

## **Introduction**

Editing an Open Issue is always exciting, as hugely varied and stimulating works of scholarship and imagination land in the in-box like exotic migrant birds. Months later, when the complicated process of sifting, revising and editing is complete, devising a running order can be quite a challenge. Can a bird of this feather sit next to one of that feather, is a question that poses itself frequently. Do we seek some sort of order, symmetry even, or is an unembarrassed aleatoric principle the best course? After all, most readers probably use the “lucky dip” method. After endless possibilities have been worked through, however, certain relationships seem to suggest themselves—how did I not notice them earlier, I think—and pairs or small groups of items gradually take on a sort of bonding, as if they were created to sit next to each other, either in harmony or contrast. That is the stage at which the issue gels, like a landscape entered backwards on a train, with its features emerging imperceptibly into one’s field of vision. Because of the extent of this issue, the task was longer, and seemed at times as if it would never resolve itself into clear outlines. But at last it has taken shape. Its trajectory is full of surprising juxtapositions, but at least it cannot be accused of being boring because of its predictability.

The weft and the warp of it are the interweaving of theory—the general—and the precisely particular. The first pair of essays illustrates this well. Sarah Garland addresses questions of twentieth-century culture by reference to the baroque, but she offers it to us via a critique of Bernini’s famous sculpture of St. Teresa of Avila, seen against works

such as Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. Keri Berg looks at the social implications of a work of early nineteenth-century France, deploying satiric illustrations in which animals are used to address the human foibles of the emerging bourgeoisie. The politics has resonance for our time, for all its historic precision. Harold Veaser and Robert Miltner again weave together theoretical debates and practical criticism.

The two items which follow focus on creativity—a short story from Singapore and an interview with an Indian poet—but they link forwards and backwards, in that the first raises some poignant questions about modernity and “progress” and the second engages with the complex implications of feminism, and of self-dedication to art, against the specific culture of a particular place and time. The pair of essays which follows opens the issue's contributions on the topic of pedagogy—a new theme for *EnterText*—with a report on an international video conference about the usefulness, or otherwise, of the categorization of “Contemporary British Fiction” as either the “national” literature of Britain, or as something relating to the former British sphere of influence and embracing all the English-speaking territories, apart from the USA. The terminology we use in the academy is always fraught, and tends to lag behind the world it seeks to express. So many of the world's writers lead international lives, that perhaps the only wise course is to let go of the idea of national literatures altogether. As Eve Aldea reports, the delegates participating in the video conference had very different views of what could and should be done. Such questions have real and serious implications for the curriculum, of course.

Roy Fox's contribution is also about the curriculum, but it traces present preoccupations in American schooling with science-oriented subjects—STEM education is shorthand for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics—to a national

paranoia of the fifties, when fears of falling behind in the space race when the Russians successfully launched the first space satellites led to a wave of xenophobia. I too remember as a teenager watching the little light of Sputnik winking overhead, just as I remember my revulsion at the idea of what the scientists had seen fit to do to the dog Laika, whose name has stayed with me all these years. Reactions in the USA, then, were clearly different from those in the UK, but the argument that Roy Fox develops in relation to the curriculum now is one that will strike echoes in many parts of the world.

Tara Brabazon's essay is one of those which could hardly have been guessed at, yet once encountered, it seems to touch something profound about modern living. It reports on the sexual politics of exercise cycling, as observed from the saddle of her own "exercycle" (a new word for me) in an early morning class she used to attend in Western Australia. The regulars were women, but the arrival of a group of men caused some intriguing ripples (and not just in the lycra). Likewise, the gender implications of the following item are central. Wanda Balzano offers a photographic essay, accompanied by an introductory narrative, about the traditional textile arts of Naples, in particular the social production of the trousseau. It is a fascinating—and beautiful—glimpse into a world which may be passing. The poems which follow, by Jefferson Holdridge, a colleague of Wanda Balzano's, were written in response to her photographic art. More poems follow, developing the gender theme.

Different takes on American life characterize the next three essays, all critiquing particular works of American culture—a play by Sam Shepard, and the Hollywood films *American Psycho*, *Natural Born Killers* and *The Matrix*. Travis Vogan takes a critical look at the Reagan era, Katherine Weiss at the Bush era of today. Eugene Arva roots his

discussion in the cultural repercussions of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and using Baudrillard's ideas, questions our relationship to the spectacle of our own lives. The theme of excess, which was with us from the beginning with Sarah Garland's paper, is developed further with Davis Schneiderman's experimental fiction, which stages a post-apocalyptic, environmentally disastrous future in which grim events are partnered with surreal hilarity—not least in the witty proposal that American presidents (including those of our present) will provide the names of choice for those yet to be born. Karen Schubert's contribution is creative in a different way: she introduces the sculptural installations of Tony Armeni, many of them made from recycled materials, and interleaves her discussion with her own poems which they have inspired. A trio of creative writing contributions follows. Personal and collective histories, as exemplified in the details of the domestic space, and in the creation of identities through intimate relationships, link these very different texts.

Two essays then revisit the theme of pedagogy, in different fields, though both are interested in what can be done with new technologies. Tatjana Chorney looks at hypertexts while Keith Duffy is concerned with sound and music. The concluding group has an elegiac quality. Lyn Graham Barzilai's moving poems commemorate the passing of a loved sister, while Adam Freeman's essay looks at the work of Wilfred Owen. While Owen found unsurpassed ways of expressing the horrors of the First World War, Lyn Barzilai sets her grief against not only calm domesticity but also the violence of an Israeli present. Finally Robert Klein Engler's reflective and personal poems end with one for the turn of the year, which seems appropriate given the date at which this issue is going online.

It is exactly seven years since we published the first issue of *EnterText*. At the time, we had set ourselves an ambitious schedule of three issues a year, an interdisciplinary remit, and an enthusiasm for combining scholarship with creativity, open to any media suitable for electronic publication—any of which might not have worked, but they did. As I retire as editor, I am enormously grateful to all those who have sent us their work over these years—including those whose work was not in the end chosen for publication—because in a very real sense this is your journal as much as it is ours. When we began, at the start of the millennium, it seemed wise to reserve the name “EnterText” to prevent anyone else setting up new formations elsewhere, such as [entertext.org](http://entertext.org), to confuse the issue. Now, if you enter the term in Google, it is our journal which pops up. More importantly, the body of work which now gives meaning to the name coined nearly eight years ago is, I think it’s fair to say, something of significance—something for all the contributors to be proud of. Thanks must go to you all, and to all those who have helped in so many ways, to co-editors, guest editors, and technical staff—notably Brunel’s Richard Mitchell who has been a stalwart throughout—and to all the experts in so many fields and so many countries who have helped us to evaluate the submissions. It is in many ways with sadness that I am finishing my role as editor. But it is with great pleasure that I welcome back one of my founder co-editors, Anshuman Mondal, to take up the reins. I wish him, and the journal, well. I know he will do a grand job. And, please, keep the entries coming!

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