

## **Introduction**

Questions of aesthetics run through the contributions to this open issue of *EnterText* in all their diversity. There are papers ranging from the areas of film studies and philosophy, and a group addressing some of the cultural problematics of today's media, to poetry and other kinds of creative and critical writing. Given that one of our objectives in founding the journal in the millennium year was not only to establish *EnterText* as a site for academic excellence, as rigorous as any conventional paper journal, but to respond to creativity and to be open to new ways of doing and thinking, it is pleasing to see that a number of the contributions here are in one way or another unconventional in their method or manner, including several using a ludic approach. Since academic journals can become a tad earnest, wit is always welcome. It is also good to find that we have a handful of returning contributors in this issue, people whose work has already appeared previously in the journal. Receiving new submissions from former correspondents has proved to be one of the unanticipated pleasures of editing a journal such as this.

The issue opens with essays on film studies and philosophy, addressing two creative thinkers whose names often feature in contemporary discussions about art and culture, those of Cronenberg and Nietzsche. Nick Redfern argues that the science fiction films of David Cronenberg describe the evolution of a system from a state of order to a state of chaos. Such systems might be societal, biological, or stylistic. Alternatively a system might be formal, such as the development of narrative from a state that corresponds to the organisation of "classical" narrative demonstrating

spatial, temporal and causal order, to a state of confusion where the spectator is unable to engage in the same process of *fabula* construction due to the increasing chaos of the narrative. Redfern explores the breakdown of narrative order in *Videodrome* (1982), and describes an asymmetrical narrative schema that can be applied to Cronenberg's other films. Nietzsche, an enduringly controversial figure, is Steven Michels' topic in an essay which examines his use of the aphorism. It argues against the accepted view aligning this with his esotericism, asserting rather that it was a strategy embraced by the philosopher for the sake of outreach to as wide a readership as possible. The consequence of this, it claims, was that it enabled Nietzsche's critique of modernity to become more precise, and also radicalised his own philosophy. In aesthetic terms, Michels concludes, Nietzsche combined the style of poetry with the substance of philosophy.

The following three pieces form a group, originating from a conference panel in Chicago staged by the Association of Writing Programs. The contributors are all involved in teaching creative writing, and address the impact of the media on that process. The first contribution, by Davis Schneiderman, presents a witty discussion in the form of an "interview" tackling current theoretical debates about postmodernism and popular culture in stimulating style. The second, by Robert Miltner, offers a broad-ranging survey of the role of print media as against the expanding empire (and waistlines) of the world of electronic media, and makes a tasty plea for a balanced diet to include not only the popular, new, and often bland, but some of the more healthful fare of traditional literature, replete as it is with fibre. Thrity Umrigar's essay completes the trio with a personal statement as to how her own background, growing up in India, shapes her attitude to television in the USA. While she concedes that the medium has its uses as a tool for disseminating information, and that as a teacher she

needs to keep in touch with popular culture up to a point, in the end her analysis takes a bleak view of the value, to herself or her students, of “the blue haze of the idiot box.”

This group is following by a further “ficto-critical” piece from Paul Magee, who uses the figure of the fourteenth floor, often actually the thirteenth which does not “exist,” to address some similarly subtle questions of art and reality. The poetic qualities of this extract from a longer work are held in a productive tension with its mode of philosophical inquiry.

Poetry itself is next in the sequence. John Robert Lee, a St. Lucian poet, and Cliff Forshaw, a British one, are represented by a selection of four poems each. St. Lucia is a tiny country with a disproportionately weighty poetic tradition. Derek Walcott may be its most famous “maker” of this kind, but there are several other notable poets whose deserve to be known outside the Caribbean region, among them John Robert Lee. Cliff Forshaw’s work is well-known in certain literary circles in the UK, but it too merits a broader readership.

The two items which conclude the issue are in an obvious sense very different, but in another, related. They are in different genres, for one thing. Nouri Gana’s contribution fits no easy category, with its mix of passion and polemics, poetry and critique. At base it takes a bleak view of the surrealisms of today’s global conflictual politics, yet at another level the wit of its polyglossic idiom (with nods towards Joyce and Shakespeare, among others) manages to produce an almost carnivalesque superstructure to the trajectory of its thought. Finally, Michael Wayne’s review of Susan Akono’s book *WMD: Weapons of My Disappointment* welcomes it as a new vantage point on the contemporary scenes of world power, in these increasingly extraordinary times when the rhetorics which are deployed to legitimise political

action are frequently strained to the point of collapse. It is a small book but big in its reach, and, like the films of Michael Moore, deserves a mainstream audience.

As we conclude the fourth volume of the journal (with a substantial supplement to this issue, on “Shelving Translation,” as a bonus), I would like to thank not only all those whose work has so far been published here, but also all those who submitted work which, for one reason or another, we were unable to publish. It is always an uncertain task to found a new journal, and there is a proliferation of electronic journals in our time, not all of them asserting that quality, both of submission and of editorial work, is as important on the web as it is in print. We have tried to maintain a high standard, and where appropriate to encourage our contributors to fine-tune their work. We are proud to have published some excellent work from contributors ranging from eminent professors to promising research students, some of whom may become the eminent professors of tomorrow. The first four years have seen extraordinary political events, to which we have been glad to publish some early responses. For the editorial team, ably supported by our guest editors on occasion, they have been testing but rewarding years, and we now look forward to consolidating the position and reputation of the journal. There are many pressures on it, not least the difficulty of maintaining its role as an interdisciplinary site when there are many reasons in today’s academy why narrowing rather than broadening is the name of the game. A further pressure comes from those who think if it is any good, you should make readers pay to see it. We founded this journal passionately committed to the ideal of the web as a new way of making connections between people the world over, transcending to some extent the great divides imposed by economic imbalances and the ivory tower of academia, not to mention global geography. Subscription journals, of course, have their role, but it is not the one we aspire to. However, if we are to keep

on the track we have pursued to date, we will need the support of our readers. Please pass on the word about what *EnterText* does and is, to contacts you have who may be interested to read what is here, or to offer submissions. We depend on our friends.

Paula Burnett

Editor