Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

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EDITORIAL

When *The Who* sang about teenage angst in the 60s, their rock anthem 'Talking about my Generation' captured the divide between youth and beyond. Today, another divide – the digital divide – speaks to the issues of access, capital, and input that follow digital technologies. Like the earlier 'me generation', the new millennium D(igital) generation remains enigmatic, its members variously praised for their technological wizardry, criticised for their self-absorption, and pathologised for their unsociability. The D generation does not comprise youth alone, but the young are more exposed than others to the influence of new media and digital technologies. And like previous youth generations, they are often viewed as degenerate. A cybernetic degeneration symbolising society's fears and cultural anxieties concerning the dehumanising prospects of technology appears most vividly in arguments about youth (Green & Bigum's 'aliens in the classroom' [1993] is an apt description in this respect). Such negative rhetoric presents a dystopic view that tempers the more utopian, but equally reductionist visions of new technologies.

And so the title of this issue, 'New Media and the D(igital) Generation' intends its own pun because for many people wired youth are indeed degenerate. In one sense, they form another kind of counter culture, offering a different radical alternative and social imagining to the psychedelic 60s and 70s. Whereas the new technologies of those previous times included hallucinogenic drugs as a technological prosthesis, today's cyberdelic culture offers increasingly new forms of technological prostheses that raise questions about what it means to be human. For many of us, they have become intimate, homely, familiar, implanted and no longer extensions of ourselves, but ourselves extended. Our machines are becoming more human, because they are a part of us, and we are a part of them. Consequently, we are discovering ways of being human that extend beyond familiar historical, cultural and social contexts. We know ourselves and are known within a shifting 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1990) where speed functions as a 'kind of sublime violence that brings an unparalleled thrill, but also a sense of human renewal, a renewal that will shatter the physical and sentimental limits of our subjectivity in order to make a wholly new experience of the world possible' (Mansfield 2000, p.150).

Yet, to know oneself is as elusive as being able to identify our 'true' self. For centuries we have been told that our true, perennial selves as human beings are stored up in the book, particularly, literature. Instead, these depictions are imbued with culture and ideology, and are therefore subject to change. While literature in its traditional book form endures, it too is a dynamic technology that changes as it merges with digital technologies. The digital revolution will not 'just f-fade away' but will continue to explore new ways for coding, recording, manipulating, and transmitting information, and for diversifying its entertainment and pleasure-giving possibilities. Ultimately, the resilience and

appeal of old technologies will be unable to survive without the life-extending capabilities of digital regeneration.

The papers in this special themed issue engage with these and related matters. If one were to read these papers hypertextually, one could follow a pathway, which connects to common concerns or foci that centre on issues about subjectivity, agency, control, and pleasure. We acknowledge the irony of a journal issue devoted to such matters presented in a traditional form restricted by print with its inherent linearity and book format; a form and format that encourage old reading habits that earlier and persistent print technologies have demanded of us. Nonetheless, it is possible to read otherwise, to make connections across papers and pages, to read backwards with hindsight, to discover thematic pathways. To assist in this process, we have asked Ray Misson to trace through the papers his own connections and to make of them a new sense. We, in turn, have excerpted from Misson's paper some quotations, which we have set at the head of the pages as a kind of running, but necessarily fragmented, commentary. Both papers and quotations become 'new' when recontextualised. By this means we are attempting to kick-start a stationary text into motion, to play with its spatial restrictions, and to encourage readers to make their own kaleidoscopic patterns of meaning making.

Our own kaleidoscopic arrangement of the contents of this issue reveals configurations that display the forms and formats of reading material across book, film, game, and manga. Andrew Burn's article considers how the rendering in these different media elicits a kind of 'potterliteracy' requiring diverse and sometimes divergent reading/viewing/gaming practices. Margaret Mackey similarly acknowledges how these different practices do not necessarily mean that one medium supersedes the other, but in people's lives reading and viewing take their place alongside each other almost seamlessly. Cal Durrant provides a review of James Gee's latest book on video games and the ways they teach players how to play them. Coining this way of reading differently is Katherine Blashki's 'wreading wrangling' boys who physically interact with games that combine enjoyable play with literacy learning. While Blashki speaks of boys' embodied reading/game-playing practices, Valerie Walkerdine's account is of girls negotiating a double performance as they both conform to and resist the constructions of collaborative, non-competitive forms of femininity with more masculine-attributed competitiveness. John Stephens and Mio Bryce consider the sensual and erotic pleasures of manga and animé as young adult readers/viewers become witness to the interplay of subjectivities between cyborgs and humans, as love, sexual titillation, and moral precepts are played out within a Japanese cultural context. Moving desire in another direction, Ann McGuire explores the utopian possibilities of the Sims, a simulated environment where the postmodern subject engages in the spoils of consumerism as part of the quest for endless desiring.

And now it is over to you to participate in the discussions that follow, to challenge and debate their arguments, to take up, dismiss, and pause over their ideas, to generate new research and new ways of thinking that will ensure that we will keep talking about this generation … and the next.

Kerry Mallan and Wendy Morgan
Queensland University of Technology
Guest editors

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