

TEXT

The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs

Editorial

Spanish Connections

This is the first issue of *TEXT* to be edited internationally. That is to say: during the full process of receiving contributions, distributing them to referees, editing the revised drafts and making them web-ready, one of the editors was at her desk at Deakin University, and the other was at a desk kindly provided by the Australian Studies Centre, University of Barcelona.

From a tapas bar in Barcelona, Nigel Krauth writes:

'How different has it been editing this issue of *TEXT*? How different from when Tess and I had offices just down the corridor from each other?

'It seems hardly different at all. There's a collegiality in email, in shunting files back and forth; a close-seeming. It defies the tyranny of distance. But it deceives too. If the electronics had fouled up, we would have floundered, 17,000 (or whatever) kilometres apart.

'The vehicle of travel being so tenuous - both awesomely powerful and awfully vulnerable - suggests to me the power and vulnerability of the cargo we have been zapping back and forth. Written information - once as heavy as tablets of stone - now weights the same as light. (Putting this issue of *TEXT* together in very early times might have been equivalent to the process of building a smallish pyramid, or part of the Tower of Babel.)

'But there are other things around me here in Barcelona to tell me that Spain and Australia are not so far apart. I had dinner yesterday with two Australian writers - one of whom I had not seen for many years. They're visiting Barcelona too. I saw in the street this morning a green cement-mixer truck with the familiar 'Pioneer' logo on the side. And this afternoon I walked past the big Letona Foods warehouse in the Gloriés district. The Sydney 2000 Olympics are playing on every television set, and INXS come over loud and clear on the Cyber Café stereo system and in the supermercat. Barcelona has just had its biggest long weekend of the year - the La Mercè Festival - and guess who opened it this time? Yep, Robert Hughes.

'But the Tasmanian-built fast ferry to Mallorca had a bad crash the other week, and someone said we got one of the Spanish dances wrong in Strictly Ballroom.

'I think Australians think that other people in the world don't often think about Australia. In Spain, that seems not to be true. I understand that, having been a bestseller in Spain, Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* may have sold more copies here than in the country it was written about. (I'll go and check those figures.) How many times has Bob opened the Sydney Festival?

'This leads me to my point: one about relative internationalism. It may surprise some readers to know that there is no enterprise equivalent to *TEXT* elsewhere in the world. I am assured by academics from the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand...and Spain, that there is no refereed journal devoted to academic discussion of the tertiary teaching of creative writing in their countries. These academics include in their responses that there is either nothing at all, or there is publication in other sorts of journals, or there are chatty, undisciplined, gazette-style printed fora.

'As each successive issue of *TEXT* emerges, AAWP colleagues are working their way further towards establishing an internationally-significant site for discourse. Australians have clearly laid claim to the academic groundwork for praxis and pedagogy in the teaching of creative writing in universities.

'This is great. But as another 'Pioneer' concrete-mixer truck rumbles by, as I admire the 'Fosters' logo plastered across every spare space in this bar, and as I watch Ms Freeman in her alien's suit 'grab gold' (as we say) on television, I have a particular feeling: that in the AAWP we should know more about what's happening in our field in other countries...'

From her desk at Deakin University, in the suburbs of Melbourne, Tess Brady writes:

'I am learning to appreciate and name the shades of grey.

'The sky is overcast, but now in late September, there is just enough sun for me to want to wear sun glasses. And the wind is brisk but not cold. I leave my heavy coat in the car and rush between verandas. Even my old dog notices the changes. She and I both nose the wind for the scent of gardens - and other's lives.

'I too have been thinking about this editing across time and space delays. It is the closest I've come to being deaf - we've talked, human talk, with out fingers - the only sound the clicking at the keys, the spilling of a wine glass, the movement of paper. And in my mind I feel as if we have tricked the keeper of those dark distances between Melbourne and Barcelona. I kept fearing our files, your papers, this edition, might slip into some deep recess of hyperspace, and so electronically, in this editing process, I felt further away from Spain than distance counted by land travel or flight. For we are out there in virtual space, in virtual time, and in my mind's eye those are dark uncharted zones. Nigel talks of light - it's summer in Barcelona - and I talk of dark shades, of night and evenings, of empty spaces and grey.

'I look down from my window - it's non-teaching time and the slate-grey plazas are empty. In the distance I can see the tarmac-grey road, Burwood Highway, there's plenty of traffic - it pushes its way into the evening and home.

'This issue for me has marked a change in *TEXT* - I've been trying to put my finger on it, but its shadowy and shy of being named. It's something to do with the way we have developed an academic community, all of us - those who submit articles to *TEXT*, those who referee for *TEXT*, those who subscribe to *TEXT*, those who write letters to *TEXT*, and those who read *TEXT*. Is it simply that *TEXT* has been around for four years, long enough to be noticed? Or is it that there are now a larger number of academics working in the discipline of writing? Is it that we are all getting use to on-line journals? Something is changing: our subscription list is growing (including international subscriptions), the submissions and the quality of submissions is increasing - and we've never put out an issue which is so *TEXT*-referencing. Many of the papers in this issue refer back to earlier papers published in *TEXT* as the debates and arguments about assessment, higher degrees, research quantum, and the naming and refining of sections of our discipline, take shape. Where once in *TEXT* we splashed out boldly with grand ideas, now we, as a community of scholars, are being more cautious - or is it more skilful, more self-assured? We are finding a pleasure in nuances, in refining and polishing and embellishing, weaving the discourses, one into the other - a tapestry of ideas in more and more numerous shades of the same palette.

'We are refining and qualifying. We are listening to others and noticing difference. We are reflecting on shades.

'Is it all too smug and self-referring? I don't think so. I think this trend (which at the *TEXT* office can be seen as something of an outpouring of interest) indicates a confidence, a sharing of issues across the Australian tertiary sector and a recognition that our reflections, experiences, research and acquired knowledge is of value both within our geographical region and in the international community. The accident of editing this issue across national borders is timely.

'The afternoon is almost over and my computer is telling me I have several new e-mails. I am three-quarters of the way through my first year in Melbourne, and while my umbrella is a bright splash of red, I am beginning to understand the pleasure of naming and knowing the shades of grey.'

Nigel Krauth
Tess Brady

Letters and Debate

Donna Lee Brien and Tess Brady *Collaborative Practice: categorising forms of collaboration for practitioners* Vol 7 No 2 October 2003

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<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>

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