

---

## SLANTS AND RIGHT ANGLES

---

*Jacket* Magazine, edited by John Tranter, special review edition CD, on the Internet at [jacketmagazine.com](http://jacketmagazine.com)

A recent issue of *Jacket*, the award-winning online literary magazine edited by the Australian poet John Tranter, contains an evocative photograph entitled *Slant Fence, Blackheath, NSW* (December 2007; <http://jacketmagazine.com/35/index.shtml>). Taken by Tranter himself, the landscape displays a single named location, yet the image also manages to inhabit multiple spaces at once. As such, the photograph can be seen as a suggestive metaphor for the ways in which *Jacket* can be critically approached, and ultimately appreciated, through the multiple frames of its own imagery. In *Slant Fence*, a sloping white picket fence frames the edge of a modest yard, behind which a wooden house lies largely concealed by the lush vegetation of an overgrown pine tree. The bright white upright slats of the fence are vividly positioned against horizontal wooden boards that appear in muted earth tones and form sharp right angles at the corners of the house. In Tranter's microcosmic image of interwoven contrasts, something straight is placed in relation to something that is leaning, while something that is revealed serves as a screen for that which remains concealed.

*Prima facie*, *Jacket* appears to be a postmodern literary magazine; *Time* magazine (Pacific edition, April 23, 2001; <http://jacketmagazine.com/00/jacket-reviewed.shtml#time>) characterised it as 'an Internet café for postmodernists'. Yet *Jacket* is much more than this. The journal is a collection of slants and right angles, poetry and prose, modern and postmodern production, all of which are embedded in a complementary dialogue that encompasses literary expression, critical commentary, and their related visual culture.

As a web-based publication, *Jacket* is expansive in both form and content. International in scope, the magazine features longer articles than it would be possible to accommodate in a traditional print journal. Tranter founded the magazine in the autumn of 1997. All thirty-five issues are easily accessible online, while the current number appears piecemeal as a work in process. In this evolving digital framework, poetry and criticism become media objects, and it almost feels as though the journal itself exists in multiple editions even before it is published.

*Jacket* brings editorial discernment to online publishing. Hybrid and heterogloss, this innovative magazine not only features literary essays, poetry, and book reviews, but a broad selection of articles spanning the arts and humanities, including comparative literature, architectural history, the history of photography, conceptual and performance art, philosophy, information technology, and cultural criticism. Experimental works by younger and lesser-known poets appear alongside pieces by established writers. Both are interposed with verse and critical commentary on such venerable figures as Arthur Rimbaud, Ezra Pound, Arthur Cravan, Mina Loy, Wallace Stevens, Marcel Duchamp, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Allen Ginsberg, and many others. Thus while *Jacket* is filled with postmodern self-reflexive commentary – the discourse on the discourse – it also contains a surprisingly extensive selection of primary source materials, including photographs, conversations, and interviews of considerable historical and documentary interest. Placing these diverse selections in a fluid digital dia-

logue, *Jacket* appears retrospective and progressive, deliberative and spontaneous, established and experimental, as it appeals at once to a scholarly and an educated general audience.

*Jacket* is free. It is not possible to subscribe to the magazine, and no advertising appears on its web pages. In an early essay notably entitled 'The Left Hand of Capitalism' (1999, <http://jacketmagazine.com/00/about.shtml>), Tranter discusses the practical and conceptual dimensions associated with his digital enterprise. In particular, he notes that the ubiquitous and timely nature of the Internet addresses the single most 'intractable' problem in literary publishing, namely 'the cost and difficulty of distribution' associated with a small, unprofitable market. Accompanying Tranter's essay is a deceptively simple-looking cartoon of a playful, salivating canine. This witty retro illustration bears the caption, 'Give the dog a bone, Graphic from *Jacket* #1'. As Tranter observes, *Jacket* creates immediate, cost-free access between the literary product and its audience, thereby reconfiguring traditional models of production and consumption, just as it inverts established structures of price and distribution. As a web-based publication, *Jacket* not only gives the dog a bone; it gives the bone a dog.

While most of the magazine's materials are original, some selections are 'excerpted from or co-produced with hard-to-get books and magazines, partly to help them find new readers' (<http://jacketmagazine.com/00/about.shtml>). One important example appears in a recent issue (no. 35, 2008) as a conversation on 'Structuralism and Linguistics' that Pierre Daix conducted with the French structural linguist Émile Benveniste (<http://jacketmagazine.com/35/iv-benveniste-ivb-daix-t-reeck.shtml>). In this interview, which was originally published in the July 1968 issue of *Les Lettres françaises*, the two men discuss Jules Gilliéron's idea that the elements of a complex living language must be collected and meaningfully assembled on maps that form a 'linguistic geography'. Through features such as this, which add valuable intellectual ballast to the novelty associated with new media and contemporary cultural expression, *Jacket* accomplishes something similar. In its convergent terrain of linguistic geographies, the magazine both embodies and performs the 'aesthetics of information systems' (<http://jacketmagazine.com/34/index.shtml>), as technical and conceptual structures engage in a constantly evolving dialogue with emergent forms of creativity.

In short, *Jacket* is perspectively complex. The magazine turns its gaze in multiple directions simultaneously, as it looks forward and backward to show its readers the slants in the fence and the spaces between them.

MARCIA BRENNAN