

**Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, University of Western Australia,
Murdoch University**

Deborah Hunn, Ffion Murphy, Catherine Noske and Anne Surma

Introduction: Peripheral Visions

Official language smitheryed to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armor polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental. Exciting reverence in schoolchildren, providing shelter for despots, summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public. (Morrison 1993)

These lines, drawn from novelist, essayist, and teacher Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel lecture, offer a vivid description of the kinds of rhetoric dominating our public, professional, and even our cultural spaces today, although the cracks are beginning to show, and we would be hard pressed to claim that 'harmony' prevails.

Such language as Morrison describes also pushes to the edge, to the margins, and sometimes to silence, alternative experiences, visions, perspectives, and the possibility of understanding the world differently or otherwise. Further, such writing or speaking may seduce us into forgetting how and why language matters, how it can connect us in the name of our differences. Indeed, as Morrison observes, 'word-work is sublime because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference – the way in which we are like no other life' (1993). Moreover, language can help us articulate not only our differences but, at a fundamental level, our relational existence, our interdependence with one another, with non-human animals, and with the planet.

Writing from the periphery often comes with an energy born of difference in action, or the negotiation of difference functioning within interrelation. It is a space where identity can be structured through the connected drives of opposition and recognition (the *peripheral*, perhaps?) and where new versions of self can be brought into voice.

Consider in this sense those seemingly transformative shifts in power that may inspire, and be inspired by, the generative possibilities of new words, new selves, new worlds, but which may also necessitate a tactical manoeuvre to new peripheries. The still relatively recent marriage equality debate in Australia, for instance, succeeded in legalising gay marriage, and despite an unnecessary process that unleashed a torrent of hate speech towards young and vulnerable LGBTIQ people, it seemed in its outcome to augur, via the popular imprimatur of the word *yes*, a more tolerant, diverse and inclusive Australia.

And yet, we now see a reactionary drive to utilise '[o]fficial language, smitheryed to [...] preserve privilege' through a proposed Federal Act that would, in the name of

religious freedom, sanction forms of institutional discrimination against the LGBTIQ community and those who support them.

In negotiating the positionality of peripheral visions (in answering the question, peripheral in relation to what?), those of us who work with words must remain critically alert to the potential domestication of the *peri-feral*; to, that is, the periphery's inextricable interrelation to that rapidly evolving, rabidly de-radicalising, yet deceptively hegemonic centre against which it sets its visions.

This special issue of *TEXT* seeks to investigate peripheral visions of past, present and future; of figures and forms, fractures and erasures. Inspired by the AAWP's 2018 annual conference held in Perth, Western Australia, we invited writers and scholars to think deeply and broadly about the purpose and potential of writing of all kinds. Authors were encouraged to tackle, for example, unconventional wisdom, unsettled perspectives, lapsed borders—that which is beyond and outside the accepted or obvious. By this means, we hoped that various worlds, ideas, fictions and verities would emerge, compete, coalesce, fragment and challenge.

During a period of elevated consciousness, when countless voices vie for attention, we believe there is a need for vibrant and rigorous scrutiny of writing's potential to interrupt, corrupt and disrupt, as well as to rouse, revivify and heal—in other words, for writing that explores and encourages various forms of peripheral vision.

Acutely attuned to the mutability of language and its imbrication within power-knowledge networks (including those of the academy), the writing contained in this issue maintains a peripheral edge, a generative *peri-feral* energy, against the resurgent pull of 'dumb, predatory' and 'sentimental' language that invokes – to paraphrase another Morrison – a convenient belief in miracles.

The broad scope of the works in this issue is symptomatic of many and various points of view that might be taken up or offered in speaking back to the 'mainstream'. The collection of works moves across genres, from fantasy to digital writing, to children's literature, to theatre writing, to ecopoetics; it considers teaching, writing and reading as (interrelated) facets of our discipline; and it speaks to various fields of criticism. In common across much of this work is a conscious consideration of the power enacted in writing; of the possibilities it offers us in both seeing the world and imagining it otherwise.

Interrogating the power in language is part of the word-work Toni Morrison points us towards. It comes with the onus of interrogating the ethics of one's own positionality in writing, the obligation to be conscious of the 'seeing subject' behind each act of envisioning, as writer or reader. Writing critically, we are trained to leverage and articulate positionality in the invocation of a critical framework, but the articles collected here regularly go beyond this, to question the discourses with which they engage. Likewise, the creative works herein are subtle in the ways they actively position the reader, implicating them within the textual moment, using empathy as a possibility for seeing differently, but also speaking to that act.

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List of works cited

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Deborah Hunn teaches creative writing at Curtin University. Her academic essays, short stories, creative non-fiction and reviews have been published in a range of journals, book chapters and edited collections.

Ffion Murphy is Honorary Senior Fellow in the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University, focussing on postgraduate supervision and research. Her publications include three edited books, a novel, Devotion, book chapters, short fiction, essays and journal articles.

Catherine Noske teaches creative writing at the University of Western Australia and is the editor of Westerly Magazine. Her work has been awarded the A.D. Hope Prize and the Elyne Mitchell Prize for Rural Women Writers, and shortlisted for the Dorothy Hewett Award. Her first novel is forthcoming with Picador.

Anne Surma teaches literary studies and professional writing and editing, and is academic chair in the English and Creative Arts program at Murdoch University. As well as book chapters and journal articles, her publications include Public and professional writing: Ethics, imagination and rhetoric and Imagining the cosmopolitan in public and professional writing.