

Special Issue Introduction

Writing in Practice Volume 7

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Special Issue – Multimodal Writing

This is the last introduction I will write as principal editor of *Writing in Practice* but happily there are a couple of firsts too. This issue is co-edited for the first ever time, with Dr Josie Barnard. *Writing in Practice* does not ordinarily run volumes on specific topics, but due to the important impact of the “digital turn” on writers and writing, the editorial board made an exception, inviting Dr Barnard to co-edit the journal’s first ever Special Issue - its subject: multimodal writing. The importance of multimodal writing to creative writers internationally has been confirmed by the fact that the Special Issue received twice the usual number of submissions. Those submissions included articles from writers who are academics (ranging from early career researchers to Heads of School), practitioners in places ranging from Falmouth to Eire, Northern Ireland to America. Writers have perhaps become split between those who feel “techy” and those who feel they are falling behind. This volume attempts to share knowledge, methodologies, and approaches. It is apparent, looking through the contributions, that the Special Issue has empowered a wide range of writers. The sense of empowerment is palpable in writers’ confidence when talking about, for instance, the importance of play to creative practice. This can be seen again and again in the rich discussion and range of topics covered in the articles.

Multimodality and the “digital turn” are having a huge impact on the Creative Writing Higher Education sector and Barnard’s work, some of which has been, appropriately, undertaken in collaboration with NAWE, has meant that writers’ concerns and interests, and those of NAWE’s membership, have been tended to. This is a national and international matter of some importance to the sector; the impact affects not only all Creative Writing programmes, but the nature of communications in general, given the way in which literary, digital and media culture has become inseparably linked to educational institutions and Higher Education writing programmes. Looking forward, it is essential to further develop work in this area, specifically around the issues of creativity, publication, performance and the broadcast of multimodal works. The Special Issue’s topic and Barnard’s work has facilitated awareness and generated creativity, aiding our membership, writers and teachers, to more fully comprehend and embrace multimodal approaches.

Whether directly or indirectly, the digital revolution has affected every aspect of the writing and publishing process. Writing – often thought of as primarily text-based – now routinely involves multiple modes of reproduction and presentation, with photographs, emoji and audio – just to give three examples - featuring as integral parts of online narratives. The explosion of new media may lead a writer to experiment with new technologies (perhaps writing Twine poetry, producing podcasts or moving into self-publishing). Conversely, it might inspire a revived enthusiasm for using old technologies such as pens, pencils, paper. In her book, *The Multimodal Writer*, Barnard notes that “In a digital age, the ability to move between types of writing and technologies - often at speed - is increasingly essential for writers” (2019: 1). In order to not just survive but, rather, thrive in an era characterised by fast-paced change, “creative flexibility and resilience [are] necessary” (2019: 119). How to develop such creative flexibility and resilience is an important aspect of multimodal writing practice. All technologies were new at some point. In order to tackle new challenges, writers draw on past experiences of tackling something new, and in so doing they are “remediating” their own practice (Barnard 2019: 29).

Prescience

The *Writing in Practice* Multimodal Writing Special Issue was announced in November 2019. At that point, the impact of the “digital turn” on writers was already significant. Within a short time, the Covid-19 pandemic had struck. Over subsequent months, and now years, the world has gone into varying degrees of lockdown. Millions have had to digitally upskill, suddenly and in an atmosphere of fear. Barnard’s theory of multimodal writing was developed via a programme of research (2012-2019) prior to the pandemic. The aim of the research was to support authors in a digital environment characterised by fast-paced change. That multimodal writing research, informing this Special Issue, has proved prescient or opportune, with articles written either before or during the first phase of the pandemic (the call for papers was in November 2019, with a June 2020 deadline; the UK’s first lockdown was in late March 2020). Barnard’s research, tailor-made for our times, provided contributors with tools to help negotiate the challenges of, and embrace opportunities for, storytelling in a new era in which the digital is no longer optional. We repeatedly see in this Special Issue writers using a different way of working, adopting a multi-dimensional perspective on what writing might be, shifting their attitude to writing about writing, with a greatly enriched appreciation of relevant and updated theories of practice. Contributors have called on Barnard’s theories, sometimes explicitly, for assistance while negotiating new media technologies during a pandemic that has mandated digital engagement.

Multimodal Workshop

A workshop on multimodal writing, designed with a view to supporting those interested in submitting to the Special Issue of *Writing in Practice* was run by Barnard and myself at Middlesex University in February 2020. This was not long before the first UK lockdown; it was the last time I was in London for some while and, as a participant remarked afterwards, it seemed as if we were getting life-jackets ready that day. The tragic events of the pandemic make all other considerations pale into insignificance, but it came to pass that the support provided by the workshop, during the following months of severe isolation and stress for all, proved highly effective and productive. Five workshop attendees have articles in this volume (Daly, García Rangel, McGowan, Moss, Richardson). Some attendees travelled from as far afield as Dublin, Cornwall and Belfast. This issue is a fitting testament to attendees’ commitment. The Workshop was quickly booked up, with a reserve list, another indication of how valued and valuable it appeared to be.

More about the contributions

The volume’s guest article comes from Maggie Butt, *Writing in Practice*’s first Principal Editor. Without Butt’s vision, initiative and organisational nous *Writing in Practice* might not be publishing today, and it is fitting to welcome her back at yet another staging post in the journal’s development. Her piece discusses the research relationship between two stories based on historical events, one set in World War I, the other in World War II. The two subjects prompt a multimodal approach that includes poems and a collage of photographs, paintings, extracts of memoirs and letters. The second subject also produced a commercial novel which has been translated into several languages.

A different strand of multimodality comes from Heather Richardson, who applies Barnard’s theory of remediation of practice during the first phase of Covid lockdowns, looking back on previous creative practice, which is then reclaimed and redeployed in a new context. The multimodal project produced as a result uses Instagram to develop and disseminate stories that combine text and images of textile and digital art. Sarah Haynes explores the influence of digital technology on the immersive practices of reading and writing. She examines new possibilities to engage readers further in multimodal literary experiences and considers hypertextual aspects and the roles readers and authors play in digital spaces. Joanne Dixon describes a multimodal research practice that employs a range of materials and technologies, reflecting on rigour and research in the context of creative-critical activities. The focus of this exploration is a wordless book of photographs taken by Roni Horn of French writer Hélène Cixous.

Rosamund Davies, Cherry Potts and Kam Rehal offer three perspectives on the genesis of a book of flash fiction about the city, to which they all contributed. This collaboration aims to facilitate reading as a narrative spatial practice, with both the stories and the book designed to encourage readers to read them in situ, in

the city, in a shared conversation between reader, printed page and the environment. Philippa Holloway's article examines the ways a psycho-geographic methodology can provide content, form, theme and meaning not in its usual writing form (nonfiction) but in fiction, specifically to inform character development. The discussion examines the complex creative processes involved in adopting such methodologies and the benefits to be gained from landscape research. Gráinne Daly researches the unlikely connections between an oral Gaelic storytelling tradition and what she describes as the community storytelling on Twitter by sports fans, a form of fanfiction in which the fans become both readers and writers.

In terms of teaching and facilitation, there are inspiring testimonies of experimentation and adaptation, in which writer-facilitators are themselves learning much from the need to flex their approaches. Jane Moss applies Barnard's suggested theories and practice of multimodal writing to a group writing project in Cornwall where, as she says, the playful use of smartphones, Pinterest, PowerPoint, and live role play on Zoom are deployed during the new regime of lockdowns to co-create a community novel. Francis Gilbert considers how a collaborative storytelling project – between a university teacher-education department, an inner-city secondary school and the National Maritime Museum – caused him to “remediate” his own practice, to transfer, as he quotes, “existing skills in order to tackle new genres” (Barnard 2019: 121). In so doing he learned of the dangers of multimodal overload and too much choice, but as a teacher-writer he improved both his craft and pedagogy by writing for a specific audience – school children.

Lynda Clark reflects on and discusses research into both Artificial Intelligence (AI) and what she labels Intelligence Amplification (IA), in an attempt to explore technologies positively rather than fearfully or dismissively. The article invites further research and a playful approach in attempting to embrace the possibility of improved or amplified intelligence in the use of all technologies. Applying Barnard's theory of remediation of practice, Sherezade García Rangel discusses how she shifted from her previous creative practice of prose writing and its related research practice, coming to apply these text-based skills to podcasting when making the pilot season of *On The Hill*, a podcast series telling the stories of, and arising from, a Cornish cemetery. In a detailed analysis of performance poetics, taking the performance online from poetry's open mic venues, Jack McGowan examines the contention that transmission of affect (the emotional states which form a crucial part of live poetry performance) is also a key part of poetry viewed and heard digitally through multimodal platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. Simon Perril argues that multimodal writing is importantly related to much creative practice and should be seen as a different mode of thought and way of knowing the world. He suggests this is more than thinking just of technical adaptability but is a way of embracing a viable and provoking research methodology.

The issue was also open to non-multimodal submissions. Three articles fall into this category but all of them, it could be argued, have a foothold in multimodal debates. Edwin Stockdale investigates a poetic approach to the interpretation of history, focusing on the disparate interpretations of the life of Richard III. In this way it delves into the various writing modes of creative historicism, focusing on the ways in which poetry can illuminate and populate spaces of uncertainty in the historical record in ways which are similar to, yet supplementary to, creative non-fiction, drama and novels. Paul Taylor-McCartney examines how the failings of various scientific and technological modes have given rise to dystopian texts. His article also investigates various aspects of the dystopian genre, including the relationship between memory and identity, and how the so-called primitive technologies of reading and writing often offer protagonists a mode of resistance. Sarah Penny offers exposition and detail about the Xenophobia Project, a social justice outreach initiative in Cape Town, South Africa. Her article reflects on the effectiveness and impact of the project, which specifically addresses xenophobic attitudes in teenage learners and which references theory from another mode of creative writing activity – CWTP or Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes.

Evident throughout this rich and intriguingly wide range of contributions, even in these last three articles, is the inherent multimodality of creative writing practice, research, facilitation and pedagogy. The discipline starts from a supposedly finite baseline of skills, technologies, genres and related theoretical registers. Yet all these facets of our subject area and the purposes to which they are put, for writer and reader, are forever flexing. We grow into new technological shifts, helping to shape those shifts, if sometimes reverting back

to trusted technologies, modes and genres. Multimodality is ubiquitous in the discipline because it is a part of how we operate and forms a fundamental part of our identity – as a practice discipline intent on communication by the most appropriate means.

The Issue Editors

Many thanks to NAWE Publications Manager, Lisa Koning for all her production work on the issues. There were four Issue Editors for this Volume, three of whom sit on the NAWE Higher Education Committee, the fourth was our esteemed guest co-editor. All offered an expert eye and diligent consideration throughout. My gratitude to:

Dr Josie Barnard SFHEA – Associate Professor in, and Subject Leader of, Creative Writing at De Montfort University.

Dr Yvonne Battle-Felton - Lecturer in Creative Writing and Creative Industries at Sheffield Hallam University.

Professor Oz Hardwick - Professor of English at Leeds Trinity University.

Dr Amy Spencer - Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Centre for Cultural and Creative Industries at Bath Spa University.

Reviewers

Thank you to all our peer reviewers for their excellent support, for the quality of their analysis, and for the positive manner in which they offered their judgement and suggestions for improvement. We are always looking for more reviewers. If you are interested, please be in touch via the email address on the *Writing in Practice* webpage.

The Next Issues

Publication of this Volume has been delayed. The submission deadline for the next issue – Volume 8 – has already passed and peer reviewing is currently being led by one of two of the journal's incoming Principal Editors, Dr Kate North (the other Editor will be Dr Francis Gilbert). Calls will open shortly for the subsequent issue, Volume 9 – to be published in 2023. In Volume 7, we have again been delighted to showcase essays from Creative Writing PhD students. We welcome such work, along with work from the broader field of practice, research and scholarship. Creative work itself is welcome when integral to an article. *Writing in Practice* is not Creative Writing's only peer-reviewed journal but it is one of few internationally. By reading it, submitting work to it and joining its peer review college, you are helping to enrich your subject community.

References

Barnard, J. (2019) *The Multimodal Writer: Creative Writing across Genres and Media*. London: Bloomsbury/Red Globe Press

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