh of child labour, a hundredweight of lead pellets and three gallons of strychnine. A mark on the land is as good as a Mark in the hand. Pieces of silver, pieces of silver.

If you want to kill a man, draw a rifle. If you want to kill a people, draw a map.

Source: *Black Box (Chambre Noire).* William Kentridge 2005
Reproduced with kind permission of William Kentridge

*

When the Herero and then the Nama rose up in 1904 against the expropriation of their land, Berlin sent the ruthless Prussian general, Lothar von Trotha, to crush the rebellion. He wrote:

> I know enough of African tribes that they give way only to violence. To exercise this violence with crass terrorism and even with gruesomeness was and is my policy. I destroy the rebellious tribes with streams of blood and money.
>
> I believe that the nation as such should be annihilated.

Von Trotha was not the only soldier to explicitly state the ruthlessness of the *Vernightungsbefehl* — the order to annihilate the Herero. After the infamous Battle of Waterberg, which defeated and expelled the remaining Herero, the official publication of the German army wrote:

> no pains, no sacrifices were spared in eliminating the last remnants of enemy resistance. Like a wounded beast the enemy was tracked down from one water-hole to the next, until finally he became the victim of his own environment. The arid Omaheke [desert] was to complete what the German Army had begun: the extermination of the Herero nation.

In 1905 the Herero appear in chains, herded into reserves, rented out as labour to German farmers and industrialists. Forced labour built the cities and towns of Southwest Africa, the churches and town halls, the elegant residences, the railway that carried more settlers into the interior. The inconvenient abolition of slavery required creative solutions. The great innovative minds of Germany could make it their mission to find new ways to manage the social, as the contradictory demands of cleansing the land of its inhabitants butted up against the demand for labour. New ideas in social engineering and racial management festered and bred in this ferment.

*

Black Box has a haunting melancholy tone. But it is not just haunted by the spirit of the men hanging by the neck from trees. It is haunted by the ideas that drove these executions.

Europe imagined Africa as a place that existed inside the scientific grid. Science was a tool to capture, measure and label Southwest Africa, to make it not just physically, institutionally, German territory but to fit it into the European imagination. Craniometry used the grid and ruler to calibrate the skull; the development of precision instrumentation would bring the products of a rational, scientific mind into the service of the colony.

Jena, Zeiss, Voigtlander: pillars of industry. The names jump out from the stage. Precision instruments — products of the great German industrial machine.

The finely-ground lens with which to spy on you. The meticulously-crafted timepiece with which to discipline you. The expertly-turned surgical instrument with which to dissect you. The rule with which to measure you. The grid to grasp the dimensions of your cranium. And the pièce de résistance: the finely-honed reason to prove to you that we are your masters.

*

The precision of clockwork makes *Black Box* function. Everything slots together: the hammer grabs the cog that turns the wheel that drives the hammer. One cog out of place and the whole mechanism malfunctions.

For this system to be possible, every intermeshing cog must fit together. If a single cog failed to do its work, the whole mechanism would stall, would lose its momentum.

*

What place is this? It is Africa but it is Europe too. Africa is a seed that has been planted, starts to germinate, will be ready to flower in the next generation. From Southwest Africa came the herding of people into concentration camps, the system of forced labour, the integration with industry in the sharing of labour resources, the bureaucracy of this new demographic strategy — the numbering of inmates, archival records registering the dead, work to exhaustion and the social philosophy that animated this enterprise.

The camps are here — the packing together of bodies for labour, the germ of an idea that slave labour can feed the coffers of Germany. The program for extermination is here. The built-in attrition is here — planned death by starvation and overwork — death certificates pre-printed with the cause of death: ‘death by exhaustion’. German science is here — the doctors streaming in to perform their experiments, the instruments of German dominion. The ideas are here. The philosophy of racial supremacy is here. And so are many of the people who become the mentors for the next generation of racists, those who take their quest to a larger stage.

*

Kentridge has written of his difficulty coming to terms with the knowledge that guards of the concentration camps would go home at night to listen to opera. How is it possible that the same human being could coldly render bodies to the gas chamber by day and surrender to the great passionate arias of German opera by night?

In and across the kaleidoscope of monstrous images in *Black Box,* Mozart's *Magic Flute* weaves its mellifluous tones.

*

Black box. Black-in-a-box. Jack-in-a-Box. Pull another one out of the hat. A bird to fly away and I will turn it into a German eagle. A king to challenge me and I will put his skull in a vice and show you why I am king. A list of the dead. And I will turn it into the melancholy slide of a cello. And in the evenings while you search for water among the poisoned wells, I will recline in my salon and listen to my gramophone. The deep-throated voice of the baritone will resonate through the fibres of my being. The bel canto of the tenor will stir my passion and the tremolo of the soprano will fill the ample space of my cranium. I will recline and ponder the sublime depths of the German soul. And while the mellow tones of the aria fill my soul, your ears will ring to the shrill cries of the buzzard waiting to pick out the entrails of your gasping child and the death rattle of the ravaged women of Waterberg. My tears will fall as I weep to *The Death of the Maiden*. You will weep blood into the desert while your children sink into the crimson dusk. Your bones will linger strewn across the Kalahari for all to remember the lessons of history.

*

This is a history, moments made of images, fragments, feelings, passions, details. Why stage it in this way? This is the stuff of investigative journalism and a documentary film that traces this history lays out the links in meticulous detail: the words of the commandant that commit the policy of annihilation to paper; the cartoons that figure the Africans as subhuman; the postcards that commemorate the collecting of skulls, tallies adding up like game trophies on the wall. The statistics, the documents, the photos … in *Black Box*, all of these fly in, explode in a momentary conflagration and give way to another fragment. For these are not just facts, but pieces in a puzzle that is much bigger than a list of dates, facts, statistics. So many connections fly out. How do they all fit together? The documentary draws a straight line, but this is a web — threads that wrap around this history like a ghastly shroud and reach their tentacles well into the present. Fragments that brush each other and bounce off in new connections.

This is Africa. But what is this place? Echoes of other places reverberate across this scene. Traces of other stories. In the photos from 1905 the surviving Herero appear in neck chains, herded onto reserves, rented out as slave labour to German farmers and industry. Herero heads were severed, skulls boiled down and packed into crates for shipment to the museums of Europe. The remaining liberated Herero were pushed to marginal land, surviving in shanty towns. Adults were forced to wear tags with a registration number; Herero were banned from owning land or cattle.

*

Like a transcontinental spider's web, threads of thought straddled the oceans in loops. Along with soldiers, settlers and capital streaming in to the new colonies came new ideas, schemata to help the colonist build his worldview on a solid basis. And back from the far-flung outposts came the insights of trial and error: new programs for managing populations, methods of subjugation and regulation, bureaucracies of control. The colonies provided a laboratory to test out new methods of racial management.

Germany came late to the colonial endeavour but others had already perfected these methods. The exhibition of *Black Box* for the first time in Australia in 2012 brings a shock of recognition. Neck chains were commonly used to remove Aboriginal people from lands required for the growing cattle industry. Segregation

into reserves succeeded massacre; Aboriginal labour became essential to the burgeoning cattle stations, the running of households, the building of a nation; a bounty was placed on skulls… Was there a colonists' gazette that shared the lessons of these field trials, a manual of techniques of dominion? Did the hothouse experiments of colonial subjugation feed from Australia into Southwest Africa and from there mature into the concentration camps of Hitler?

Kentridge's installation flings this history into a cauldron of associations and throws it straight back out to assault the viewer with a plethora of other black boxes.

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Anne Rutherford is a Senior Lecturer in Cinema Studies in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney. She is the author of 'What Makes a Film Tick?': Cinematic Affect, Materiality and Mimetic Innervation *(Peter Lang 2011) and numerous essays, including studies of cinematic affect and embodiment, documentary film, 'animate thought' in ethnographic photography and film sound. Her current research explores the relationship between cinema and architectural space in the installation work of William Kentridge.*

TEXT
Vol 17 No 1 April 2013
http://www.textjournal.com.au
General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy & Enza Gandolfo
text@textjournal.com.au

TEXT poetry

Anonymous

Working Hot

Standing before the Atrium glass,
aware of the hot chick in the shadows whose hands
seem prepared to ascend to heaven,

or, at any rate,
brush the contours of the bottom,

we adorn the precise, white letters placed
on a red / black that lacks definition.

Our Vision is keen.

Standing thus,
in love with the language
and the muffled light,
we long for the descent of trolleys,
plumed and girded with logos,
for a grave cortège
to escort us
to our hot desks.

In silence and dismay,
we admire the view:
corporate choreography still.

Burn the books. Now.

Anonymous grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She is the author of a novel, three collections of short fiction, two plays, and four books of

poetry. Her awards for poetry include the New England Review Prize for Poetry (2005) and the Martha Richardson Medal for Poetry (2006). Stretchmarks of Sun *is forthcoming (Re.Press 2013). She is Associate Professor in Writing at Swinburne University of Technology where she is sometimes known as Dominique Hecq.*

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Vol 17 No 1 April 2013
http://www.textjournal.com.au
General Editor: Nigel Krauth. Editors: Kevin Brophy & Enza Gandolfo
text@textjournal.com.au