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## **Review of *New Perspectives on Academic Writing: The Thing That Wouldn't Die***

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### **Abstract**

This is a book review of *New Perspectives on Academic Writing: The Thing That Wouldn't Die*, reviewed by David Livingstone.

**Herzogenrath, B. (Ed.). (2022). *New perspectives on academic writing: The thing that wouldn't die*. Bloomsbury Academic. \$108, ISBN: 978-1-3502-3153-5**

Instructors of academic writing are often faced with the Herculean task of teaching a generation of students who not only do not write much (at least not on their computers), but do not read (at least not books). Faced with this reality, does it make any sense to continue to teach the standard established approaches in the discipline? The current volume attempts to provide not only some answers to this question, but also some hope for the future. The book is actually the second book in a series, in which the editors call for a revolution of sorts in university education, arguing for the need for interdisciplinarity and experimentation, or in their words, “a multiversity” (p. viii).

The editor of the volume, Bernd Herzogenrath, provides an overview of the nature of the chapters included in the book in the introduction, and also calls for an infusion, or in his words a “seed bomb” (p. 11) of new life into the field of academic writing, which will involve, among other things, the use of video-essays, collaboration, “raveling” (p. 110), unwriting, affective reading, etc. There are fourteen chapters in all, with end notes provided at the end of each chapter, and indexes of both subjects and names at the end of the book, thereby enhancing orientation for the reader. The contributors to the particular chapters come from a range of countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, UK, US) and a number of different, many interdisciplinary, academic fields (architecture, art, cultural studies, education, literature media studies, philosophy). Brief biographies of the contributors are provided near the end of the book.

The first chapter, “The Structure and System of Academic Writing”, is appropriately placed at the beginning of the book as it involves an attempt to map out the nature of the field and begins to open up questions as to its imminent future. The author, Levi Bryant, divides his analysis of academic writing into the following categories: Normal academic writing, writing machines, critique, and bombs. He draws inspiration here from a range of theorists, in particular Niklas Luhmann.

One of the denser chapters in the collection, “Walking On Sunshine”, critiques the so-called educational state of “Educacene”, this being a condition marked, in the view of authors Jessie Beier and Jason Wallin, by materiality and stasis (p. 25). They present various ways to counter this tendency, including “walking research” (p. 28), a downward subterranean writing style and dehiscence, the last-mentioned used here as a way of probing, exploring and embracing negativity.

The third chapter, “Science Fiction Devices”, takes an experimental “fictioning” approach to its subject (p. 51). Employing a performative approach, it not only includes a schizophrenic dialogue between the authors and an academic but the playful inclusion of a field trip through six science-fictionish texts.

Liana Psarologaki, the author of the chapter “Mythoplasia and Fictioning in Academic Practice: ‘Writing; Other’”, supplies a highly provocative critique of contemporary university education and writing, or in her own words: “We need to move from teaching as facilitating a necroculture to educating via technoculture and neuroculture against the neo-totalitarianism of worry” (p. 53). Psarologaki urges the embracing of new radical approaches and readings in academia, in contrast to the too frequent tendency to navel gaze and twiddle one’s thumbs within what she refers to aptly as the “mothballed academy” (p. 53).

In what the present reviewer found one of the most readable chapters, “[Fill In the Blank]”, Kalani Michell assails the conservative approach to the use of images in academic writing texts. She argues that it is high time to move away from the conformist, stereotyped style of academic writing involving mere words on the page and instead embrace the creative and academic potential of text-image relationships.

Chapter six, entitled “How Can One Be Farocki?”, is both highly entertaining and thought-provoking with its focus on the interworkings of academic conferences and the creative potential of the essay film/video essay. Also of great interest is the discussion of the revolutionary impact, at least in media studies, of the *Snap and Go* app. In author Rembert Hüsler’s view, this was “the first service of its kind that introduced the app to the daily communication of the social system of academia” (p. 91).

The intriguingly entitled chapter “Step 2 Hearing: ‘The Parties Agree to Use Their Best Efforts’: A Dramatic Academic Work” looks at how the translator as academic is often not granted sufficient respect and recognition within the academy. Instead of lamenting this state of affairs, the author posits that he or she can instead serve as a revolutionary “scyborg” (p. 99). The contribution includes a so-called “dramatic academic work” (p. 101) supplied as a case-study for author Jennifer Hayashida’s approach.

“Writing the Unwritable: Raveling Worlds”, by artist and theorist Julie Vulcan, explores writing-with—in this case not collaboration with humans but rather with mother nature—and so-called “raveling” (p. 110). Whilst Vulcan provides the concept of raveling with multiple meanings, it primarily consists of the process of creating and destroying. Her conclusion is the somewhat mystifying yet inspiring statement that “Academic writing might write the world but it must also allow the world to write us” (p. 116).

“Writing In-between” is arguably the most experimental of all of the chapters included herein, employing a cut-up style, with each section subtitled with a poem-like passage starting with the word ‘between’. The final five pages of the text are a delightful variation on Allen Ginsberg’s seminal poem *Howl*. Author Anna Gibbs’ version is entitled *Whimper*, and begins as follows:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, complying, quality-controlled, broken, dragging themselves down the concrete corridors at dawn looking for a working printer. (p. 129).

The tenth chapter in the volume is entitled “Unwriting for the Anthropocene: Looking at the Disaster from the Inside . . .”. It focuses on what author David R. Cole calls “unwriting” (p. 140), with a call for abandoning established modes of academic writing production out of concern for the climate change crisis—or Anthropocene—making use of the concept developed by Nigel Clark.

“La Mise-en-Abîme: Placing Academic Writing in Scare Quotes” provides not only an overview of the fairly long history of laments concerning the state of academic writing, but also focuses

on specific aspects which most of us find particularly painful. Mick Wilson's discussion of footnotes is amusing and poignant at the same time: "Footnotes are often dismissed as the self-congratulatory pedantry or the back-channel bitching of academics" (p. 154). Wilson concludes with a call to once again attempt to move away from Eurocentric colonialist models and approaches.

Chapter twelve, "Abstract Academic Expressionism: An Alternative Aesthetics of Scholarly Practice", is inspired by, among others, the artwork of Jackson Pollock. Just as the painter revolutionized his artistic milieu, author Anne Pirrie encourages a parallel quest involving queering established standards of academic writing and welcoming varied perspectives on the issues at hand.

The editor of the volume is also the author of the penultimate contribution, "Affective Academic Writing". Arguably the densest of the articles in the collection, Herzogenrath delves into the complexities of affect theory in order to eventually apply it to academic writing. He makes extensive use of Deleuze in his argument; in particular, his notion of "playing around" (p. 182) with texts. Although skeptical of the continued validity of the discipline, Herzogenrath hopes his chapter (and, I surmise, the book as a whole) serves as an academic writing manifesto leading "us out to a place where we have not yet been, providing an encounter with an outside of thought that forces us to think" (p. 182).

The Canadian theorist and artist Erin Manning brings the volume to a close with another manifesto of sorts. This 'manifesto' involves 86 statements, predominantly her own words, with around a third consisting of quotations from thinkers including Whitehead, Nietzsche, Fred Moten, Stefano Harney and Tony Morrison. A number make reference to the concepts of "writing to/for life" and "writing white"; however, due to length constrictions, two will have to suffice here: Firstly, "37. Writing to life does not have the last word" (p. 189); and finally, "86. Writing white kills" (p. 190).

In total, this volume contains a bounty of riches, which will merit re-reading and savouring. It is admittedly a heady read, with a great deal of references to literary and cultural theory, but the effort invested will definitely pay off. Although this book might appear a bit too avant-garde and high-brow for use in EAP classrooms, it should nevertheless provide food-for-thought for advanced students and instructors and a much-needed impetus for continued rethinking and re-evaluating of the entire field of academic writing, particularly in the humanities.

The book is also a partially deserved scolding for those of us in academia, who have become too fixed in our ways, who are afraid of thinking outside-the-box, who find it easier to complain about the deterioration of traditional study and writing skills among our students, but who are reluctant to embrace new approaches and technologies. I appreciate how the text repeatedly draws attention to the realities of academia today, very much taking a stance on the issues at hand. As a writer, reader, editor and teacher of academic writing, the reading of this volume and the consequent writing of this review has challenged me to question my own tried and tested, but often uninspired, standards and approaches.