

Axon: Creative Explorations, Vol 8, No 2, November 2018

FINDING (OUR) VOICES

Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien, with Cassandra Atherton

This has been a challenging and illuminating issue to edit, and we hope it will be similarly challenging and illuminating to read. The contributions in this issue have been gathered together from various sources including a number of events addressing the themes of this issue. Primarily, these were the *Turning Point: Creative Arts and Trauma* symposium (University of Canberra, 7 June 2017), and the *Narratives of Health and Wellbeing Research Conference* (CQUniversity, Noosa campus, 26–27 October 2017). In addition, a series of interviews generated from the ARC-funded project, *Understanding Creative Excellence: A Case Study in Poetry* (DP130100402) sparked the idea of recruiting more conversations between creative practitioners working in a range of art practices: poetry, prose fiction, film and visual art in particular. Together, these contributions comprise a fascinating, revealing and sometimes provocative collection.

The editors have found it exciting to read the submissions to this issue, as this area of art and health, art and wellbeing, Health Humanities, is such a rich field for both research and creative production. The sometimes gritty narratives — both research-driven and creative — can be challenging to read due to their subject matter and the approach of their writers; they never shy away from content matter that may cause readers to be unsettled, to flinch or draw back. A number of the contributors also challenge the innately positivist, positive and improving rhetoric that can surround work in the health discipline, which is always searching for answers and solutions. Instead, they embrace the subjective and human side of ill-health, and challenge the possibility of achieving wellbeing in any formal sense. A number of these authors, indeed, explore the darker sides of health and ill health, considering suffering, pain, silencing and the position of people on the margins; as well as also contemplating ways of building resilience, of living a worthwhile life despite illness and pain. Such material casts light on the human, the humane, the inhumane and the human condition — sometimes at its most visceral.

The interviews in this issue span more than conversations with poets and other artists; they are also rich sources of information about creative identity. While creative practitioners are known primarily through their public work, behind that lie a life and a practice, a community and a context. Particularly important is the way these discussions take place between practitioners, so the intricacies and complexities of poetry and other art forms, and their connections to the world, are explored in dual ways. Unlike more conventional interviews, where the initiator approaches an expert, these are typically conversations between people equally versed in the form, which means that often where one speaker leaves off, the other continues. The interview is a powerful written

form, as evidenced by success of the long-running *Paris Review* series *Writers at Work*, and we were keen to build on earlier issues of *Axon* that include an interview or two, and to provide a platform for a substantial body of interviews, and the resulting antiphonal effect of voices discussing creative lives, creative practices, and contemporary context.

We have grouped these together into five themes: *Trauma and Creative Interventions*; *Health, Science and Resilience*; *Storytelling and its Devices*; *Poetry: Reading and Writing the World*; and *Storytelling and Culture*.

The first section begins with an interview with Ian Drayton, the initiator of the University of Canberra and Department of Defence ARRTS project (Art for Recovery, Resilience, Teamwork and Skills), where Jessica Abramovic and Samuel Byrnannd probe the institutional and health contexts that frame its possibilities, and which introduces concepts that appear in a number of other contributions: the role of creative practice in rebuilding one's life; the affordances of art. In this same section are creative works by Alison Kelly and Samuel Byrnannd, along with papers that offer information about conceptual and technical approaches to the use of creative interventions, by Leanne Dodd, Pam Harvey, and Cathryn Lloyd.

The next section, *Health, Science and Resilience*, includes works that directly address, or draw on, the health sector and health issues. Vicki Cope discusses nurses and resilience; Fanke Peng describes design approaches to healthy aging, Saskia Beudel interviews scientist Pep Canadell on environmental health, and Heather Clark provides information from Dementia Australia. Two poets respond to the topic also: Sandra Renew and Marcelle Freiman, each of whom offers both a short explanation, and a series of poems, that look directly at suffering and coping.

Storytelling and its Devices, the third section, combines conceptual/technical papers, such as the work by Ross Gibson, Teresa Crea and Grant Chambers on the application of story to emergency responses, and Liz Ellison on the concept of masculinity, murder and the beach in Australian literature. A short story by Tony Eaton sheds further light on masculinity, trauma and beach life. Depression and transgenerational trauma are examined in papers by Shelley Davidow and Kate Fitzgerald; while Gail Pittaway's story about being young and trying to make sense of life adds further illumination of such problems.

Poetry: Reading and Writing the World, is the first of the two sections that focus primarily on interviews. This section begins with a poetic conversation, where Autumn Royal and Lucy Van correspond in poetry, using the line to speak for trauma and, ultimately, hope. Similarly, Nathan Curnow and Kevin Brophy provide an excerpt from their email epistolary: Brophy writing from a remote Aboriginal community in the Kimberley region and Curnow from Ballarat. Jen Webb interacts with Sarah Rice and Edwin Thumboo in two of the conversations: with Rice, she discusses proprioception and poetry; with Thumboo she unpicks issues of identity and Singaporean culture. Paul Hetherington and Cassandra Atherton discuss poetic form with John Skoyles, who has written books across a variety of genres and forms; and Linda Weste interviews Geoff Page about his verse novel *1953*, and this unique poetic form.

In the final section, *Storytelling and Culture*, the works (mostly) move away from poetry to examine visual forms, and in particular the storytelling strategies and concerns of Indigenous practitioners. Barkindji man Paul Collis opens the section with his lyrical memoirs/family narratives; Anne Rutherford presents a conversation between Indigenous film maker Ivan Sen and cinematographer/lecturer Susan Thwaites; Jen Webb talks art and Maori culture with Faith McManus; and Lisa Stefanoff interviews Martu film maker Curtis Taylor about his practice. Barnaby Smith interviews Joshua Yeldham about his recent work, and finally Kevin Brophy offers a double-discussion (in 2013 and 2017) with Irish poet James Harpur.

An issue of this size involves the input of significant number or people. Aside from the contributors, a small army of peer reviewers offered generous and formative advice to both the authors and editors, improving and shaping the issue in the process. *Axon* also acknowledges the convenors, presenters and delegates of CQUniversity's Narratives of Health and Wellbeing Research Conference, and those of University of Canberra's Turning Point symposium; the ARC for providing the funding for DP130100402, which not only generated a number of the interviews but inspired the editors to focus on this form of knowledge production and dissemination; Adjunct Associate Professor Paul Munden, who kindly built the website for this issue; and, of course, the authors and interlocutors, whose careful, ethical and generous thinking and practice fill these pages.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien, with Cassandra Atherton

Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice, and Director of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra. Recent publications include *Researching Creative Writing* (Frontinus, 2015), *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts* (Manchester UP, 2016), and the OUP bibliography entry for Bourdieu (2017). Her poetry includes *Stolen Stories, Borrowed Lines* (Mark Time, 2015), *Sentences from the Archive* (Recent Work Press, 2016), and *Moving Targets* (Recent Work Press, 2018). She is Chief Investigator on the ARC Discovery project 'So what do you do? Graduates in the Creative and Cultural Industries' (DP160101440).

Donna Lee Brien, BEd (Deakin), GCHEd (UNE), MA(Prelim) (USyd), MA (Writing) (Research) (UTS), PhD (QUT), is Professor of Creative Industries at Central Queensland University, Australia. With her Masters and PhD theses in the area of non-fiction creative writing, Donna has authored over 20 books and monographs and over 300 refereed published journal articles, book chapters, scholarly conference papers and creative works. Donna is co-editor of *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, and Past President of national peak body, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs. Her latest books are *Forgotten Lives: Recovering Lost Histories through Fact and Fiction* (with Dallas J. Baker and Nike Sulway, Cambridge Scholars 2017), *Offshoot: Contemporary Life Writing Methodologies and Practice in Australasia* (with Quinn Eades, UWAP 2018) and *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Food* (with Lorna Piatti-Farnell, Routledge 2018). She has been working collaboratively since 2012 on arts and health and wellbeing-related research.

Cassandra Atherton is a prose poet and Associate Professor in Writing and Literature. She was a Harvard Visiting Scholar in English 2015–16 and a Visiting Fellow at Sophia University, Tokyo in 2014. She has published 17 critical and creative books and has been invited to edit six special editions of leading journals. Cassandra is the successful recipient of many national and international grants including a VicArts grant (2015) and an Australian Council Grant (2016). Her most recent books of prose poetry are *Trace* (2015), *Exhumed* (2015) and *Pika-don* (2018), and a coedited collection of scholarship on the atomic bomb, *The Unfinished Bomb: Shadows and Reflections* (2017). She is the current poetry editor of *Westerly* magazine and is co-writing a scholarly book, *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* with Paul Hetherington for Princeton University Press.

URL: <https://www.axonjournal.com.au/issue-15/finding-our-voices>

ISSUE 8.2: TURNING POINTS: NARRATIVES, HEALTH, AND SPEAKING THE SELF

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[Read the full introduction.](#)

Editors for this issue: Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien, with Cassandra Atherton

Image: Detail from 'Rolling around Heaven all day' by Faith McManus

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