

# EDITORIAL

*what comes out...writing from below*

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**D**ECEMBER 2012. The site was a postgraduate symposium, gathered beneath the heading "Desire Lines". Instigated by Wendy Mee, it featured a keynote address from Marion May Campbell (subsequently published as "Trajectories of Desire in Genet and Wittig"), a series of papers from across the disciplines, and a concluding plenary to discuss the possible futures of gender, sexuality, and diversity studies at La Trobe University. By the end, the success of the day was clear, but we were baffled: How did we all not know about each other? How had we never met before, never shared our work before? Here was an underground research community working in the most diverse disciplines intersecting with gender, sexuality, and diversity, revealing themselves to be astonishingly productive, and confessing to the same frustrations at lack of opportunities, institutional support, and recognition for our interdisciplinary discipline. We were everywhere but nowhere, a disembodied discipline, industrious but spread so broadly as to be nearly invisible, and we found ourselves pushing (up) against the University: close to, nestled right up alongside, and in a way dependent upon the University, but also opposed to the implications of such an intransigent and monolithic institutional beast. Desire lines—these informal paths worn into the earth by pedestrian deviations from the legitimated route, meandering as if to prove that desire itself is neither linear nor straightforward—had drawn us together, along our own previously untrodden and convergent routes, to participate in this important discourse, and we could not let this moment dissolve back into nothing. A space to speak from, to gather in, and to write through, was vital. And so *Writing from Below*—this peer-reviewed, open-access journal devoted to promoting the interdisciplinary field of gender, sexuality, and diversity studies—was conceived. It thus originated not as an attempt to generate an interdisciplinary conversation focused on issues of gender, sexuality, and diversity, but rather as a platform to facilitate and amplify

such conversations already occurring, fractured and disembodied, scattered, within, across, outside of, (up) against, and (above all) below, the University.

We take our cue from—we have borrowed our name from, and owe a great, unrepayable debt to—Carolyn D'Cruz, the convenor of Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies at La Trobe University. Responding to the increasingly marginalised position of GSDS in the University with the resilient *cri de coeur* "[Taking Responsibility for Gender Sexuality and Diversity Studies](#)", she writes:

So let me emphasise this double imperative again. First, without a doubt in my mind, GSDS takes sides—we write history from below, we redress exclusions from the canon, we appreciate lived experience as a crucial voice in the making of expert knowledge, we question divisions between the private and public and what that means for our bodies and lives, and we unpack the bias embedded in power/knowledge relations that are dressed as value neutral and grounded in Reason. *We take sides in the name of justice.* On the other hand, while we might work in the name of justice or social transformation, we have brought the arms of activism and advocacy into the academy. As such, I believe we are obligated to follow a second imperative: *we must give an account for how we legitimate our knowledge claims.* And it is the tensions and productivities between these dual imperatives that provides our area studies with an extremely fertile terrain for asking the most fundamental questions about the pursuit of knowledge and liberty (to give a nod to the Enlightenment heritage), as we account for the most complex patterns of domination and subjugation in our world today.

Restating the importance of those subaltern voices and subterranean narratives coming up from below, she reiterates the significance of GSDS in her conversation with Jacinthe Flore, featured in this journal:

Our brief, from its very beginnings, has been concerned with justice, transforming this world from the inequalities to a better, more just society. Our concern is that knowledge production plays a huge role in that. We want people to have access to a historical narrative that recognises that we do not all come onto the playing field of citizenship equally. And if this University is really concerned with what is called "global citizenship", I think the voices of those that have been deemed non-citizens, denizens, or those who historically have not qualified as citizens, are a crucial part of that narrative. We will always have a role to play in the telling of history, in the make-up of politics, in the philosophical heritage of reason that has deemed some people in this world "unreasonable".

In our staging of a title, we strive to embody these impassioned ideals: we will actively and provocatively take sides, redressing exclusions, questioning divisions, and unpacking biases, and we will put lived experience up against expert knowledge (as when Edwin Ng and Janet Watson present “A Foucauldian and Deleuzian Reading of Autopoietic Bisexual Lives”, revealing the possibilities for pleasure and desire as sites of resistance), all the while queerly interrogating what it is to be “reasonable”, what it is to be “natural” or “normal” (like the protagonist of Natalie Harman’s short story “Dust Flakes”, who stages her own confrontation normative gender expectations). Writing from below, our words come from within and without the academic community; we push (up) against the limitations of its discourses and disciplines, and push the University up against the wall. Inhabiting the structures we seek to transgress, subvert, scandalise, and overthrow, with our voices and pens and bodies and brushes and cameras, we push and poke and prod, finger and fist and fuck, pressing against and up against the borderlines of the acceptable, respectable, legitimised—perhaps best exemplified by Erika Kvistad’s analysis of what sex writing in Brontë could reveal about readers’ approaches to texts in “Scenes of Unveiling: Reading Sex Writing in Charlotte Brontë”, seeking out the oft-missed connection between erotic desire and critical interpretation, following a thread that might bring undone scholarly convention. We search out the fissures and fault-lines in academic orthodoxies—these sites of resistance are where we live, and thrive. We necessarily deviate from the “reasonable” and “natural” and “normal” and “normative”, following desire lines into untrodden territories. We revel in the interrogation of complexity and difference, be it gender as in the images and words offered by Melbourne-based installation artist Caroline Phillips, exploring the possibility of “A Phenomenology of Sexual Difference” in sculpture with a critical commentary on the stunning work *enmeshed*, or race, ethnicity, culture and language as in “Trueno tropical—Faititili a motu—Tropical thunder”, a nuanced conversation between artists and researchers Léuli Eshraghi and Lucrecia Quintanilla. Writing from below, our words also come from an abyssal place so deep down in the pit of the stomach that it hurts, because it is so personal it sometimes hurts, a visceral feeling that necessitates a response—borne witness to in Becky McLaughlin’s genre-bent memoir “Big Sex: The Story of the Silver Nail and Other Objects of (Mass) Construction”, a bare reflection on the restraint imposed upon the sexed subject in the academic community, or in Zahra Stardust’s defiantly indescribable “Fists are for Fucking, Not for Fighting: An Open Letter to all the Lovers, Kin and Mentors I have picked up at Sex Conferences around the World”, wherein she (amongst other deft critical-creative manoeuvres) exposes the re-signification of bodily practices as a one of many strategies for activism. We embrace the axiomatic blending of critical and creative genres and forms (because art is theory, and theory art, after all, despite desperate protestations

from outside us to the contrary)—exemplified by the collaborative project “Riding Renga: Low Theory and Collective Critical Dissatisfaction” which, following Judith/Jack Halberstam, plunges the reader into a network of “detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion” to articulate a frustration with the limits of contemporary academic research, and suggest some interesting possible futures. *Writing from Below*: a beautiful and protestful multitude of critical and creative voices screaming with despair, anger and desire, wrapping their words in the form of a formless online journal, between two non-existent covers on so many immaterial pages, open-accessed for all the world to witness, hearts on sleeves and baring all. Down here, down below, this is where revolution lives. You might not notice us or hear us, nor listen, not yet, but we are there, down here, writing from below.

This is what comes out.

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Thank you to our esteemed advisory board for kindly supporting without question nor recompense such an unknown quantity as this journal, to the talented scholars who completed peer reviews for their rigorous intellectual engagement with such a strange assortment of material, and to our resilient section editors—Bree Ahrens, Amalya Layla Ashman, Wing-Yi Chan, Jacinthe Flore, Emma Josephine Hughes, Alikei Koms, Christie Nieman, Amie O’Shea, Natalie Pirotta, and Zoe Thomas—for their persistence, conscientiousness, and hard labour. Thank you also to Darryl Ephraums for his spectacular work with layouts, and to Aimee Gumina for voluntarily providing such great proofreading support.

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Thank you to our spoken word performers who all generously volunteered their time: ReVerse Butcher, Jax Jacki Brown, John Alexander Stevens, Karina Quinn and our amazing host Margaret Mayhem. Thank you also to [the Hare Hole](#) for providing the perfect venue for such a “down below” spectacle.

And thank you finally to all of our contributors whose wonderful and provocative research, critical and creative, theory and practice, and those thorny places in between, informs, and will continue to inform, so well, the vision of this journal and the community of scholars it cultivates. A special thank you to Caroline Phillips for allowing us to feature her stunning artwork on the cover, and to Catherine Evans for taking those photographs. And indeed thank you to everyone who took the chance and made a submission. The volume and quality of submissions was heartening, and clearly validates the need for such a platform as *Writing from Below*.

Thank you.

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Now, we look forward. We are calling for papers for a special edition of the journal, titled *Death and the Maiden*, to be published in August 2014. Submissions are open until 7 March 2014—although we are accepting submissions for regular issues throughout the year. We accept submissions from any field or discipline that intersects with GSDS—literary and cultural studies, journalism, media and cinema studies, game studies, art history, visual art, architecture, theatre and drama, performance studies, languages and linguistics, planning, philosophy, theology, sociology, anthropology, history, politics, public policy, law, legal studies, criminology, health sciences, et cetera—and are especially keen to promote the work of postgraduates and early career researchers. We will consider any type, genre, form, or medium, and particularly want to encourage experimental works, so long as the material intersects somewhere with an aspect of GSDS.

Our next issue will be published in April 2014, featuring:

- Judy Lattas with a singularly astounding and deeply affecting case study of an Indian woman caught in the wake of a threefold imperialist-religious-technological missionary enterprise
- Ashley Lavelle on the political metamorphosis of Adela Pankhurst Walsh from suffragette to Nazi admirer

- Eden Elizabeth Wales Freedman on witnessing trauma and theory in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Dialogue on Love*
- Robyn Walton on Wyndham Lewis’s fascist, pacifist, homophobic utopia
- Peter Banki and Nikó Antalffy in conversation on whether there can be such a thing as non-normative sexuality
- A speculative soundtext by Michael James Coombes which explores sexuality and subjectivity
- Plus reviews of *Twists and Turns in the Heart’s Antarctic* by Hélène Cixous, *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* by Julia Serano, *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk* edited by Valerie Steele, Joss Whedon’s recent cinematic adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and more

This will be followed by the *Death and the Maiden* special edition in August 2014, and our third issue for the year in December 2014, for which we will be accepting submissions throughout the year. Please, if you think your work might fit here: submit!

Stephen Abblitt, Nicholas Cowley and Karina Quinn  
Managing Editors, *Writing from Below*

STEPHEN ABLITT is a literary philosopher, queer theorist, and post-critic. He presently works in the Radical Learning Project at La Trobe University, where he is also an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Humanities, and a member of the Centre for Creative Arts. His PhD thesis staged a sequence of missed encounters, frustrated correspondences and abortive dialogues between James Joyce and Jacques Derrida, and his current research project comprises a series post-critical essays on love, death and infidelity in texts by Roland Barthes, Hélène Cixous, and Derrida. Stephen can be contacted at [S.Abblitt@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:S.Abblitt@latrobe.edu.au)

NICHOLAS COWLEY is a postgraduate researcher at La Trobe University working in the areas of Victorian/Early Modern popular fiction, phenomenology, gender studies, and reading practices. Nicholas is currently writing a thesis entitled “Reading the Frontier: Masculinity and Popular Fiction from 1890-1940” in an attempt to make him feel better about all the feelings he has for trashy books. He is currently joint Managing Editor of *Writing from Below*, which makes him feel better about being a human. He can be contacted at [N.Cowley@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:N.Cowley@latrobe.edu.au)

KARINA QUINN is an academic and creative writer working in queer theory, fictocriticism, and post-structuralist and feminist theories of the body, subjectivity, and self. She writes short fiction, poetry, and fictocriticism, and is currently writing her PhD titled “this body, written” at La Trobe University. An accomplished poet and spoken word performer, Karina was recently awarded second prize in the prestigious and long running Newcastle Poetry Prize for her poem “Always going home (a domestic cycle)”, and is the most recent recipient of La Trobe University’s Professor Anthony Smith Conference Attendance Award. Karina can be contacted at [K.Quinn@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:K.Quinn@latrobe.edu.au)