ESSAYESQUE DISMEMOIR: w/rites of elder-flowering

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DECLARATION:

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the candidate alone. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

.................................................................

Peta Murray _____________________________ 2017
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This project has challenged me in ways that playwriting never did, extending my practice while exposing me to buffeting changes in the world, and testing my mettle at every turn. There is no way I could have done it alone, and there are many people to thank. This is why a tiny font is needed.

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* Also The Candidate’s nickname, but used only by closest family and friends.
ABSTRACT:

This practice-based research project offers an exploration of the embodied experience of ageing through a kind of text-based autopsy of the self, unfolding a notion of elder-flowering as a means to sustain a viable artistic practice in advancing age. In so doing, it takes up Julian Meyrick’s call for “descriptive sensitivity” (2011) around the “nerves and mechanisms” of creative process (Krauth 2011).

Using queered, mixed and intuitive methods, the author’s past practice as a playwright is variously renounced, revisited and recuperated through memoiresque gestures and via experiments in mutations of the performable essay dubbed herein as w/rites. The work admits messiness and unruliness, failures, gaps and derelictions as it goes in quest of a poetics of ageing. It fuses form and content to refract allegories of senescence and inflorescence through multiple lenses, including that of a florilegium. Its findings have also been delivered in theatrical performance, in live art as a community Mass, as well as through exhibition-meets-installation. These works, as a triptych, compose its creative artifact, ‘Ware With A Translucent Body’, a multi-modal work of essayesque dismemoir.

The study grows from current scholarship on the evolution of the practice-based dissertation and demonstrates an approach to writing-as-research whereby public acts, personal archives and private interactions become a site of resistance. Drawing upon the found and the prepared, and holding space for the immanent and the extemporized, it offers essayesque dismemoir as not only a queerly innovative method for making and thinking about creative nonfiction, but one with a capacity to bring to the page something of the live-ness of the vanishing act that is performance.

Keywords: ageing – playwriting – women – queering – essaying – memoir
PREFACE:

In a recent issue of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, Paul Williams (2016), through an article entitled ‘The Performative Exegesis’, surveys a dazzling field of “fictively playful” exegetically-inclined works that, in their sheer volume and variety, serve as clear indication that when it comes to the (practice-led) research degree, most remaining boundaries between the creative artifact and the scholarly dissertation have been all but erased. Building upon and bringing into the present moment earlier surveys of the evolving creative arts doctorate in Australia (Carter 2004; Booth & Martin 2006; Krauth 2011), Williams describes exegeses paracritical, performative, fictocritical, doppelgänger, counterpoint and epistolary, to name a few, before concluding that the exegesis is well on course to being no longer “an appendage to the artifact but rather a component of it” (16).

For a sometime professional playwright such as myself, this profusion of the playful in the academy is a breath of fresh air, especially at the end stage in my PhD candidature when I am attempting to find means by which to present the findings, flourishings and falterings of my research in a manner that is not only examinable, but also authentic to me. At the core of this endeavor is a personal quest to continue to pursue what I have long thought of as both my calling and my craft into my ‘third age’ and the impulse behind this has led me to the following question: *How might the page ‘stage’, indeed display, the live-ness of the vanishing act that is performance?* The search for a means to do this is taking my practice into new grounds, while also opening up new possibilities in the exegetical field that may, I hope, make a contribution to the expanding taxonomies of playwriting and creative practice research.
This is not where I began. On re-entering the university three years ago, in quest of either a sustainable vocation, or a different path, I found myself struggling to develop what I hoped might pass as a suitably academic voice. Early efforts on the page were earnest if lacklustre imitations of what I took to be ‘scholarly writing’. These did not come easily; more than this, they did not carry my intent or speak to my purpose in any worthwhile way. I was not an academic, nor was I convinced I could, or should become one. Over time, however, and through invigorating encounters with experimental creative practice works by artist peers (Cameron 2016; Eades 2015) I began to invent neologisms for what I was making and for how I might advance my research. I may have begun in the rubble of my life in the theatre, and indeed, even of the word playwright, I declared, but I would now send my praxis into punctuated and parenthetical spaces I termed the inter-lands. I would move forward as a paracademic: one who practices not so much within as alongside, beyond or beside the academy.

These new namings, coupled with what Francesca Rendle-Short describes as “thinking prepositionally” (2015, 95), gave me not only a method and a means, methodologically speaking, but also afforded me – albeit tentatively – first sites of resistance. One was situated in my ‘known world’ of theatre and performance. It permitted me to imagine myself in a kind of grudging détente with that once hallowed ground. The second was located at the threshold of the academy, but with a wilful determination not to allow my own voice to be subsumed by the so-called conventions of disciplinarity. These sites of resistance, in turn, afforded me an altered awareness, a faux-scholarly view, arising from what Ross Gibson terms the “oscillation between being inside and being outside” (2010, 5) the maker-as-researcher experience.
These sidesteps, this slant-ness, this threading of a path that ducks and weaves *beside, beyond or around* rather than *forward or through*, became the defining characteristic of my doctoral journey, where the focus of my research is conducted, slant, in the forward slash (/) of creative non-fiction. My project, a queered, feminist, performance-based autoethnographic inquiry into the experience of ageing in arts practice, employs parodic and rhapsodic gestures, and pedagogical and playwriting tropes, to identify, seize and occupy new sites of practice, not just for me, but for other eldering women artists in advancing age.

In this, it grows, organically – if one will pardon the first of many such puns – from my earlier inquiry into the experiences of the woman artist as *late bloomer* (Murray 2011). That earlier work, for a Masters degree, grew from personal interest in the nexus between women, ageing and creative practice and found that hybrid and hyphenated forms (including, in that case, what I claimed was an *anti-musical*) still afforded inclusive and democratic spaces in which voices that might otherwise be muted could continue to be heard.

This PhD project extends that work, continuing in quest of subversive alternatives to well-mapped binary narratives of decline and triumph that typically dominate wherever ageing discourse is examined (see, for example, Gullette 2004; Segal 2014; Woodward 1991) and finding them in notions of *wayfaring* (Ingold 2011), *nomadic feminist* inquiry (Braidotti 2011) and *ongoingness* (Haraway 2016). Staked alongside these is my own contribution herein, a notion of *elder-flowering*.

Elder-flowering, in my punning usage, plays on dual meanings of the word, *elder*, as both plant and personage. There are many possible readings of the elder plant, *sambucus*, a genus of flowering plants of the family Adoxaceae. The elderflower is widely prized for its flavour in food and in beverages, and also has
well-documented application in medical traditions worldwide. However, parts of the plant are potentially toxic, and it is in this paradox, this contrariety, that the word delivers some of its richness in its capacity to carry a notion of late-life flowerings – those I shall later describe as the “frothing of full florality” – that are, in the same hour, closing manifestations, last hurrahs, before an inevitable final fade.

The idea of the elder as personage (person-age?) is just as rich when one considers how it seems to contain an inbuilt point-of-view, an invitation to prepositional thinking, inasmuch as to locate an elder one seems required to look up, and to become an elder one is required to move up. Standard definitions such as those offered by my dictionary.com app say that an elder is a person who is older or higher in rank than oneself. The word is imbued with degrees of comparison, and of an altered or elevated rank or station in life, of influence and of leadership delivered from a vantage point somewhere above. A little more etymological digging leads me to the ecclesial Latin word for elder, presbyter, and from this it is only a short hop to the word priest. We may return to this notion when the time is right.

In Australia of course, as in other parts of the world, the word has particular currency in the context of the First Nations peoples, where acknowledged Elders hold an honoured place and have particular ceremonial and cultural duties to perform. An unnamed indigenous activist given Quote of the Day at a webpage online declares: “An Elder sits within all of us waiting to come out” (Butler). In this, we are given to understand that elderhood is not guaranteed, that not every Elder will be emergent. Old age and advancing years do not automatically confer or bestow ‘elderhood’, for it seems that this state must somehow be authorised or conferred, activated or earned.
We may return to these etymological diggings in due course, as play with words, and their music, as well as the mining of them, for their meanings are but some of an array of maverick and mixed methods this study employs. This promiscuity has been emboldened by Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam’s call for a queer art of failure wherein we “First, Resist mastery” (2011, 11, emphasis and capitalisation in original), by marrying low theory, popular knowledge and bricolage, to test the proposition that “under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). Halberstam re-purposes the notion of low theory – a term she borrows from Stuart Hall – as a site of alternative and anarchic knowledges in “in-between spaces”, one that allows for “the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal” (2).

Central to this performance-based inquiry, then, have been many of the ‘failings’ regularly associated with ‘advancing age’, including the failure to be seen – age may confer a certain cloak of invisibility, or is it erasure, upon women? – and other falterings, such as falling, forgetting, sight and hearing loss, not to mention sore feet and a certain creeping contrariness. Neologisms continued to arrive over the life of the project, alongside the creation of texts that exemplify what I am propounding, as w/rites. Such fresh coinages have mostly been part of the playfulness of the project, but they have also, at times, been mischievous developments, often delivered to my mind overnight through a phenomenon (or method) I recognise in myself as ‘sleep-working’ – a practice conducted in that state between dreaming and wakefulness known as hypnagogia. Neologisms such as essayesque dismemoir, for instance, arrived via this conduit, as did the triptych of
terminology, (playing homophonically on The Three Rs of education) that began as
\textit{write, rote, wrought} before mutating, and re-arranging itself again and again, and
only at the eleventh hour settling into the spellings and sequence adopted in this
folio: \textit{wright, w/rote, wrought}.

Each of these examples arrived, almost song-like, into my mind overnight. And in each case, it was its phonic force, (or its appearance when inscribed onto the
cover of a virgin exercise book the next morning), that was initially compelling,
rather than any as-yet-to-be unpacked meaning. Each of these examples endured,
mantra-like – or as more modern \textit{memes} – in a variation of what some think of as
‘earworms’ – catchy tunes that worm their way into and repeat in one’s mind. Indeed,
I will table evidence that I uttered and employed the phrase ‘\textit{essaysque dismemoir}’
for many months and in all manner of contexts over the course of my candidature
before I had any notion of what it was, or would become. Only now am I able to
begin to define it as a method for performable essaying that fuses into an ephemeral
live art assemblage an array of texts – found, prepared, immanent and extemporised
– in gestures expressive of a communal or personal rite.

\textit{Essaysque dismemoir}, then, and as will be dis/played and elaborated in this
folio, fuses impulses rhapsodic and parodic with impulses to queer, to perform and to
essay. It is a \textit{play-wright-like} practice, though more akin perhaps to what other
traditions pronounce ‘\textit{oration}’, in that it, as Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o tells it, inhabits a
“liminal space between speech and writing, performance and print, where the
channels of communication constantly overlap, penetrate and mutually produce one
another” (qtd. in Conquergood 2013, 110). For the purposes of this dissertation, and
given so many of my \textit{w/rites} were fabricated extempore, and as experiments, some of
the textual artifacts gathered here have been re-created for inclusion – a more
accurate description is re-composed – by a method I call *retroscripting*. To make them, I recorded the performances, lectures, even postgraduate milestones in which I extemporised, fabricated, and fabulated on my feet, mixing recitation, oration, improvisation, found texts, memories and mis-re-membrances, borrowings and other performative ‘utterances’ and illocutionary and perlocutionary ‘speech acts’ (Austin 1955). I then sat down and typed them up. In some cases judicious pruning and deadheading was part of that process.

The resulting texts, I now think of as different blooms, different species within the broad genus that is *writs*. Variously classified taxonomically as *wright, w/rote, or wrought*, they are all generated through the practice of writing but in each incarnation infused with different essences of ritual and play (or not), and towards different degrees of completeness. Some of the pieces assembled here sprouted on the page, for my eyes only, and not meant to be shared. Many are failures, false starts that withered and were abandoned; what I think of as broken texts. Those that were made for sharing have been delivered through public presentation, often with participatory components. The husks of these, housed herein as the triptych *Ware With A Translucent Body*, are, I will contend, texts of *-esqueness* in that they are neither ‘plays’ nor (purely) ‘rites’. Further, they resemble but are neither memoir nor essay. In their many slippages and instabilities, they are, or were, in fact *wrought*, flowering briefly in real time and space, and in their very live-ness exhibiting a queered resistance to the effacements so often conferred by advancing age.

Much of this research took place in the inner west of Melbourne, first at the Bluestone Church, in Footscray, under the aegis of local government, and later in the context of a series of engagements as an artist-in-residence at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, under the umbrella of its VicHealth award-nominated
Creatively Ageing programme. As will become apparent in the course of the folio, this relationship afforded a safe haven in the form of a kind of greenhouse, offering a sanctuary for the seedlings and the sprouts, the tender shoots and delicate tendrils of this inquiry during a time of particularly harsh and unfavourable climate change for the ecology that is arts and culture in Australia (Croggan 2016).

This work is transdisciplinary and nomadic, scavenging amongst discourses of botany (Brandis 1907; Gianolo 2014; Mabey 2105), gerontology (Cruikshank 2006; Stuart-Hamilton 2011; Zeilig 2011), anthropology (Dissanayake 2008) and autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2010), play studies (Henricks 2006; Sicart 2014) and burgeoning scholarship on creative nonfiction (Singer & Walker 2013) and the queer and twenty-first century essay (Lazar 2013; Carlin & Walker 2014; Brette & Carlin 2015), while also nudging dramatic conventions and playwriting techniques towards a non-fiction frontier that has been termed “the performance essay” (Janaczewska, 2013: 1). Hybridity is a watchword of the venture, which sees me capture artifacts and/or arte-facts of distinct processes of thought and practice in a triptych of w/rites. Each speaks to a phase in a case study of personal elder-flowering and charts a rite-of passage as an established woman artist farewells late mid-life for early elder-hood.

Fore-words, arounds and asides break the ground. Part One, WRIGHT sprouts from the rubble of my past practice as a playwright, and is presented in a form that may be mistaken for a play script not just in its comportment on the page, but in its adherence for the most part to the time worn playwriting maxim: show, don’t tell. In the absence of The Candidate, it welcomes fresh dramatis personae in the arrival of two docent-guides, Buster Loose and Wanda Lusst, who in turn hold space for the immersive engagement of guests and visitors, congregants and witnesses. The effulgence of the performative articulation of elder-flowering by
**essaysque dismemoir** is displayed, within, as a florilegium. Integrating creative and uncreative artifacts with dissertation-by-disquisition, this first part is queerly playful, having both botanical and liturgical readings, the latter as a gathering of sacred texts and doctrines; the former as a kind of portraiture in a catalogue of exotic, possibly nearly extinct, blooms. This form allows _wright_ to be simultaneously and triumphantly _wrong_ in the tabling of a range of broken, abandoned and failed texts in an array of voices and styles. My own voice, such as it is, comes from _elsewhere_, as marginalia, or through our interlocutors.

Adopting this approach admits a queer polyvocality, or what Marion May Campbell calls “polyamorous ventriloquy” on the page (2012) and this, in turn, permits a sense of what I hope may be received as a kind of textual _live-ness_, inviting active engagement, as it stages an interplay between the many complex and contradictory impulses informing this inquiry. Here, I foreshadow, too, a place for this work in a broader cultural context, as a work of performed autoethnography (Spry 2001; Jones, Adams & Ellis 2013.) For if viewed against policy and funding developments in the Australian arts and cultural sector at large, and heavy weather in the so-called Creative Industries in the period 2013 to 2016 (Pledger 2013; Eltham 2016), we find that one part of our larger purpose is simply to capture and to conserve for posterity the testimony of an endangered, or at the very least, a threatened species: that of the independent (woman) artist in the later stages of her creative life course at this moment in time.

To conclude Part One, I offer something new, by way of a world premiere, live on the page, of a work of **essaysque dismemoir**.
Part Two, W/ROTE offers a paracademic bouquet of scholarly writings, with the odd weed in the bunch. To my eye and ear, these writings are duller blooms, fit for display only in that they are required ‘chapters’ testifying to the doctoral life-journey. They are for the most part written from the liminal space of ‘betwixt and between-ness’ in a voice that feels false and forced, to me, and from a place at creative and career crossroads, thresholds between industry and the academy, mid-life and the oft-vaunted third age. The banner under which they are presented, w/rote, grafting the word write to the word rote with the forward stroke (or slash or solidus) speaks to this junction, and plays on the meanings of these words, the former with its sense of accounting and the capture of data via the making of marks, and the latter adding a particular inflection of mechanical, repetitive, habitual practice and learning. Together they deliver a somewhat joyless if, I hope, efficient set of inscriptions.

Part Three, WROUGHT, presents scripted arty-facts, evidence of the creative project that is Ware With A Translucent Body, presented in three parts, each expressive of a specific stage in the rite-of-passage I underwent over the period of this doctoral candidacy. The first is valedictory: charting my formal separation from past practices of playwriting and theatre production. This was staged in the form of a ceremonial community performance, entitled Swansong!!! The Musical!!! Subtitled an oratorio for late bloomers, this work’s emblem is telopea speciosissima, the notoriously difficult to cultivate waratah.

This text had three public iterations over the course of my candidature, the first a showcase after an extended creative development at the Bluestone Church in Footscray, the next, in RMIT’s First Site Gallery, as a standalone work, and finally, as the finale to my epic extravaganza Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda, when
performed at Footscray Community Arts Centre on 1 March, 2014, to mark International Women’s Day. It was on this occasion I crossed a hitherto uncrossed line between playwright and performer, to make an appearance in the work myself.

A second arty-fact sees me inhabiting a liminal space, as I continue ‘performing myself’ through installation and exhibition in a gallery space, under the broad banner of a Creatively Ageing Project called ‘embOLDen’. The bones of a new form that will become essayesque dismemoir are unearthed through this extended period of residency in which I was offered fruitful opportunities, alongside two other elder-women artists, for both spontaneous and gregarious flowering. The emblem for this chapter is, accordingly, the bamboo, which shares these proclivities.

The creative husk: Litanies for the Forgetful is neither a play nor a script, but a template for some other kind of essayistic performance. It affords spaces for improvisation, for participatory engagement of onlookers and for the playful use of prepared and found materials, arranged, unfurled, or otherwise disported in the moment. Through this work of immanence, a rhapsody of re-membrance that makes its making process explicit, a deeper reading of the idea of the w/rite begins to emerge.

The final arty-fact in the triptych that is Ware With A Translucent Body brings re-emergence and re-integration in the form of a participatory and immersive community Mass for the Ageing (Missa pro Venerabilibus). This final w/rite of elder-flowering consolidates the method and practice of essayesque dismemoir as an innovative contribution to the field of creative nonfiction, by employing live art and modular installation within the frame of the performance essay, thereby offering a daring and showy inflorescence with multiple bracts and petioles, buds and blossoms.
Its emblem, most appropriately, given its abandon and excess, is the species-rich genus *passiflora*, the passionflower.

To conclude, I present *over, besides and after-words* on all that has gone before, and stake up some green fuses that may lead to further flowerings beyond the hothouse of this doctoral research project. Through these many metaphors and mutable methods, through the researcher-in-residence space, and indeed through the ‘ruins’ of this dissertation, emerge methodological sites of abandon and excess, play and possibility, and a new praxis in the spaciousness of form that is *essaysque dismemoir*.

Here, it is my hope, theory and practice may meet in a poetics of ageing dis/guised and dis/played as a (wo)manifesto for a retiring *writer* now renascent *wright* – an emboldened *paracademic*, and unfurling elder-flower.
PUBLICATION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:


An earlier version of parts of the Preface, entitled *Play/w/rites for Paracademics* is my contribution to a co-authored article on creative practice research, *Methodologically speaking: innovative approaches to knowledge and text in creative writing research*, accepted by New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing, and published by Taylor and Francis online on 24 February, 2017. My fellow authors are Craig Batty, Sophie Langley, Louise Sawtell, and Mattie Sempert.

Parts of *Passions Flower* are from a co-authored article, *Panel Play in Three Acts Or, How (or when) does a Panel Become a Playpen?* The other authors are Mattie Sempert and Stayci Taylor. That article was submitted to Axon: Creative Explorations, Number 12 on the theme of Creative Play. It has passed peer review and will see publication in 2017.

An earlier version of the creative work called *Please Supply Own Title* has been accepted for publication in a forthcoming Special Issue of TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses, edited by Rachel Robertson and Kylie Cardell, on the subject of The Essay. Issue 39 will see publication in April, 2017.
DEDICATION:

To my elders –

my partner, Jane, and my doppelgänger, Gina

To my betters –

Salty and Loretta (small brown dogs)

To those who went before me –

my grandmothers, Florence and Constance, and my mother, Hilary

And to those who follow me –

my six nieces – in order of appearance:

Lauren

Lucy

Georgia

Nell

Eve

Phoebe

May you take up space and make much mess!

May you make great noise!

P
We are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities.

- Donna Haraway, Staying With The Trouble, 2016.

At my Confirmation of Candidature I made three tentative gestures towards the work this has become. I read the poem, *Prayer*, by Judith Wright, in which the poet offers a plea to her muse not to abandon her as she ages. I looped, as a backdrop, a short film made with stop-motion photography, in which the life cycle of a plant is depicted from first bud-like shoot through full inflorescence and beyond into senescence and decay, only to issue from its dust a fresh ‘green fuse’ and successive flowerings. And I set a metronome – tock-tock, tock-tock – to align the time the presentation took to deliver with the tempo of my ageing heart. I was fifty-five.

As I write these words I am three years older, and another birthday looms. Two of my friends are in palliative care. My practice-based research is about eldering and the lived experience of ageing in my creative practice. This manual speaks to that unfolding in the ruins and to the mess I have made over the course of my candidature.

Be forewarned. This dissertation is an abandoned, excessive and poly-headed beast and it mirrors my research process by remaining unruly to the last. Its design is unorthodox, its composition at times vexatious and just plain wrong. Within this assemblage the reader will encounter a kaleidoscope of textual and material expressions in a plethora of voices, as well as an exuberance of images, digressions, disruptions, and neologisms, all tricked out in a florality of fonts.
Yet be of stout heart. This dissertation is but the compost of a process of making and thinking conceived and conducted principally as live art. Accordingly, it may only be completed – artful, quick and lively – via a presentation-cum-performance on a date to be advised. You are therefore exhorted to approach this dossier as mere prologue to that encounter….

*Let us play!*
ESSAYESQUE DISMEMOIR:

– w/ rites of elder-flowering –

(Not So) Succulent: graptopetalum amethorum Photo © Peta Murray 2013
FORE-WORDS AROUNDS & ASIDES
Q: And if you couldn’t write, tomorrow? If your hands or… your eyes or…? What would that mean to you?

A: (QUIETLY) I’d feel enormous loss. For those moments when you just think you’ve got some divine… it’s not divine but…. Before I said that I very much know what I’m going to write. And I do. I do sort of map it out. But I leave huge gaps. Where I don’t know what will happen. And the pleasure is having this sort of rough map. And then, from your unconscious and your thoughts and everything it just coalesces into something you didn’t know was going to happen. And it delights you, for a start! And you go: ‘WHAT HAVE I MADE? Look what I’ve made.’ (LAUGHS) I would miss that.
FOR THE FALLEN (WOMEN*): 2013 – 2016

ARTISTS, ARTS WORKERS, ACTIVISTS, ARCHITECTS, ARCHIVISTS, ADVOCATES, AND ABSENT FRIENDS

AHERNE, CAROLINE (UK) Comedian, writer, actor

AMPHLETT, CHRISSY Singer-songwriter, actor, rock-chick

BAYFIELD, LOIS Reader, music lover, dear friend’s Mum

BEATON, LYNN Writer, historian, activist

BIDDELL, KERRIE Jazz singer, pianist, teacher

BLAIN, GEORGIA Novelist, journalist, biographer

CAMERON, MARGARET Performer, dramaturg, pedagogue

CAPLICE, ELIZABETH Writer, archivist, artist

CREGAN, JEAN M. ‘PEG’ Activist, advocate, adventurer

CROSSETT, PEPPER ANNE Labradoodle, good girl, family pet

COLEFAX, NOLA Deaf activist, actor, writer

* This is not a footnote. It is an underneath, simply to propose that those playing along at home may like to keep an eye out for a rogue bloke in the mix, as well as for a beloved dog, and a woman who is ‘out of time’.
One day you wake up and find yourself in the throes of a mid-career menopausal crisis, invisible... It was one of those periods in my life when I couldn’t get arrested. I had no acting work, certainly not enough to sustain me and I couldn’t write a play. I still had things to say but wanted to say it in a new way. That’s a challenge. It’s scary and very depressing. But I wasn’t going to go away. Where anyway? There was nothing outside of theatre I could do. I applied for teaching jobs, artist in residences, sent out CV’s looking for any related employment. Nothing. I had to find a way to diversify, metamorphose and create something from the overlap of the acting and writing disciplines I’d worked at to date... I decided to make my own work... But it’s not easy being the elder in these situations. I had a good idea for a new project but it didn’t receive any financial support. Compelling but not compelling enough – we’ve all heard that before. All those applications. All that time. But no. And no again. And again.
DEVESON, ANNE  Broadcaster, author, activist

DISKI, JENNY  Author, traveller, taboo-buster

E ___________  Your name goes here

FELL, JAN  Craftivist, friend’s big sister, music lover

FISHER, CARRIE (USA)  Actor, writer, mental health activist

GOEDECKE, GWEN**  Activist, agitator, arts-lover

GORE, LESLEY (USA)  Singer, actress, activist

HADID, ZAHA (UK)  Architect, visionary, neo-futurist

HALL, LESLEY  Activist, disability advocate, arts worker

HAZZARD, SHIRLEY  Novelist, essayist, thinker

IVES, DEREK  Circus artist, rigger, iconoclast

JONES, SHARON (USA)  Late bloomer, funk elder, soul singer

KING, INGE  Sculptor, immigrant, centenarian

** This is not a footnote either. Merely a beside. Gwen’s thirst for knowledge saw her undertake an arts degree at the age of 70 (!!!). Her thesis, ‘Poor Man's Arts Centre’, was on the history of the Footscray Community Arts Centre, an organisation she helped establish and manage. Her aim was to make art and culture available to the working-class families of the west. Go Gwen!
I am always frightened that I will be forgotten. And maybe that’s because it means so much to me. Like actually being able to put light onto bodies and words and music... that if I wasn’t able to do that because the opportunities went away, then I’m not quite sure what I would do.

*****

It is certainly a challenging landscape for 50+ theatremakers without their own company. I don’t expect handholding but there seems to be a fetishization of new and upcoming artists. Artists continue to develop and need to be supported in that. I am currently on sabbatical from making applications.

I am saying ‘no’ to being said ‘no’ to.
KOSKY, LYNNE  Arts Minister, Bulldog fan, jeweller

LAMARO, ANA  Activist, healer, art lover

LEY, RUTH  Builder, musician, environmental activist

MACKAY, BONNIE L. MAY  Activist, communist, dear friend’s Mum

MAIRS, NANCY (USA)  Advocate, feminist, essayist

MEARS, GILLIAN  Author, athlete, euthanasia advocate

MUSCAT, KAT  Writer, editor, advocate

NISHIMOTO, NORIKO  Poet, puppeteer, pedagogue

NOONAN, HELEN  Singer, actor, agitator

O ____________  Your name goes here

P ____________  Your name goes here

Q ____________  Your name goes here

R ____________  Your name goes here

SALVADORI, MARGOT  Neighbour, elder, friend
But during Phase Two I did think: If you stick in long enough, if you stick in long enough eventually it’ll all come good. And that’s been proved wrong. Because Phase Three is spare and sparse. And you go: Oh, I stuck in, and it didn’t happen. But I’ve still got a bit of that belief and I’m hoping Phase Four and Phase Five... You stick in long enough and people will go... (LAUGHTER) What’s Phase Four? Renaissance! And Phase Five then is sort of... acclaim. You’re venerable. It’s when you get given the honorary PhD. That sort of thing. Honorary doctorate with accompanying money. Perhaps you travel the world, talking at... (PAUSE) No. Playwrights never get asked to talk!
TAYLOR, CORY  Author, screenwriter, taboo-buster

UNKNOWN WOMAN***  You jumped from the Bolte Bridge

V ___________  Your name goes here

WILSON, REBECCA  Sports-writer, broadcaster, trailblazer

WOOD, VICTORIA (UK)  Comedian, actor, singer-songwriter

X ___________  Your name goes here

YOUNG, STELLA  Comedian, journalist, disability advocate

Z___________****  Your name goes here

*** Someone should say something about this.

**** Or do we***** break with convention, reverse first names and surnames, and finish with Zsa Zsa Gabor (USA)?

***** ‘We’? Who speaks? Show thyself!
I see myself dying. I plan my death a lot... I’m so much more conscious of an end. I never thought about the end, ever, until recently. And now it’s finite. I can see that. I don’t really mind either. Partly I do this thing where I go: (insert name of play) will get done when I’m dead. And I say to my kid: You’ll do really well. For 70 years you’re going to do really well! But I actually don’t think it will. I actually think I’ll be just another one of those Australian women who never really made it. And it’ll never get looked at... So I just play with the idea... It’s odd. It’s odd. Those kinds of wounds.

There are different wounds one carries.
I can't write you anything new at the moment and in a way, I feel that generating further new texts is not my current 'problem'. My problem now, and the blockages I have of the moment, concern the assemblage, and shaping of my so-called argument. I have most of what I need. The issue now is how best to display it on the page.

I can't write, also, because I'm reeling. In the past weeks we've seen a wave of deaths in the arts sector, said our farewells to luminaries on the national scene as well as local artists, small fry as far as 'the industry' goes, but people who were deeply loved, and lauded for their talent, dedication, vision and artistry. I've lost two friends in the past week, both women, both fringe dwelling community artists, one a musician and the other a master puppeteer. And all of this against the back drop of this sorry election campaign, all jobs and growth, jobs and growth, with scarcely a mention of the death of the reef, the death by a thousand cuts of the arts sector, and the death of our humanity, while asylum seekers suffer in the camps.

What's it about? What's it really about? you asked.

The project started out as a kind of a manifesto for a re-emerging artist. As the self-proclaimed 'slowest writer in the southern hemisphere', and a carpenter's daughter, I was no longer content to call myself a playwright. Over two decades of professional practice, and during a brief golden age in which Australian voices and women artists were fostered and championed, I viewed the work of writing as manual labour and more craft than art, and sought a kind of mastery in that endeavour. My output included main stage and community theatre and was focused upon women's experience and expressed in non-linear structures and experimental forms. Then, in my mid-fifties, inhabiting an allegedly postfeminist world (hah!) and entering a third decade in the arts, I found myself in transition from shrinking violet to shrieking late bloomer, from solitary, hiding playwright to public maker-performer.

Through my PhD, then, 'the play' as I knew it, has been re-imagined, and with it has been a kind of coming to voice for me as a re-emerging artist in Advancing Age. There was a sense of urgency to this; a sense that I had lots more work to do and far less time left to do it. I needed to get my hands dirtier, work faster, re-connect with other makers, ransack folk and popular traditions such as travesty, parody and drag. I perfected *bricolage* as my *modus operandi*. I mixed my metaphors, dredged up my schoolgirl Latin, went...
back to church to make work that is, I hope, funny, furious, contrary, immersive, participatory, sacred, community-focused, community-building (but without the dull bits). Work that sits at the edges and lives in the gaps, and that eschews distinctions between high and low theory and high and low art.

So I played with words and images, queered and built things with them, especially essayesque dismemoir, which I contend is something new. Not quite a memoir, not a play, nor an essay, nor a monologue, not a bird or a plane but something other, something -esque. I'm using it to remain non-committal. It is something with a semblance of something else. It's play-like, for I remain endlessly fascinated by the mechanics and dynamics of theatrical form, but old ways are, for me now, unsustainable. It's time to make work that is inter-generational, trans-cultural, trans-gendered, inter-active. Inter. Para. Trans. Between, across and beside. These are the qualities of ‘-esqueness’ I tried to unpack as a paracademic. (Yes, another new word. I am a taxonomer at heart. In the vein of the paralegal and the paramedic, the paracademic is one who works beside you, the real academics!)

Through my PhD experience I sought to make work that has mass and gravity and, dare I say it, sacredness at its core. Work that is transformative, difficult, yet vital and alive. I was inspired by women artists who sustained a creative practice into old age - the Caryl Churchills, Louise Bourgeois and Agnes Martins of the world. I remain inspired by women artists who did not begin to ‘emerge’ until mid- and later life - women like the writer Elizabeth Jolley, the artist Rosalie Gascoigne and the painter Emily Kame Kngwarreye. I am inspired by these and other women who are brave and bold, unshrinking and unflinching in their practice, and especially by elder-practitioners, in all fields of endeavour.

So what's it really about?

Sometimes I think it's a work about climate change.

This past week, post the latest Australia Council funding announcements and in the midst of so much death and despair, I have noticed how the timing of my PhD tracks against ecological changes in the sector. When I started at RMIT, in March 2013, we still had Crean’s Creative Australia on the table as a wellspring of possibility. As I finish up, we are in the post-Brandis ice-age and starting to understand the reality of its devastating impact upon an incredible shrinking arts sector. Independent artists (comme moi) are likely to be early casualties of this.
So. As an independent and would-be re-emerging artist I am now starting to understand my contribution as something for the fossil record. My purpose lies in giving testimony, leaving to posterity an accounting of one woman's practice at this moment in time, against the back drop of what's happened specifically, locally, in the Arts with a capital A, over the duration of one little old PhD. What it's really about then is the testimony of almost-a-dinosaur, teetering on the brink of extinction. (The dinosaur metaphor is wrong and I have a far better one in the Panamanian Golden Frog, but that's for another day, another document). It's an act of testimony to sorry times.

Life is short. If things don't improve soon, I'm going AWOL. I'm leaving it to some 'real' academics, docents Buster Loose and Wanda Lusst, to prepare a Report For The Examiners in the form of an Apologia by Florilegium. They can account for my candidacy, and describe my activity over the past three years under their tutelage and their direction, and speak to my worthiness or not to be awarded a doctorate given my resistance, my refusal to speak in a proper scholarly voice, synthesising theory, and citing as required. (I can't do it. I won't.) They, however, may speak in their best scholarly voices, citing themselves or others liberally. Whether they are willing to defend me, or whether one defends and one demurs, remains to be seen. I am yielding the space of the white pages to them – the main stage of the PhD as it were.

Also, I should warn you that I have developed (am developing?) a fixation about offering an afterword – a rebuttal, if need be – to Lusst and Loose's concordance, in my own voice, in my own words, and doing so as a durational work, through a public performance, probably by hand, extempore, with some kind of finite material – blood? ink? - vowing to continue issuing it until said substance runs out, at which point this dissertation will be not so much finished as abandoned, and a symbolic 'edition' of the work will be interred somewhere at Footscray Community Arts Centre, like a time capsule. It may rot, or it may become a kind of seed and/or fossil-in-waiting. Who knows? Who cares? I don't have a site for it yet, but I'm thinking, given my penchant for plant metaphors, it needs to be in some kind of a garden.

What's it really about? Matters of life and death.

Thanks for asking. Now I'm off for a walk.

***** This email was sent in May, 2016, months before the disappearance.
I’m mid-career but I do feel like I’ve moved into a third phase somehow. What do I call that phase? Neglected! (LAUGHTER) No. Not only neglected. I think I went through a couple of years… when I got quite taken aback by the lack of opportunity in a way, and the lack of appetite for my work. I felt like something had gone down ten degrees in interest in me, or fifteen degrees, twenty degrees – I don’t know what it was but I felt that, I could feel a shift. There had been a certain interest… I could get a commission every year or two, I could get a show on every year or two – maybe three – you know, I’d usually have a production coming up. Something I was working on. And then it shifted and … (LAUGHS) And now I don’t have a commission… and I don’t have a production coming up. None at all. And that is a shift, that is a shift, and what do you do with that? Do you stop writing plays? Do you go: Okay, I’m not going to make a living out of this, I’m not enough in demand, I’ll stop. Or do you go: I love writing plays, I’ll keep pushing my work. This will be – swings and roundabouts, this will be a roller-coaster – and this will change. I’ll get another renaissance. But will I?
NINE WALKS – FIELD NOTES ON AUDIO ARTEFACTS

WALK 1:
Where: Kuarka Dorla Reserve
What: Off road walk through manna gums, moonah grove, past nursing home
Location: Anglesea
Date: 10 February 2016
Companion: Loretta (dog)
Time of Day: 7.30am
Duration: 13 mins and 20 seconds
Footwear: Mizuno Neutral Balance, with orthotics
Notes: Garbage truck, radio from passing car, birdsong, some interference from the technology

WALK 2:
Where: Ingram Street and Coogorah Park, then River Reserve Road
What: Bitumen streets leading to gravel road
Location: Anglesea
Date: 10 February, 2016
Companion: Salty (dog)
Time of Day: 8.30pm
Duration: 12 mins and 45 seconds
Footwear: Mizuno Neutral Balance, with orthotics
NOTES: Birdsong, some interference from wind, in spite of windsock; walk taken too early, crickets and frogs did not start until after I got home.
WALK 3:
Where: Coogoorah Park wetlands and islands
What: Unsealed paths, boardwalks
Location: Anglesea
Date: 12 February, 2016
Companion: None
Time of Day: 6.30am
Duration: 19 mins and 11 seconds
Footwear: Birkenstock clogs
NOTES: Dawn chorus, waterbirds. One pause, mid stride, when I am startled by a bird taking off just a whisker away from me. Listen for long grasses and rushes over boardwalks. Distant vehicles.

WALK 4:
Where: Coogoorah Park to home, via Ingram Street
What: Bitumen street
Location: Anglesea
Date: 12 February, 2016
Companion: None
Time of Day: 6.55am
Duration: 5 minutes and 1 second
Footwear: Birkenstock clogs
NOTES: This is a short walk. Some sound issues. Tread comes and goes. Birdsong, featuring magpies, king parrots, wrens, finches.
WALK 5:
Where: Urquhart’s Bluff along the beach to the Mermaid’s Pond and back
What: Sand and shoreline
Location: Between Point RoadKnight and Airey’s Inlet
Date: 12 February, 2016
Companion: Loretta (dog)
Time of Day: 11.30am
Duration: 18 mins and 22 seconds
Footwear: Keen’s sandals
NOTES: Encounter with off-lead dogs and a family group early in the walk (approx. 2:50 – 3:00 mins in) may startle the listener; midpoint poo pickup necessitated a pause in the recording, mostly sand and shoreline walking but a couple of small runnels of water crossed, listen out for biplane on approach, and also on its return flight along the beach. Recording ends abruptly.

WALK 6:
Where: Fraser Avenue and environs
What: Bitumen streets
Location: Anglesea
Date: 12 February, 2016
Companion: None
Time of Day: 8:50pm
Duration: ?
Footwear: Mizuno Neutral Balance, with orthotics
NOTES: Right on twilight, a brisk loop of the local streets. Crickets and bugs, adolescent boys, dogs.
WALK 7:
Where: Atung Terrace and environs
What: Bitumen streets, some gravel, some grassland
Location: Dromana
Date: 28 September, 2016
Companion: None
Time of Day: 5.09pm
Duration: 24 mins and 27 seconds
Footwear: MUJI slippers, then HOKA ONEONE walking shoes
NOTES: A loop of the local streets. Birdlife of great variety. Local traffic. Two encounters with locals and their dogs. Discussion of a local incident involving a gas leak on a worksite.

WALK 8:
Where: Dromana Foreshore
What:
Location: Dromana
Date: 5 October, 2016 (Go Doggies!)
Companion: None
Time of Day:
Duration:
Footwear: HOKA ONEONE walking shoes
NOTES: This recording is missing.
WALK 9:

Where: Epsom Road, and environs

What: Footpaths, bluestone lanes and beyond

Location: Inner western suburb of Kensington, and surrounds

Date: 10 November, 2016 (US Presidential Election)

Companions: Unknown

Time of Day:

Duration:

Footwear:

NOTES: There is no extant recording of this walk.

The recording apparatus has still to be recovered.

******* These field notes appear to apply to sound recordings on USB sticks prepared by The Candidate with a view to inclusion in her doctoral submission.
I think I sit quite uniquely in the landscape. And it’s sort of funny. It’s a really funny position to be in. It’s not like I’m championed or I got all those things that are missing, but it’s sort of like I’ve got some kind of ‘elderly woman’ status, because there’s no one ahead of me, that’s older, that I know of... Dorothy would have been the next main peer, and she was much older than me. And Dorothy is dead. And Dorothy was totally ignored. All the other women who had been writing, I just don’t know them... They didn’t mentor me, even obliquely. Because I didn’t know of them. They weren’t there. They’d dropped out. And see I’m in my sixties, so it’s old I suppose, but... I feel like there’s this weird kind of respect. (LAUGHS). I had it for a little while where I sort of thought: Oh, what the hell’s going on? Maybe they’ll do my play? No! They’re not going to do my play! It’s... ‘Would you like to come and talk...?’ Yeah, sure, that’s fine. It’s sort of like I’m in a really odd place... And I’ve also got to an odd place personally, because I think I’ve got three plays left in me... Maybe as they get done I’ll be able to see if there’s anything else...
PART ONE
WRIGHT

- towards essayesque dismemoir -
Sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly.

Jerry, in 'The Zoo Story', by Edward Albee, 1958
DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Examiner 1: __________________________ (your name goes here)
Examiner 2: __________________________ (your name goes here)
Supervisor 1: __________________________ (your name goes here)
Supervisor 2: __________________________ (your name goes here)
Docent 1: Mr Buster Loose (your name goes here)
Docent 2: Ms Wanda Lusst (your name goes here)
The Candidate: __________________________ (your name goes here)
The Doppelgänger: Ms Gina Moxley (your name goes here)

Others in minor roles, including: Congregants and Wit(h)nesses, Panellists, AWAs (Anonymous Women Artists), Small Brown Dogs (SBDs), Saints, Muses and more.
Congratulations on being invited to essamine this essaysque dismemoir. We hope you enjoy the ride.

Before we proceed, we ask you to note that the word 'essamine' is not a spelling or a typographical error but a purpose-built neologism carefully crafted under RMIT non/fictionLab conditions to enhance your experience. Please take a moment to familiarise yourself with the emergency exits indicated throughout this document via the use of the symbol: ∆ It’s meant to be a bell. Pretend it is.

At the sign of the sound of the ∆ we urge you to STEP away from the document and take a break. You may wish to add in a walk — actual or virtual. (Samples of the latter are to be supplied.) For our own part, we like to take an NLNL Dancebreak whenever urged to do so. (See nolightsnolycra.com or check out the VicHealth funded app at dancebreak.com.au)

You also get your own font. Abadi MT Condensed in both Light and Bold is used through the text to communicate directly with you, as Congregant and/or Wit(h)ness. You may wish to flip through the document now, with an eye out for it? Go ahead. Flip. Skim. Scan. Boogie. For that is precisely the approach we urge of you as we sally forth.

For this is an interactive w/rite, right? (Wrong ‘w/rite’.) It’s a wright, which means you will be welcome to join in at key moments along the way. The last thing we want is that you sit there, ploughing your way through ponderous prose, when you could be having a PEE instead.

For this is a work best viewed askance. As in, from above and below, around and beside. To assist you in your essamination, certain tools will be supplied. In the real life real time kit accompanying this document you would find, among other accessories:

1. A pair of white gloves
2. A magnifying glass
3. A USB containing artifacts (and walks) for your listening and viewing pleasure.
Please note that if the document now before you is a PDF file or any other kind of digital text then it is a B & W (and therefore doctored) version.

That means it is not the state-of-the-art (SOTA) version that is intended to be encountered live, in three dimensions and in living colour. It is our hope that you may have that experience before the essamination period is over.

As a Warm-Up please complete the following FAQS and refer to your answers as necessary for a PEE (Premium Essamination Experience):

My preferred time of day for essaming this document is:

My preferred location for essaming this document is:

The number of hours I am willing to devote to this experience in any one sitting is:

If I am essaming this document on a plane, my beverage of choice will be:

If I am essaming this document on a plane, my destination of choice will be:

My preferred attire for essaming this document is:
INTRODUCING YOUR DOCENTS:

MR BUSTER LOOSE*

Buster Loose, Visiting Fellow, is an affiliate of the Academy of Applied Facial Hair. His current research focus is entitled *Sartorial or Tonsorial: What Maketh The Man The Man?*

Recent contributions include *Bearding The Liar* (2013) and a seminal performance installation, with sideburns, the acclaimed *Dressing/Re/Dressing* (2014).

In 2017 he will release his first album: *The Mo’ I See You, The Mo’ I Want You*. Mr Loose is lead co-author of the forthcoming *Please Supply Own Title*. (IN PRESS)

* Portrait photography by Jane Murphy.
MS WANDA LUSST

Ms Lusst is (Acting) Professor of Manicure at a University of The Third Age. She publishes widely on The Fingernail as Art. Recent jottings include: *Lack, Lacquer, Lack Her: Varnishing the Vanishing* (2015) in Archaeologies of (G)loss. Ms Lusst is lead co-author of the forthcoming *Please Supply Own Title*. (IN PRESS)
△ PARADE OF DOC-NETS (SP), DOGNATORIES (SP) AND WIT(H)NESSES (SP)

Once all ceremonial matters have been completed, you will be requested to inscribe something meaningful in the Visitors Book. You may wish to prepare so as to avoid spelling mistakes. Use your best handwriting.

The space will look something like this:

NAME: __________________________________________________________

REMARKS: ______________________________________________________

NAME: _________________________________________________________

REMARKS: _______________________________________________________

NAME: _________________________________________________________

REMARKS: _______________________________________________________

NAME: _________________________________________________________

REMARKS: _______________________________________________________
Official Declaration of Doctoring:

**NOTE: THIS PAGE MAY BE INCORRECTLY PLACED**

Parts of this work may have been doctored along some or all of the following lines**.

To doctor- verb, transitive: to *doctor* something

1. to restore to original or working condition; repair, mend. *She was able to doctor the chipped vase with a little plastic cement.*
2. to tamper with, falsify: *He doctored the birthdate on his passport*
3. to add a foreign substance to; adulterate: *Someone had doctored her drink*
4. to revise, alter or adapt (a photograph, manuscript, etc.) in order to serve a specific purpose or to improve the material: *to doctor a play*
5. to award a doctorate to: *He did his undergraduate work in the U.S. and was doctored at Oxford.*

** All definitions sourced from mobile phone app Dictionary.com unless otherwise indicated

Δ Use this space for your preferred alternative definition. Or not.
FAQ: WHAT IS A DOCENT?***

NOTE: THIS PAGE MAY BE INCORRECTLY PLACED

What is a docent?
Where do I get one?
What do they do?
How many will I need?
What do I feed them?
How do I look after them?
Are the expensive?
Where do they sleep?
What if they fight?
Do they come with a clothing allowance?
Can they be exchanged?
Will they age in the same way that I do?
Is anything to be made of the fact that docent is an anagram of doc-net?
What if my docent is a drag?

*** Feel free to supply your own answers. Or get your docent to do it.
Prefatory Remarks in a Florid Font

LOOSE: What would you like to know?

LUSSIT: Everything. You have to tell everything.

LOOSE: Perhaps a more pertinent Question is, what do they need to know?

LUSSIT: They? Oh. They.

LOOSE: Lovely bash, by the way....

LUSSIT: Thank you. Moreover... How helpful need we be? Guise and Guile? Inscrutability? Hair and Nails? Falsies and Footnotes! The latter, as you may know, Buster, is the Title of one of my most recent Publications on Issues of Veracity in 21st Century Schol....

LOOSE: Later Wanda. Perhaps. For now, Reader, we plan to be both Obsolete and Wilful in employing both literary and lexical Archaisms liberally though out this Document which has fallen to us for Doctoring by Default in the Absence of...

LUSSIT: Since the Disappearance of...

LOOSE: (in unison) You Know Who.

LUSSIT: (in unison) You Know Who.

LOOSE: Obsolescence Reels OK!

LUSSIT: We are also cognizant that this Exhortation appears before you in a most bothersome Font.
LOOSE: We call upon your Forbearance.

LUSST: As we move to make alternative Arrangements forthwith.

LOOSE: Meantime, whilst we Upskill or Outsource ourselves Typographically, we draw your eye to another PhD Dissertation in a Font far more Vexatious than this, to wit Margaret Trail’s Submission, cast as a Thesis in the Form of a Cloud, and entitled, There’s The Siren: Aurolity and Representation of the Sounds of Australian Football.

TF: Whistle Blast

LOOSE: Go Doggies!

LUSST: That Dissertation was presented in Dakota-Handwriting font on unbound Pages, submitted for Examination in 2009, duly approved and later further lauded. Bravo Doctor Trail!

LOOSE: We further direct you to a doctoral Dissertation by Michelle Crawford, 2010, entitled Fingerprints: Exploration of Identity, Community and Place, as later referenced by Krauth (2011). This Thesis employs an Array of Fonts to distribute and distinguish Authorial Voices throughout its Pages.

LUSST: Or else, to a Paper that appeared in Text Journal, Volume 20, Issue 1, in 2016, entitled: ‘The Visible Voice: Typographical Distinction in Thesis Writing.’ The author, Professor Welby Ings gives Examples to support his Contention that ‘Although the use of typographic design is not a ubiquitous practice in higher research exegeses, it is becoming increasingly evident in the fields of creative writing, architecture and visual communication design.’
LOOSE: And of all this is not Precedent enough we direct you to our forthcoming Contribution: Fonts of All Wisdom: Serif, Sans-Seraphim, Loose, B & Lust, W in The Manicured Manuscript.

LUSST: If we ever finish it!

LOOSE: We crave your Indulgence, then, with our louche Lettering and indeed with the promiscuous Vociferance of this Submission, which, given our Predicament, is offered in a Spirit of Play and Experimentation...

LUSST: ...or else of Despair! Ruination! And Hopelessness!

LOOSE: As we unfold and... and... Help me, Wanda! Help! Help me Wanda!

LUSST: Distend?

LOOSE: Distend. Yes. Distend the Affordances of the Florilegium as the final and most fitting Effulgence of our Disquisition.

LUSST: Of our Disquisition? Of a Disqui...

LOOSE: Of this Practice-based Research....

LUSST: We may elaborate upon pluralising Pronouns forthwith - concerning the Notion of Elder-Flowering and the embodied, dare we say, lived Experience of Ageing in Creative Practice. And in Public Places.

LOOSE: Yes. That. Whatever.

LUSST: This Florilegium, then, speaks to an ongoing and unfolding Investigation, and is offered in its current...

LOOSE: Assemblage?

LUSST: There is a better Word.
LOOSE: There is always a better Word.

LUST: Assemblage as a boisterous Bouquet, an unruly Archive, a chaotic Concordance of all we/she/they (Please Strike Out as Appropriate) had to show for her/him/ourselves, through the Years Two Thousand and Thirteen to Two Thousand and Sixteen as... as... as... 

LOOSE: As One?

LUST: As One approached the final Phase of One’s Candidature. Oh, this is a fucking Nightmare.

FX: Whistle Blast

LOOSE: Herein, then, an essaying upon One’s Industry and Endeavour over this Period while at the same remove a Bid to proscribe a clear, uninhabited Space in its Centre, a symbolic Space of...

LUST: Space?

LOOSE: Perfect. A Space of Space.

LUST: Of Absence, of the Vanishing, Of Acts of Erasure. Of Effacement...

FX: Whistle Blast

LOOSE: No! No! No! Too much, too fast. And it was, it was, One intended it was, always to be a Symbolic Space of Space for Liveness and Display wherein, through Rhapsodic Utterances - whilst disporting oneself spiritedly upon one’s Poor Sore Feet - the Bulk of one’s Confabulations concerning Essayisque Dismemoir could, these Years past, have been conducted.
LUSST: But must we ask our Congregants and Witnesses, then, to be mindful that the core Contribution of this Inquiry has gone out, Live, over many Months, via Exhibition, Installation, and in the Carnival that is the Conference?

LOOSE: Or do we remind them that this Portfolio, then, is merely the Dust of those Exertions, the Reliquaries of due Diligence in the Years past.

LUSST: Either. All. Both.

LOOSE: Suffice it to say that in unearthing and indeed in reassembling this Almanac....

LUSST: This Folio...?

LOOSE: Better. This Dossier....?

LUSST: No. This... There is a better Word!

LOOSE: I like Folio. Folio is good. From the Latin, folium, for leaf. With its leaf and its...

LUSST: Leaves... and its Leave-takings!

LOOSE: In reassembling this Folio, we made significant Discoveries about the Form of the Work and indeed, about its Contents, and above all, about how it might be doctored for Examination.

LUSST: Or not.

LOOSE: Or not. And so, as The Candidate did before abandoning her Post, we exhort Readers to approach this...

LUSST: Anarchive!
LOOSE: What?

LUSST: It is “Anarchive”? This far better Word is a Concept propounded by Members of an International Community of Scholars, under the Banner of The SenseLab: a Laboratory for Thought in Motion, founded by Erin Manning in 2004. What an Anarchive can be is to be invented they cry at their Webpage accessed on 17 December 2016, and located here: http://senselab.ca/wp2/immediations/anarchiving/

LOOSE: Its Procedures grow from within its Processes, they say, but more poetically, thus: ‘Anarchiving catches as a Kite catches the Wind. Its Process is bearing Witness to its own Undecidedness.’

LOOSE: Accordingly, in our Undecidedness we exhort the Reader to approach our Anarchive with an eye to its Construction and Tone, and to eschew close Scrutiny unless invited.

LUSST: We shall do our best to guide you through the Matter as we go. So, Buster... What would you like to know?

LOOSE: First things first, Wanda, and pardon my French, but WTF is a Florilegium?

FX: Whistle Blast

Co-Author by Docents: Buster Loose (Distinguished Fellow)

and

Wanda Lusst (Acting) Professor of Applied Manicure, University of The Third Age

This __________________, in the Year Two Thousand and __________________
WTF IS A FLORILEGIUM?

AN ILLUSTRATED LECTURE

Peta Murray, Phd candidate, RMIT 2013-2016

* Apologies for pixelated image, we don't know how to drive this thing
She begins with a self portrait. She took this photo. She is not a trained photographer, but an amateur in the truest sense of the word. She has a decent ‘point and shoot’ camera and is fascinated by all forms, but especially the botanical. Her re-embodiment through new acuities of hands, eyes, ears, voice is a theme of this project. It also amuses her to play with the trope of the ‘little old lady’ as a flower-fancier. But does this belong in a Florilegium? It does in this one, which is to be a compendium not only of blooms, and blossoms, but of witherings and decay. But before we get ahead of ourselves, we must ask: A Florilegium, WTF?

In medieval Latin, a Florilegium was a compilation of excerpts from other writings. Florilegium and anthology share the same linguistic roots. Etymologically, the word draws together the Latin, flos, meaning flower and the verb legere, meaning to gather. A Florilegium, then, is a gathering of flowers, and in this context becomes a collection of blooms, curated extracts from a larger work.

The first Florilegia appearing in medieval times, were collections of extracts drawn from the writings of early Christian authors, pagan philosophers and classical texts. Their purpose was to combine passages that illustrated particular themes or demonstrated certain kinds of dogma or doctrinal thought. As time passed the term ‘florilegium’ was extended and came to apply to any compilation or omnibus of literary or scientific character.

Her leaning was to interpret this as license to supply ragged fragments of unfinished texts, lopped from their beginnings and/or their endings, as if torn from their source materials.
It is here that we find the term *florilegia* appearing in its botanical context, emerging alongside the arts of botanical illustration and the publication of texts we know as herbals – books describing the culinary and medical applications of plants and herbs.

Florilegia of the sixteenth and seventeenth century were often commissioned works, devised by artists at the behest of wealthy patrons who sought to capture the beauty of exotic plants newly imported into Europe from the east. One of the most celebrated is Joseph Banks’ *Florilegium*.

She was able to examine the original plates in the library of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney during the course of her candidature. Is a reference needed for this? And does this viewing have any bearing on the matter, or is it purposefully tangential, intentionally tendril-esque?

Production of commissioned, bespoke florilegia peaked in the seventeenth century, and these works remain among the most valuable collectibles of today’s rare book world, typically portraying the rarest and most exotic of plants. Modern florilegia are few and far between, and their focus is no longer so much upon cataloguing the exotic, but upon testifying to the existence of the endangered, and upon those bordering on the extinct.

These days florilegia are likely to draw upon singular collections of plants in discreet gardens or unique locales.

This metaphor, and its relevance to *The Candidate* as ageing subject, was to have been unpacked further in the future, should she have lasted so long.

The creation of florilegia is, as it has always been, extremely time-consuming, especially in the production of the artistic plates by skilled botanical illustrators. These are ‘life-drawings’ of sorts and must be botanically accurate and scientifically precise, showing all the parts of a plant. For this reason alone, florilegia remain among the most extravagant and expensive of all books produced. It is intended that our own Florilegium, in whatever final form it assumes, shall have something of these ‘rare book’ and antique qualities about it. It is to consist of some kind of container that includes not only text but reliquaries of this research.
If she ever finished this PhD she vowed to get herself a botanically accurate 'life drawing' in the form of a tattoo on her left shoulder. It would be of *passiflora cinnabarina*, a species indigenous to Victoria. It's a lovely red bloom on a vigorous climber and would speak very nicely to the *telopea speciosissima* (the waratah) already tattooed on her right breast. She would like to become a human florilegium.


For further information see:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florilegium
Also,

Whatever its form, we are determined ours shall be beautifully composed, with high production values, so as to make it a pleasure to hold and to peruse.
PREFATORY REMARKS IN TIMES NEW ROMAN (REPRISE)

LOOSE: What would you like to know?

LUSST: Everything. You have to tell everything\(^2\).

LOOSE: I would like to know why a Number suggestive of a Footnote continues to dog your Response to my every Overture. But perhaps a more pressing Question is: what do they need to know?

LUSST: They? Oh. They.

LOOSE: Lovely Sash, by the way…

LUSST: Thank you. Moreover…

LOOSE: More. Over.


LOOSE: We crave your Indulgence, then, with our…

PAUSE

FX: Whistle Blast

LONGER PAUSE

FX: Whistle Blast

LX: Fade to Black

SILENCE

FX: Whistle Blast

LX: Lights up

\(^{2}\)
LUSST: Excellent! It may by now be apparent from the Above Meta-Theatrical Moves that Issues with the Manicure of the Manuscript have been for the most Part addressed and Typographical Assistance has been secured. We feel confident to proceed. What shall follow, in the Form of a Florilegium-on-the-Fly, is to comprise Findings we find salvageable from the Compost. They shall be dis/played to Congregants and Wit(h)nesses for Consideration in Seasonal Succession.

LOOSE: Those not salvageable may need to be…

LUSST: Buster!

LOOSE: But Wanda, not all of the Fruits may be… shall we say… Edible?

LUSST: It’s true. There’s quite a Hoard.

LOOSE: For reasons of Occupational Health and Safety we may deem it necessary to…

LUSST: Yes. But let us not put one’s Cart before one’s Horse. Buster.

LOOSE: Indeed.

LUSST: Let us not jump to Conclusions!

LOOSE: So. Are we agreed?

LUSST: I believe we are. Conclusions may well arrive in due Course, as we sort and scrutinise the Scrivenings.

LOOSE: We shall take a Turn about?

LUSST: Yes. I am about to make my Exit.

LOOSE: Marvellous.

LUSST: I don’t know about you, Buster, but Wanda has long had a Penchant for the Making of an Exit.

LOOSE: Buster does too. A rather lovely Penchant.
LUSST: You shall witness me withdraw. After which, you shall not see me. I shall occupy, for that Time, some Kind of other Space, wherein I shall nail and file more Artifacts that may inform our Disquisition.

LOOSE: You are a Marvel.

LUSST: Thank you, Darling. I am often told I am a Thing of Wanda! And you, Herr Loose?

LOOSE: Where?

LUSST: There! Ah! Such a fragrant Pomade!

LOOSE: Better?

LUSST: Yes. You are very Smart.

LOOSE: I shall stay here to display and to array for our Learned Friends that which I regard as being somehow Composed or otherwise Fit. We may begin, I think, with W/rites of Some of Her.

LUSST: Some of Her what?

LOOSE: Sum. The Sum of Her. Summary W/rites of Summer.

PAUSE

LUSST: Is that my Cue? That pregnant Pause? Do I repair, now?

LOOSE: Yes. Repair. And repair!

LUSST: Away with me!

EXIT Wanda Lusst.

LOOSE: Now. (TO ESSAMINER) What would you like to know?

LUSST: (OFFPAGE) Everything! You have to tell everything!³
A REPORT TO THE EXAMINERS

(IN THE ABSENCE OF THE CANDIDATE)

IN THE FORM OF

AN APOLOGIA BY FLORILEGIUM
SUMMER
PETA:

*Things That Fall Over*: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda. We call it TTFO, for short.

ROBIN:

TTFO in its initial incarnation was to be a site specific performance piece at The State Library of Victoria, the oldest library in Australia. Built in 1856 as a hub for the civic education and information of the populace, it saw, and still sees, itself as guardian and nurturer of the culture. We were to have been performing TTFO in Queens Hall, the original Reading room. It would have been a perfect fit for this premiere performance with its sense of historical grandeur, creative resistance and civic transformation! Drumroll, please!

PETA:

TTFO was conceived as arts-based activism; an act of culture-jamming.

ROBIN:

Working collaboratively — dare one say collectively — Peta, Robin, Jo, with a composer, musicians, choristers and other members of the sisters-in-the-hood we (MORE)
ROBIN:
will hoped to build an anarchic extravaganza in response to mounting evidence locally and abroad of the erasure of women from public and artistic space.

PETA:
In this work we will were going to reverse the existing world order. Just this once, we are were going to take up all the space and make all the noise. At the same time we were exploring hoping to explore the core human experiences of entropy, of failure, and of in-between-ness in a celebration of lives lived in the ‘inter-land’.

ROBIN:
Audience enters would have entered up the spectacular black and grey marble staircase of the State Library of Victoria, stepping in the declivities on the stone steps worn by countless feet. They would have passed stained glass windows and into a large square space.

PETA:
It’s dim, a bit unfinished. There are would have been two small rostra in different areas of the space, and chairs, some scattered some in several stacks. Two long dark wings extend North and South from either side.

ROBIN:
There are would have been several hastily set-up looking art installations around the (MORE)
ROBIN:

walls- a Mac classic computer, yarn-bombed in camouflage colours; the head of a toy dog with wires protruding on a tray with a picture of Caravaggio’s Salomé with the Head of John the Baptist.

PETA:

A rounder’s bat & ball with a trophy, a tube of Goanna Oil anti-inflammatory cream; a slim novella in a set of antique scales used for weighing babies.

ROBIN:

Actors with torches could have invited the audience to talk with them about what they see and what these things might mean.

PETA:

There could have been a sense of the sharing of secret information and facts, a feeling of the clandestine, the potentially dangerous.

ROBIN:

Presentation of TTFO here in 2013 would have completed a transformative journey of collaboration as a dynamic, inter-generational, community of artists.

PETA:

Next The Weaver would have taken charge, to set the scene. She’s part Narrator, part Ring Mistress. (MORE)
PETA:

Women’s creative work is under threat. The group’s previous venue has been violently closed down and they are determined to present their performance here as best they can.

ROBIN:

Everyone would have assisted, the actors dismantling the installations, audience taking their seats. Members of the choir would have been undercover in the audience: half ‘pregnant creatives’, half ‘Sisters in the Hoods’—Pussy Riot balaclavas in their pockets.

PETA:

Act 1 was to have been played on rostra in among the audience so they are implicated in the action.

ROBIN:

Act 2 saw a shift to a Sanitarium and The Bindery – a hellish, absurdist vision of forced surgery to purge women of their creations, the mass burning of books, a martial arts sequence and a chopper rescue à la Miss Saigon.

PETA:

Act 3 is an impossibly ideal Haven for Creative women and the Coda is to be was to have been a short detachable, standalone oratorio – the aim of the whole endeavour: Swansong!!! The Musical!!!
ROBIN:
At times we were in mad sci-fi territory. Ursula Le Guin and Margaret Atwood spring to mind. There were crazed nods to theatrical traditions from many eras. The heightened characterization of medieval mystery plays, circus, farce and contemporary musicals was to propel the action.

PETA:
Invisibility and visibility, shape-shifting, dramatic escapes, magic costume changes, tricks of lighting, sleights of hand.

ROBIN:
The poor theatre, creaky wheels of making the performance were to be visible, worked by the increasingly overloaded Weaver. Australian women artists were referenced.

PETA:
The music would have been beautiful, eminently hummable: Rembetika meets Kurt Weill, The Sound of Music meets Aretha.

ROBIN:
Our Creative Development process made it clear this preposterous mix could work. The performers were funny and fearless, the choir harmonious and willing, the jokes and references made everyone laugh and the musicians and music were strong. (MORE)
ROBIN:
The work was a mix of Grand Guignol meets Girls Own Adventure, Dorothy Hewett meets Mary Poppins.

PETA:
The use of mechanical toys - a wind-up dog, a remote controlled helicopter, a magic self-typing typewriter, light emerging from opening books, created a sense of playful and wondrous surprises...

ROBIN:
TTFO is work that would have struck a chord, even as it hit a nerve. We had an amazing response to what was to be, effectively, a public act of reclamation and topsy-turvydom on an epic scale.

PETA:
The Victorian Women’s Trust are on board, the State Library of Victoria, individual donors, and through our social media activities – a creative development blog etc, we have had one big and ever-expanding TTFO family...

ROBIN:
We are taking a long-range view of TTFO. We are planning a series of public manifestations and ‘apparitions’ of the work in different arenas through the first half of 2013 and into 2014.
PETA:

Verity in the Domed Reading Room? Open rehearsals? Public choir practice...?

ROBIN:

Another goal of our Creative Development was to think about how we could create an easily replicable production template for community touring, so that’s what we came up with. A work that can could be made in modular easy-to-assemble sequences.

PETA:

Through staging TTFO we were to reclaim space. We were to turn the world upside down. In this world, women would get all the fight scenes. Women would fly the choppers. Women would sing the love songs.

ROBIN:

Women would despatch the traitor, and wield the blowtorches.

PETA:

We would get all the swordplay, and we’d get to tell all the jokes.

ROBIN:

TTFO is was to be a bold imaginative work set in an imagined future, not so far from our own. It is would be a romp, a musical, yet with serious intent. (MORE)
ROBIN:

Peta described it as a ‘monstrous’ work, but in the face of the monstrous TTFO is a fiercely comic work of hope and joy.

PETA:

We wanted to be a startling and provocative presence in Australia’s 2013 performance milieu and beyond. We wanted to puncture cultural bubbles of pomposity and inequity and exclusiveness with darts of insight that are as amusing as they are serious.

ROBIN:

Things That Fall Over.

PETA:

An anti-musical of a novel...

ROBIN:

Inside a reading of a play...

PETA:

With footnotes...

ROBIN:

And oratorio-as-coda.
PETA:
It's farce and it's furious!

ROBIN:
See it once, and you need never go to the theatre again!
A LECTURE: WANTED, DEAD OR ALIVE

I begin by acknowledging the First Australians upon whose traditional lands we meet today and pay my respects to the Ngannawal people and their elders, past and present. And to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people here with us today.

I’m going to keep this informal. I like to move around a lot as I’m talking. Feel free to chime in as we go. If there’s anything that’s unclear, or something you’d like more detail about, let me know. Otherwise I’m going to free range. So. I appear before you as a Living Breathing Australian Playwright. I think that in itself is quite a significant thing. I don’t know how many of you have encountered a Living Breathing Australian Playwright before. You may be familiar with a range of Dead Playwrights. And you may be familiar with playwrights from other cultures. But Living Breathing Australian Playwrights are fairly thin on the ground. And I’m going to talk a little bit about that as I try to communicate to you something of my enthusiasm for this bizarre trade I ply.

I always like to start by drawing our attention to the language that we’re going to be dealing with today. So if I can find a whiteboard marker that works, let us look first of all at the word ‘playwright’ itself. It’s a gem of a word. ‘Play’ up the front, its roots in the Dutch language, I believe - Middle Dutch - and a connection to the idea of leaping. So, something that contains this idea of leaping energy or leaping thought. Then, bringing up the rear, the word ‘wright’, w-r-i-g-h-t. A hoary old word from the English language that immediately attaches us to tradespeople and to guilds.

If you know the word in other contexts, of course, you may think of a shipwright or cartwright, a wheelwright or wainwright. You may think of any of those things, and they are artisan crafts, connected with manual
work, and playwrights are, by extension, a part of that family. Now, that’s bizarre. Think about the literary arts. If you had a novelist in front of you, or a poet – as you may do from time to time as part of your program – they are not going to be defiantly attaching themselves to medieval guilds. But I am, because I see playwriting practice as a manual, workmanlike – work-person-like – practice, with discernible skills, with particular tools, and over the years I’ve had the opportunity to play with those. And so my purpose today is to tell you a little bit about how I turned into one of these bizarre, medieval creatures, and to talk about two or three of the plays that I have created over this time – that I have made, that I have built – one from early in my career, one from mid-career, and one recent. So that’s what I’m hoping to cover in the time that we have.

I often think about what made me a playwright. I see two clear sources that somehow tracked together and turned me into this thing. One is that my family moved around a lot when I was a child, so I soon learned not to make friends, except with books. Mostly I sat in the corner and got ready for our next house move. And I became an observer, an outsider and quite shy. I could talk to people, I wasn’t crippled by shyness, but I was an introvert because of this and I think I became guarded and more disposed to watch the world, listen to the world, tune into the world. So that capacity to watch and to listen, and what’s more – to listen between, to listen into and around the gaps, the silences, the spaces between what people are saying and what people are doing – is a set of skills that started to form in me early, before I was aware of what they were. So that’s one trajectory in my life in my craft.

The other – and you’ll laugh at this, but it’s serious – is that my father is a carpenter. Now I’m the oldest daughter in my family and I was born in the late 1950s so I wasn’t singled out as being a likely successor to my Dad in
his trade. (Although I’ve gone on to learn some woodworking skills in later life.) But I think living around a carpenter, around someone who project-managed renovations to our home and who brought his practice, his trade, into our house, exposed me early to certain ideas and habits of thought and certain ways of seeing the world that have served me well as a playwright. As I go on today you may well hear me talk about playwriting in terms of physics and geometry. Because they are the underlying languages that, to me, make the most sense, in terms of the work that I do. Why? Because I’m setting out to build something that can stand up in time, and in space. Not unlike a building. It might be a hut. It might be a skyscraper. There are different kinds of plays, as there are different kinds of buildings. But the core principles – of scoping out a site, of working out how the thing is going to stand, of working out who it is for, who is going to use it…? All of those kinds of considerations that were so real to my father as a carpenter who became a builder, are also real to me as a writer. As a playwright, working in time and space. Because of course, as you know, with plays, yes they sometimes come to exist as a legible document – I have one here, a work by Patricia Corneliaus (LBAP), a play called Love, in print - but actually that’s a rare thing, these days, for a playwright. It’s hard to get your work produced, and it is even rarer to see it preserved in this kind of literary form. So it has its ephemeral moment, its flowering in time and space. Some people see it. Most people don’t. And on you go.

Those two strands, I think, were significant in my early life. As I said, we moved around a lot and when we finally came back to Australia and settled down – we’d been living overseas for a couple of years – one of my teachers spotted my capacity for performance. I must have been in some terrible school play in Grade Six, and she said to my mother: Have you noticed how ___ somehow comes out of herself when she’s performing? So my parents sent me off to Marian Street Theatre School in
Sydney - it was a Community Theatre company in Killara - and away I went to do weekly Drama lessons there. And it was a funny time. It was the sixties. So when I’m talking about ‘doing speech and drama’ it was (BBC English) ‘Speech and Drama’ and it was very much, you know, the old school from the English tradition. Their ideas of what theatre is were mostly informed by what was on in the West End. We had only a limited sense of what an Australian play might be at that point. This was just around the time when – I’ll give a prize in a moment to the person who can tell me what the work was that suddenly made a sort of Australian theatrical identity for us – but this was around the time when we were still doing George Bernard Shaw and Shakespeare and we thought that’s what theatre was. Now, luckily for me I had other very significant theatre encounters. I fell in love with theatre through going to that drama school and I went off every week in my black leotard and tights and did my deep breathing and my slow moving and learned a lot of things that have served me very well. I started to go and see everything that I possibly could. I went to everything that the Marian Street theatre put on, so I saw all these magnificent plays. Terrible productions, often, but one could still see the plays, the bones of them beneath. I became a kind of theatre nerd. (Any other theatre nerds in the room? Ah! Good!) And on weekends I would go off to whatever was on in Sydney at that time. Now, the Elizabethan Theatre Trust out in Newtown – it’s gone now, it’s a block of flats – used to show amazing things. I had extraordinary encounters with theatre, as a young person. I was sixteen, seventeen years old. I don’t know whether this will mean anything to any of you – but I saw Glenda Jackson on stage as Hedda Gabler, in the play of the same name. I saw Peter Brooks’ production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, where the fairies were trapeze artists, and never touched the ground. The entire fantasia was played above my head. I saw Lindsay Kemp, giving his Jean Genet, in Flowers. I
had extraordinary encounters with theatre that was often very sophisticated and even beyond me in terms of what my adolescent head could handle. But there was something about what I was receiving in terms of the imagery, and in terms of the language and in terms of the energy, the frisson of excitement that was in that space when you sat there and the lights went down and everyone shut up. Where, suddenly, something started to appear before you in the seeing place. The Seeing Place. The word ‘theatre’ means ‘the seeing place’. The origin of it is in the Greek idea of ‘to see.’ ‘Theory’ and ‘theatre’ are related, etymologically, I believe… And this idea of the seeing place, the place of visions, this place where things appear before you and then disappear was magnificent, and hypnotic for me as a young person. What was I going to see next? The sense of possibility, the sense of danger, the sense of risk, the sense of how many times things went wrong… (For you know, if you go to the theatre a lot you soon start to realise that most theatre is terrible. (They’re laughing, they’re nodding. They know!) Most theatre is terrible. Why? Not because people are unskilled, or people can’t tell. Because it’s hard. It’s really hard to bring all of those people together – and their egos – and somehow, to make something whereby all are telling the same lie, so that it somehow manages to hold together briefly, in that magical hour, or two hours that we spend together in the seeing place.

By the time I finished high school I was entranced with the theatre. I had performed a lot. I made my first professional appearance in Macbeth as Macduff’s son at the age of about twelve at the Marian Street Theatre –He has killed me, mother! Run away, I pray you! – was my line. I got to die. It was fantastic. So I did all of that and by the time I finished high school I thought: I want to do this! I really want to do this!!
So at sixteen I went off and tried to get into NIDA. Failed. Very few sixteen-year-olds get into NIDA. It’s very good that they don’t. Instead, I ended up at UNSW in the School of Drama and I’m grateful for that time. I had a broad education in theatre history and exposure to whatever passions my tutors and lecturers brought with them - French Classical Theatre, commedia dell’arte, a semester on Japanese theatre - so an eclectic introduction to what theatre was. It blew my tiny mind after being at Marian Street with George Bernard Shaw all of those years. The thing that I remember being most excited about when I got to university was the Europeans. Ionesco (DP) changed my life. I had never seen anything like it when I encountered his plays. The Chairs! The Lesson! Now before I run too fast ahead of myself, can anyone think what play I was alluding to before, that started to give us a sense of identity...? The Summer of The Seventeenth Doll? Indeed it was! (Have you read Love, by Patricia Cornelius (LBAP)? There you go, that’s for you.) Yes. The Doll. And I want to say in the same breath that when Lawler’s play won the competition that put it on the map – and it’s a great play and we’re thrilled to have it – it did so alongside another winning play, a play called The Torrents by a female writer, named Oriel Gray (DP). And her play has disappeared and The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll endures and I say that because (a) there’s more women in the room than men and I also say it because (b) I’m about to tell you about my work and my own writing practice and in so doing I want to fly the flag for the telling of women’s stories. I think what kept me excited about theatre for so long was the possibility that I could somehow tell women’s stories through these particular tools and devices I had. And I could see – because I learned about them at university – that there were women playwrights out there. Dorothy Hewett (DP) was a particular influence on me. Is anyone familiar with her work? Which one? The Man from Mukinupin? Pandora’s Cross? The Chapel Perilous? Again,
a work that changed my life. Because it is so bold, stylistically and so – bolshie – as Dorothy Hewett was. I think of Dorothy as a kind of foul-mouthed mermaid. It’s a pretty tough sort of a play, and for that period, this was an exciting thing to encounter. Dorothy Hewett had a long life and wrote an extraordinary body of work. And no two plays are alike. Every play that Dorothy wrote is a stylistic invention; an experiment with form, an experiment with construction. And so, for me, the encounters I had with her work were eye opening and always exciting. The other formative encounter I had as a young woman was with a play by the English writer Caryl Churchill. Is anyone familiar with her work? Wonderful! Caryl Churchill is still writing – she’s now in her late seventies I think – a recent play Love and Information was on in Melbourne last year. It’s a play that has 117 scenes. She’s a remarkable writer and the play that changed my life, that I read, and re-read, and then saw, by her, again, in the 1980s, and have seen since, was a play called Cloud Nine. And if you’re not familiar with that play, and you’re curious about playwriting, I commend it to you. I commend anything by Caryl Churchill to you. She’s an innovator, always daring, still writing, and again, as with Dorothy Hewett, she never does the same thing twice. And this may be one of the attractions of playwriting – for, yes, the form of the novel has evolved and the voice of the novel has changed and we see experimentation in the novel – but there are things that plays can do that we haven’t conceived of yet. In what’s going on at the moment, in the theatre, with technology – in exploring how you might bring technology together with live-ness and what that can do and what that can be is a most extraordinary font of possibility in terms of revitalising a practice. I think for playwrights it’s hard to get bored with the form. The form is always asking you to do something with it. Pull it this way. Push it that way. Try something else… What if I write a play that’s just for you? And it’s going to be a play that’s going to be viewed by one person
at a time. It’s been done. What if I write a play that’s only going to be performed for you through headphones? What if I write a play that can only be played in an existing hotel room? What if I write a play like the Iranian playwright, Nassim Soleimanpour has - it is on at the Edinburgh Festival as I speak, a play called Blank - unrehearsed and no director ...there are whole pages of it that are blank... and an audience member each night comes out and parts of their life story become part of the construction of that performance of the play. So you can see how elastic, plastic, malleable - how I want to move my hands like this when I talk about playwriting - because it is this form that invites engagement, construction, destruction, re-construction, and play. Play. Play and wright. Play and write. All puns intended.

So, where am I up to with my plan? I want to make sure that I try to mention as many Australian plays as I can in the course of this hour. Because I want you to know how vital the culture of the Australian play has become. And that even though it’s harder and harder to get them on, thanks to the funding policies that we’ve seen over the past ten, even twenty years, there are still many plays out there and many Living Breathing Australian playwrights making them.

Before I move on to tell you about two or three of my projects, I want to tell you about some of the plays that made a mark on me as a young writer. I’m going back now to when I was first at uni where I did a one semester subject in playwriting - I remember it well - and I chose it, you know, off the menu, as you do, because it sounded interesting. I had no intention of becoming a writer. Or so I thought, then. I was destined to be a teacher as I’d gone to uni on a teacher’s scholarship and I was going to come out the other end as an English, History, Drama teacher. And I duly did, and served my time as well. But while I was at uni, I encountered particular
canonical Australian texts that will stay with me forever. And when I was making this list I thought: this is curious. Three of them are in fact works for a solo performer. That may not mean a great deal to you, but if you’re excited by theatre, I suggest that you go and have a look at the monologue, the play for a virtuoso solo artiste. Firstly, because you can afford to put it on - with a cheque from your mother or your brother. And secondly, because it will teach you what the theatre can do. When there’s only one person. One person and an object. One person in a place. One person and a problem.

Three plays that stayed with me - let me know if you know of them. First, Jack Hibberd’s *A Stretch of the Imagination* – anyone familiar with it? Hibberd (LBAP) is a Melbourne-based writer and his play demands a virtuoso performance from the lone actor in it. It’s stayed with me for its profanity. It was almost disgusting. Rude and real. It was one of the first plays I saw that tried to grapple with the Australian emptiness, the empty heart, the emptied soul of our country and what that might mean, and how one might express that moral vacuum through a theatrical experience.

The second one that hit me was a play called *The Christian Brothers*, by a writer called Ron Blair (LBAP). He’s a Sydney-based writer. And maybe that one had resonances for me because I had a Catholic education through my early childhood, but it’s a play written for a solo performer who plays a Christian brother giving a lesson to a class. What it did, for me, was smash the fourth wall. You’re familiar with the fourth wall? Well, this was a play where you’re in the audience but at the same time you are students in my classroom. I may throw chalk at you in the course of the play. I remember being quite shocked by this playwright’s audacity in letting that fourth wall down, and in extending the danger – that we typically perceive from a safe distance... You know how it is when you’re sitting in an
audience? Normally one of the first things you check out is: Is there going to be audience participation? No? Oh, thank goodness. I’m fine. Because we don’t want, as an audience, that danger. We’re happy to have it behind the curtain, or beyond the proscenium, or behind the frame, but when it threatens to break out and the energy of the play threatens to spill out into the auditorium, then we’re in a different kind of a world. And it’s a different kind of experience. It’s one of the reasons I love theatre and it’s also one of the reasons I think that theatre is one of the most important art forms we have. Because we don’t – any more – have many opportunities to behave as a congregation, as a community of people, as an audience.

Giving audience. In its full meaning. The third of the plays that made a big mark on me was a play by the late Stephen J Spears (DP). It was called The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin. And again, it was a one-person show, and what was staggering about this play was that it was so ahead of the times in tackling issues of sexuality and gender. I remember it – this won’t mean anything to most of you – but I remember it opened with an elderly Australian actor by the name of Ronald Fraser, naked, on stage. He played a gay man who had a drag queen alter ego. The play was about his life, his ‘straight’ life as an elocution teacher and the speech lessons he gave a young boy called Benjamin Franklin and what happened when myths and misinformation and gossip about the elocution teacher got out into the community. It was an extraordinary play in terms of the issues it tried to tackle – when I think about it now, it was twenty years ahead of the times - when you think about where we are with gay marriage and queer families, it was twenty years ahead of public discourse around particular issues. So I want to say to you that I think one of the reasons I remain attracted to playwriting – apart from the fact of ‘play’ and apart from the fact of being able to try to blow up the form every time you write a new one – is that it’s actually a form of public philosophy. It’s a philosophical practice that
allows you to have a conversation with your fellow citizens in a public way. Not through the one-to-one of the novel or the one-to-one interface of the poem. They can do that work too, but there is something about sitting with your fellow citizens in a public space, and having a conversation about difficult things that I think is transformative. And, potentially, profound.

Those plays all made a huge mark on me. Others of that period – this was an extraordinary time in the Australian theatre, right? So I’ve come through uni and I’m starting out as a high school teacher in the early 80s. The Pram Factory, in Melbourne. The Australian Performing Group. Up in Sydney we had the Stables Theatre that became the early Nimrod. And Belvoir Street Theatre. So this was a period not long after the formation of the Australia Council. Thank you, Gough Whitlam. Thank you, ‘Nugget’ Coombs. And we saw an active movement towards an Australian voice, an Australian theatre. And so we had these groundbreaking plays – others that stuck with me from that period... David Williamson (LBAP). I’m not a big fan of his work, but The Removalists is extraordinary. If you don’t know the play, get to know it. It’s an amazing piece. The Floating World, by John Romeril (LBAP). It blew my mind. I could not believe the audacity in what I was seeing. Alex Buzo’s (DP) play Norm and Ahmed. One of the first plays to tackle multicultural Australia and our difficulties and our issues, our confusions and our fears. Our cultural blindspots. But don’t get me wrong. Going to these plays wasn’t like going to a lecture or a sermon. Each was a play in its own right. And, as with any good play there was what it’s about, and there was what it was really about. And as long as they’re not the same thing, as long as there’s two strands of possibility alive, then you have, you see, in that gap, you have the possibility of engagement, you have in that gap the possibility for the audience to be pushed back and repelled, or admitted, and invited in. These, I think, are critical considerations.
I’d like to talk a little about my own work now. I’ve been practising – I use that word all the time – I’ve been practising as a playwright since about 1988, when I wrote a play called Wallflowering. I was a high school teacher at the time. I was teaching at a posh girls’ school in Sydney and I... I had recently had my heart broken. I confide this to you as we are such a small group. So it was the August holidays, and I sat down and so as to make myself feel better I wrote something. And the way this thing came to me, the way it fell out of me, was in a theatrical form. It was like the only language I knew, and I guess that was because I’d done all the acting, plays at uni, I’d seen so many plays, so that theatre became my first language. So that the stuff I was trying to work out for myself at 28 or 29, whatever age I was, came out in a form that needed to be expressed in a three-dimensional landscape. That’s the only reason. This play was about a middle-aged married couple of ballroom dancers and it was a reflection – when I think about it now I realise that what I was reflecting on was my childhood in the seventies and what happened when feminism – while it was still called ‘women’s lib’ – hit the mainstream. When women’s lib got into The Women’s Weekly! When it was no longer a theoretical thing or something that academics and people into consciousness-raising spoke about, but when it jumped the fence and got into the suburbs. And what happened to families and marriages – and especially to relationships between men and women when feminism arrived like that. So Wallflowering is about this middle-aged ballroom dancing couple – they’re prizewinners, they’re prize-winning dancers who have won prizes for decades. And it’s about what happens when she suddenly decides that she wants to lead. So, it’s a very simple little allegory and – you know – I’m sure you’ve encountered this already, through your studies - when we are working in the theatrical landscape, when we are working with plays, we often find that we are dealing with the metaphorical. So if I say to you that
I’ve written a play called Salt, it’s not going to be about sodium chloride. It’s going to be using that idea, that metaphor, to speak about something else. Similarly, through the metaphor of ballroom dancing I found a broad vocabulary – through all the dances that a prize winning ballroom dancing couple would know - the rhumba, the foxtrot, all those – and a range of rhythms for different kinds of conversations. It gave me different kinds of energies. So, that play is unusual because it’s a two-hander, a play that’s for two characters only but it’s also able to be performed as an eight-footer, and more often than not, it’s done with two actors and two ballroom dancers. And so there are two Pegs. There’s Dancing Peg and acted Peg. And there are two Cliffs. Dancing Cliff and acted Cliff. Now I just need to step to the side for a moment and pretend I didn’t write that play. And to invite you to imagine this from an audience’s point of view. Two Pegs! Two Cliffs! Oh my God!! I can’t cope. You know, one of the things we worry about in the theatre is will an audience keep up? A lot of new writers tend to try hard to join all the dots and make sure they hold the audience member’s hand all the way through so they keep up with everything. But I had no problem at all. No audience member ever had a brain freeze and said: Stop the play! I can’t cope with the fact that there are two Pegs and two Cliffs live on stage at the same time. So – I’m a carpenter’s daughter as I said – what are the tools I can work with? We call them dramatic conventions. What are the dramatic conventions that are applicable to this play, and that I’ll need to get across to the audience, right up front so they don’t have a meltdown and run screaming from the theatre. So they can negotiate, navigate the world of this play? And one of them was – and I flag it right at the beginning – there will be two Pegs and two Cliffs. Get over it!

I wrote that play quickly. I remember the epiphany I had and it’s funny – it wasn’t about characters, and it wasn’t about plot. It wasn’t about the story.
It was – and I think this is critical – it was a moment when I realised the structure of the play was this ‘X’. I could draw the play. That’s what the play looked like. Now, as an architect, or as a structural engineer of something that has to stand up in time and space, knowing that ‘X’, I suddenly understood how the energy and the story itself needed to move. That ‘X’ may mean nothing to you. But to me what it means is: here’s Cliff and Peg and they start here, apart, and they dance towards each other, and then they swap positions so they can dance out the other side. They finish up there. I’ve learned over the years that once I get to a certain point with each new project I have to be able to draw it. When I can draw the play, when I understand the way the energy moves in the play – and how I can capture that in some sort of ideogram – then I’m home and hosed. Until that point, I’m suffering, I hate it, I don’t want to be a playwright anymore – I always wanted to be a postwoman – and why am I doing this to myself? So I’m waiting for this moment when I understand the structural mechanics, the engineering of the work, the way the energy needs to move through the narrative, in order to give expression to a second rule. Which is that any half decent play is an exercise in the management of tension through time. Get your head round that. A play is an exercise in the management of tension through time.

Now we don’t have time, today, to unpack that. But think about it in relation to texts you’ve been studying, or think about what happens when you write a play where ALL OF THE BIG STUFF HAPPENS AT THEBEGINNING! IN CAPITAL LETTERS. And then, nothing. It flat-lines... Or think about how acts and scenes are used to distribute energy through a play. Or think about Aristotelian dramatic structure and the gradual build towards catharsis. All of these models suggest different ways of thinking about the management of tension through time, and even plays that seem to be what are now called ‘antidramatic’ or ‘postdramatic’ are still
managing the experience of tension through time. I put it to you that any play worth our consideration is pulsing at a higher frequency than everyday life and it’s only because of this that it is playworthy. This idea of playworthiness is something I have become sensitive to over the years. Not every idea is playworthy. Not every story, not every character. Not every situation is playworthy. But those that are carry this capacity to be told in a way that manages the passage of tension through time.

So Wallflowering was my breakout play. It was my break out of school teaching play. It went to the Australian National Playwrights Conference in 1988 – I had leave from school to go – I was so excited! I went off to NIDA (at last!), all these actors and directors everywhere – and my play was workshopped. And it was one of those experiences where... so much luck! I was in the right place at the right time. I came out of that experience with a production; the first production of Wallflowering was here in Canberra, at the Canberra Theatre Company. I had an agent. And I had a commission. Toe Truck Theatre Company - a Bondi-based Sydney company that did schools’ shows all through the eighties and nineties - their little van went all around Australia – commissioned me to write a play. So I thought: well, the gods seem to be saying have a go, so I left the posh school and I decided to give myself twelve months of pretending that I was a playwright. And that’s what I did. And here I am nearly 30 years later and I’m very poor, and I haven’t had a commission in years, but I’m probably happier than I would have been had I stayed at that girls’ school. Back then I went into a period of intense work. This was the late eighties and through the nineties. So I can say to you – and I do so with some sadness – this was a Golden Age for Australian writers. And for any of you sitting there, thinking, I want to be a playwright when I grow up... it’s going to be tougher for you. Because that was a period when there truly was a premium placed on Australian writing. When there were companies
dedicated to producing only Australian plays and commissions were quite commonplace. And so through the eighties and nineties, I was in work – thank god, because I’m the slowest writer in the southern hemisphere; I hardly ever have an original idea of my own – but I was in work because companies would come to me and say ‘hey, do you want to write a play about this?’ And I’d say: oh, sure! I’ll write a play about that!

Because I know nothing about it!

And that’s my third little provocation for you. If you’re going to write plays, write plays about something you know only a little about, something that piques your curiosity. If you want to write a play about something you know a lot about, write a sermon, write an article for a newspaper, perhaps write a letter - I’m showing my age here, they’re three all-but-extinct forms - just don’t write plays that tell us all that you know about something. There is nothing more like a closed door than a play like that because when we go to a theatre, when we go to a play, we need to be able to interact with what’s going on. But how we do that? Well, if you remember your Aristotle – you do that through investing your interest or your emotions or your empathy in some way, usually through a very simple device of investing in a character’s success or failure. Will Romeo and Juliet end up together? I hope they will, I fear they won’t! That basic idea, I hope they will, I fear they won’t is the engine of most conventional plays.

Now, where there’s uncertainty, there’s suspense. And interest. Where you know everything and you’re just telling the audience – no suspense, very little interest.

So what I learnt over that time was to say ‘yes’ to jobs that invited me to find out more about something that I knew next to nothing about. And plays, for me, have become and remain, a means of interrogating
something. Deeply. For myself. *Wallflowering* was my way of asking: can couples remain together, and change at the same time? Can two people in a relationship metamorphose and still stay together? That was the question I was trying to answer to heal my bruised heart. *Salt*, the next play I want to talk to you about, is another mainstage play, and I wrote it a good ten years later. *Salt* is a play about mothers and daughters and food. I was interested in trying to understand something about the relationship between mothers and daughters and the complexity of that relationship and what it means to want to feed someone and to kill them at the same time. Because that, for me, was fundamental to my experience of being mothered, and ultimately, of mothering my own mother, as she succumbed to dementia. So that play is a three-hander – you’ve heard about the two-hander – I’ve now built up to a bigger cast. Two women and a man in that, it’s a triangle. So there’s a mother and a daughter, and also this man who keeps appearing out of the refrigerator with new ingredients. And cooking happens on stage in this play. This is a play that is delivered to the audience in five helpings. The epiphany – and this play took me years to write – I had no idea what it wanted to be – and it took me so long to come to grips with what it would be. I had the title. I liked the idea of salt; I liked its corrosive properties. I liked the fact that salt is also a preservative. So you can keep things well, keep things edible with salt, but you can also over-salt something and destroy it through that. So there was something in that metaphor that was very rich, but it took me ages and ages to arrive at what I needed to do with it. And what that was lived in the idea of enigmas of the kitchen garden, foods that are both healthful and toxic. So there are five helpings. I had mushrooms, potatoes, rhubarb, tomatoes and eggplants and all of them are foods that can be either nourishing or poisonous. Once I found that paradox within that metaphor, that conceit, I was able to parcel up the play. So this is a play that moves freely in time. Each of the
movements – it’s as if it has five movements as in a symphony – each takes place in a different time between the mother and the daughter around cooking and eating a particular dish.

Finally, I’d like to tell you about my most recent work. Over the past few years I have been working on and have subsequently had performed – just once, though, I might add, one show only – my most ambitious work for performance. As you’ve seen, the early plays were modest in scale. Two characters and two dancers, then three characters but this last one is for an ensemble of women and girls aged seven to seventy and this ‘one-off’ was performed with a women’s community choir and a cast of thousands – women only – and it’s called Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda. I call it TTFO, for short. It was a play about the creative practice of a woman artist over a long period of time. It was written in response to the contracting opportunities I perceived for women as artists, and after prolonged reflection on the lives of two women artists who didn’t commence their careers until their late fifties. I’m talking about Elizabeth Jolley, the novelist, and Rosalie Gascoigne – you should know of her because she was a Canberra local – and an extraordinary visual artist. A sculptor and installation-maker. She didn’t start her career until she was 58. Jolley was published, perhaps for the first time, at 55. And so I’m thinking – and this was when I was in my early 50s – and coming into this period of midlife and wondering how things would have been if I were just starting out. There’s nothing. Doors closed. Doors closed. Theatres gone. Small theatres, gone. Youth theatre companies, gone. All of those places – community theatre companies – that had commissioned me, and had kept me close to solvent over so many years – gone. What could I do? And so this play, with its preposterous title, was my howl of rage about what had happened. It’s a dystopian play, it’s set in a nightmare future. And it
concerns a female artist who is pregnant – literally – with a trilogy – in a world where women’s work is no longer welcome. It’s a play full of intertextual references, and as the title suggests, it turns from a reading of a play into a musical, and more. It has a separate work, a standalone swansong, an oratorio, at the end. So by the time you’ve finished you’ve just about been through the history of Western art and its theatrical traditions and you come out the other end and you’re in an oratorio. That work was hugely ambitious; it nearly killed me. We thought we were going to get to stage a season of it, but the wheels fell off that plan. But I did get to put it on, just once, and now I’ve gone back to working on tiny little micro-plays and texts that I can perform all by myself. So, that’s a kind of potted history. And that’s just about all I know about playwriting! Any questions?

Q: What is your biggest incentive to write?

A: I hate writing. I hate it. Money? Trying to keep going? Still being in love with the form. Every now and again I go and see a play and go: Oh my god! Theatre! You know, I vowed that today I would tell you about some current writers who give me that kind of a thrill. Mary-Anne Butler (LBAP). Her play. Broken. She’s a playwright from the Northern Territory. I read the play the other day, and it made me howl. It is one of those plays that you can read on the page and it’s extraordinary. Angus Cerini, (LBAP) from Melbourne. The Bleeding Tree. It’s won numerous awards. A man writing on domestic violence. Poetic, brutal, and using theatre – it’s not a lecture – but it uses the vocabularies of the theatre in a most effective way. Patricia Cornelius. An eminent writer, and elder stateswoman, of the Australian theatre. She can’t get a production from a mainstage company to save her self. They won’t look at her. But she’s a poet of the theatre and she writes powerful stuff. And there are many other living, breathing,

Q: How do you go about your research?

A: I’m glad you asked. Because I do research. Say I decide to have a character who is a postwoman. Living the dream. Well then I go and find someone and talk to them, or shadow them. You do research the way anyone would do research. You go and talk to people, you use the Internet, you put yourself in hypothetical situations. A lot of the community theatre work I’ve done took me into real life situations. I wrote a play years ago for the first International Conference on Hospice and Palliative Care, so I spent six weeks hanging around a hospice. So you put yourself into those kinds of spaces and places and you search out the particular. There’s a great example I like to give from JM Synge’s play, Riders to the Sea. There’s a moment where a character says: ‘Go now, take the pig with the black feet to the market…’ or something like that. And I thought, why didn’t the writer just say, ‘take the pig’, but I realised that when I hear ‘fetch the pig with the black feet’ – I can see that pig. There, in all its specificity, in its black feet, lives the pigness of pigs. So there is something about trying to find the most precise and unique detail in something, the idiosyncrasy in something, because it contains the universal, and through those kinds of details, which you glean through your research, you are able to tell the audience: yes, I know what I am talking about. This has the tang of credibility. And you all know what it’s like to be in an audience of something that lacks that tang. Where you go: I don’t believe it! I don’t believe that character, I don’t believe that situation. That wouldn’t happen. So you as a playwright must convince the audience that you ‘know’ what it is you’re showing... The research is the fun part. To be honest with you. The writing is horrible. But the research – which can go on for years, in my
experience – is fun. You become like flypaper. That’s what I’m like. I move through the world and stuff sticks to me, and I know that gradually it’s going to suggest a shape, it’s going to move itself from random mess into some kind of formation I can recognise or understand. I’m rarely wrong about that. These days, now, I scribble things on a sheet of butcher’s paper on my wall. And I go: ‘What’s fencing got to do with it? I have no idea what fencing has to do with TTFO.’ But sure enough in TTFO there’s a scene where the pregnant writer and her midwife are fencing, with swords. I saw that image, I was attracted to it and I knew it was going to be a part of it. So collecting imagery – becoming a thief, a bowerbird – as the writer you are a thief. You’re constantly listening, looking and collecting, notating and gathering stuff, shiny things that appeal to your eye.

And there I’ll stop. Thank you very much. You’ve been very generous.
LETTER TO A MINISTER FOR THE ARTS

The Hon. Simon Crean MP,
Minister for the Arts
GPO Box XXX
Canberra, ACT 2601

Dear Minister Crean,

I am a woman in my mid-50s. I live in Melbourne. I have been a professional playwright since 1998. I made a reasonable living through my writing for the first couple of decades. I had some plays produced nationally and internationally and won several high profile awards. Many of my plays engaged with young people and addressed specific issues in specific communities, so it’s probably for these that I was awarded an Australian Government Centenary Medal for Services to Literature and Society in 2002.

Ten and some years on, I find myself in utter despair, ready to walk away from the performing arts, from community arts, and from any thoughts of further practice.

I have just received word of an unsuccessful funding application to the Theatre Board of the Australia Council. The project - to stage a huge new performance work that would have involved almost 50 artists – all girls and women - in a
world premiere season in a confirmed venue in partnership with The State Library of Victoria – is now in jeopardy and may not go ahead.

Minister, I am not writing to protest over this, or to ask for any intercession. Let me be clear: I know the work of the panellists in making their deliberations will have been rigorous and scrupulous and fair. I do not begrudge any of the successful applicants their funding. But the fact is that only 6 productions, Australia-wide, were funded in this latest round. Six, from a pool of 38 applications. 32 teams, ensembles, collectives, projects large and small, overlooked.

I find this staggering, unbelievable, heart breaking. What are we to do? There is a crisis in arts funding in this country. It is quickly becoming a crisis for artists and for the arts. It’s only a matter of time before it is a crisis for culture and our country. I despair for us.

We are told to look to new models, sources of corporate funding and philanthropic engagement, but most are closed doors to writers like me. I am not a company, just an independent artist with a grand vision for an inclusive and participatory arts project. I begin to suspect that this big new show of ours will never be seen. And as an older, so-called established artist, and especially as an (invisible) middle aged woman, I wonder what am I supposed to do to make a career, to sustain any hope of a livelihood, not to mention artistic growth, development and continuity of practice, in a climate of this kind? I despair, for myself, and for my peers.

Finally, I despair for the women. For the ones in the audience, and especially for the ones who would have been seen, who would, just once, have had their turn out the front.

As you know, there has been an outcry over the past couple of years about dwindling opportunities for women writers and directors in the theatre. Calls have been made for greater accountability, gender equity, some good old quota-based affirmative action. This show of ours, specifically created to speak to, and draw attention to these issues, was ready to go. It had the support of La Mama
Theatre and the Victorian Women’s Trust. It would have brought together professional actors, emerging artists, young people, old people and a women’s community choir in an epic extravaganza and a celebration of women in the arts.

And here’s the sting in the tail. The Theatre Board funded our creative development last year. It was thanks to Australia Council money that we were ever able to prepare the work to a point where it is now so presentation-ready.

This is an awful irony. That the Australia Council gives with one hand and takes away with the other makes no sense. That the Theatre Board is not in a position seek a return on its initial investment in a new work by going on to fund its production is incomprehensible, especially when we had other confirmed funding, key partners, a perfect venue, and nearly $60,000 in-kind support on the page, all locked in. But then, only 6 productions, Australia-wide, were funded in this latest round.

Yesterday I called an officer of the Theatre Board, and sought feedback on my application, as one is encouraged to do. I learnt that we scored high in all categories and it seems there was little more we could have done to impress the panel with our application. I burst into tears when I was told that all the assessors loved the script. Our planning was strong, our commitment to diversity and inclusion outstanding. At the end of the day, there was just not enough money to fund us. If this is the case under a Labor Government, what will happen if there is a change in September?

Whatever happens, our project is now unlikely to go ahead. I felt you should know.

Yours faithfully, etc.
FROM INVENTORIES OF MY DEAD: JEAN

HER DAUGHTER WAS A FEW YEARS OLDER THAN I WAS. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THAT MEANS. FOR TO BE HONEST I CAN’T RECALL HOW OLD I WAS OR EVEN WHERE MY FAMILY WAS LIVING AT THAT TIME. THEIRS WAS A FAMILY OF THREE. I SEE HIM SUAVE, ONE OF THOSE SILVER FOX TYPES, SLEEK OF HAIR AND BEARD, WAISTCOAT, BROWN SUIT, WITH A SLIGHT FLARE TO THE LEG. BESIDE MY MOTHER’S FRIEND, JEAN. JEANNIE.

THIS DAUGHTER OF THEIRS? PERHAPS IN HIGH SCHOOL, AND ME STILL IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, THEN? WE READ SHAKESPEARE TOGETHER OUT LOUD, LONG SPEECHES FROM OTHELLO, AND THE WINTER’S TALE. I REMEMBER TRYING TO PRONOUNCE DES-DE-MONA, BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND THE PHRASING, HOW TO BREATHE IT, READING THROUGH THE END OF ONE LINE AND ON INTO THE NEXT, SAVING MY AIR AND PUSHING MY VOICE THROUGH THE WORDS TRYING TO CAPTURE THE SENSE. I REMEMBER ONLY THIS ABOUT HER, NOT EVEN HER NAME, THOUGH SOMETHING OF THE LOOK OF HER, A SLIM GIRL IN A CHECK SUMMER UNIFORM, SHOULDER LENGTH, BROWN HAIR. SHE WAS ALWAYS TANNED LIKE A NUT. A PRETTY GIRL TO MY PLAIN.
They were from England, they'd come out from the old country. Well, Jeannie had. She had big teeth, bad teeth, National Health teeth. I don't know how, or where my mother met her. Jean had a big laugh. My mother's name was Hilary. I wish I could remember where we were. Was it after New Guinea, or even in New Guinea? If so, I would have been very young. Was it back in Sydney? Let's agree that it was.

I want to suggest his name was Brian. I want to suggest her name, my friend's name, was Karen. I want to be right. I don't want to make things up. But there is no one to ask, no records to consult. I must try to remember.

I mix Jean up, the form of her, I know I do, with another we were told to call Aunt. They were, neither of them, aunts. They were my mother's drinking buddies. (There's another one. Inventory of my Mother's Drinking Buddies.)

I superimpose Jean's face on the face of the other Aunt, Glamorous Gail. I see the teeth, the dark hair with the broad flash of white, sweeping in a sculptural wave back
from her high forehead. I see the clothing, loud, geometrical. Is she wearing a caftan? She is large, generous, block-shaped, in a robe of violent colour. I superimpose one on the other except Gail is all elegance and Elizabeth Taylor with a martini glass while Jean is Joyce Grenfell on account of that accent, those startling teeth.

They’re gone now, all three, if one includes Hilary.

Jean loved art. Her family lived for art. I can’t see the house, but I can feel how I felt to be in it, inside that 70s palette, the mission browns, sages and oranges, the heavy pottery pieces, the coloured glass, the abstract art. Crazy paving to the threshold. I feel how I loved to move through it, looking. How brash and bold it all seemed to me after the flock wallpaper and the horse brasses, the oak roll-top desk and antique clocks and barometers of our home. I’ve never considered it before, this strange aesthetic of my parents’, their English club-meets-alehouse sensibility.
I sense that Jean made something - what, am I a medium now? - I sense that she threw ugly pots on a wheel or hectic oils at canvasses or did something angry and arty. I sense this was what Hilary loved to see in her, and why we visited them, so often. This girl, the Shakespeare-lover, was forced to entertain me, which she did, quietly long-suffering, and with our reading, as our mothers drank on.

Jean’s was the first death I remember, but as with others that followed it was not cast as a death. Merely a disappearance. A stoppage. We did not visit the house again. The girl, her father, the art, the house, those worn volumes of the plays of Shakespeare - I have no idea what became of any of them. I don’t recall whether my mother visited Jeannie over the course of her illness; only that she was suddenly gone from our lives.
FROM INVENTORY OF MY MOTHER'S DRINKING BUDDIES:

My mother began drinking when she was in her early 20s. There are photos of her in clubs and smart restaurants, and she mostly has a drink at hand, and a cigarette, propped, languid, between her fingers. The lacquered nails of her hands. She was proud of her hands, shapely, long fingers, her moisturised hands. Hands that did little by way of manual work. Hands that did not say housework. The glass is there, even in these early shots. Wine glass, whisky glass, sometimes martini. This is not the voice I want but I have to keep writing in this voice till I find the voice I want. I remember the feel of my mother's hands, her soft and perfumed skin.

About the drinking. It was an affectation, long before it became a need. Here is the story I tell myself. They drank like normal people for those first few years, most of the time. But at parties, they binged.

Then, in New Guinea, everything changed. New Guinea is white spirits and flying ants. Gin, and vodka, in the refrigerator. The refrigerator has curves. It is empty of food. It has bottles of chilled water and bottles of cold
gin. And cordial. Am I making up a memory of pouring myself what I thought was a mixture of raspberry cordial and iced water and gulping it down, only to find that water pure alcohol?

In Port Moresby, where the wives had nothing to do, long lunches with other expatriate ladies became the thing. The children were at school. The babies, and the housework, were attended to by the houseboy. What else was a woman to do with her days? The long long days in that liquid heat and far from home. My mother took to the bottle, there, in the most civilised of ways, over long lunches, with her drinking buddies. My mother's drinking buddies were the wives of the men who had been picked up and set down, like chess pieces, in this wet green world. Port Moresby was hot, and humid, it was vines and a tropical fecundity. Everything was overgrown, overtaken, in the throbbing heat and the torrential daily storms. Storms you could set your watch by.

When I think of the place I see greens, all greens, themes and variations; I see dead toads and live toads and horizontal rain at the window. Hibiscus and purple banana flowers - beautiful things, briefly - yet
EVERYTHING SOON RANK, AND ROTTEN, SODDEN AND STINKING.
WHERE AM I GOING WITH THIS? AND IN WHAT VOICE?

MY MOTHER’S DRINKING BUDDIES SAT OUT OF DOORS, ON BALCONIES, OR INSIDE, ON BAMBOO FURNITURE, UNDER THE SLOW CHOP-CHOP OF CEILING FANS. THE FANS STIRRED THE HOT AIR. MY MOTHER STIRRED A PITCHER OF PIMMS WITH A SWIZZLE STICK, OR SLURPED A GREAT GLUG OF GIN FROM A TALL GLASS. THEY DRANK THEIR DAYS AWAY, MY MOTHER AND HER DRINKING BUDDIES, WHO MUST BE NAMELESS FOR REASONS OF MY DEFECTIVE MEMORY. BY THE TIME WE GOT BACK TO SYDNEY, THREE YEARS ON, SHE HAD THE HABIT.

IT WAS THE LATE 60s. WE SPENT THE WEEK OF OUR RETURN HOLED UP IN A MOTEL ROOM, WATCHING TELEVISION, WHILE THE COASTGUARD SWEPt GUNNAMATTA BEACH FOR HAROLD HOLT. WE BEGAN THE FIRST OF ANOTHER RUN OF MOVES INTO RENTAL PROPERTIES (MAKE AN INVENTORY OF DWELLINGS), HORRIBLE PLACES, CHOSEN FOR US BY THE COMPANY. BY THE TIME WE SETTLED IN KILLARA, MY MOTHER HAD FOUND NEW FRIENDS, SOMEWHERE, AMONGST THE MOTHERS GROUPS, AND THESE IN TIME BECAME THE LADIES WHO MET TO ‘DO CRAFT’. THE JOKE WAS THAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BRING SOMETHING TO DO WITH THEIR HANDS - SOME STITCHERY OR SKETCH-BOOKERY. UNDER
cover of craft - my mother painting and endlessly repainting her nails, attending to her cuticle-care - they uncapped the flagon or emptied the cask. The drink of choice by then was sweet white wine. We wouldn't touch it today, we wine snobs, but they did not so much quaff as scoff.

I come home from school to roundtables of inebriated needle-workers. The raucous laughter, the foul mouths, the roughness of their greetings as they pull me to them and miss-kiss the side of my head.
I won’t write at length here about *Cloud Nine*, except to say that I know I’m neither the only, nor the first, to install Caryl Churchill as God. This play exploded everything I thought I knew about storytelling in theatrical form. Its two halves bear such a tenuous relationship in time and space to one another, and the sheer audacity of its inversions ripped the veneer of niceness and normativity (I did not know this word back then) from view. I saw *into* theatre from this moment. Which is entirely different from looking *at* theatre. I was able to see inside it, into its ribs and bones and airspaces. I was able to see, in this encounter, and on top of these other encounters, what theatre could do. In these works I saw an active theatre, a theatre capable of pushing back. No longer, pretty, or passive, or posing for us to simply watch and admire – a nice night’s entertainment, safely framed behind a proscenium arch – I saw in this work a whole world of new and sometimes quite unseemly possibilities. I was a nice white girl from an upwardly mobile family. I had renounced their leafy middle class suburb, but I was still that nice white girl, albeit turned and still turning, under the influence of my new-blossoming sexuality, my encounters with gay politics, with feminism, and now this. In *Cloud Nine* I encountered, perhaps for the first time, the theatre of resistance. I am imbuing it with magic powers and glorifying it, and I would glorify it if I could, and its writer, and there were other plays, and
of course what our Angry Young (Male) Playwrights were doing were writing acts of resistance too, acts of resistance in Australian idiom and Australian voice, telling Australian stories. But with Hewett and Churchill it was women doing it, and with Kemp and Brook it was queer. Queered. *Cloud Nine* must surely be the quintessence of queer? Likewise, in a more mild-mannered way, *The Chapel Perilous*, with its lesbian kiss. These works, my encounters with these pieces and their writers, are the most formative of my early practice. All of them are distinctive as acts of resistance, as queered expressions of theatrical possibility. All of them transgress, all of them explode form. Exploding form is a radical and provocative act. It is an act of resistance. It is not guerrilla theatre, but rather it is the lobbing of a kind of a theatrical grenade into the room. It scatters the audience. It divides and shatters, and bits of it may become embedded elsewhere, in audience bodies, to be carried back out into the world.

That’s what happened to me.
EXTRACTS FROM A WRITERS JOURNAL

From April

Two days with PW, composer, visiting from Sydney to work on the beast. One Saturday we have a viola player and our new choir director here, as well as singers. We talk through the text, placing the songs and the music as we go. It’s intense and tiring, but useful and illuminating for the new members of the team. PW has been polishing the music. A friend of hers, a professional opera singer, joins us after lunch and can sight read beautifully. It’s amazing to hear the music in full flight. I observe, again, and have done for a while, that the next draft, as well as being about The Weaver, needs to somehow rein itself in sufficiently to see the entire work function as a kind of runway – I have in my mind an aircraft carrier – for our musical coda. The whole work, then, is more and more swanlike, inasmuch as I see the music as a kind of swan, lumbering through the ‘play’ towards the moment when it takes off and soars. I feel there may need to be further economies of text imposed to get the right proportions and in some way to ‘privilege’ the oratorio which is, in this light, the point of it all. On Sunday we had a bass player here, and it was interesting to reflect afterwards how her innocent questions, comments and general feedback, assisted us – PW and myself – to grapple with some elusives. It was a kind of dramaturgy-by-accident in
that KM’s uncertainties allowed us to share our own. As a consequence, when later in the afternoon we sat down and picked over Swansong, phrase by phrase, bar by bar, syllable by syllable, we worked harmoniously and seemed to arrive simultaneously at the awareness that the final song was all wrong in tone and voice, and needed to be re-written. We were also able to make significant tweaks to the structure of the finale, and to bring the obligatory reprise of the anthem in at the end, a kind of coda-to-a-coda. It was all most productive. I wished I could have stayed in that headspace. But I couldn’t.

Today I engaged with the researcher from ANU who also sent me her notes on TTFO. I must acknowledge them. It astonishes me to read someone else writing so knowledgeably about that text. I also continued to engage with the world at large as we process the departure of Chrissy Amphlett, who died yesterday at 53.

It’s devastating and profound. I don’t really know why. Still thinking about it. She was such a force, such a statement of other possibilities for women. I watched YouTube clips of her songs – great, great songs – till very late last night and was blown way by the theatre of them, and the sense of risk. Also by something about the way the band The Divinyls hung back, almost
remote, letting her take and have the space. There was a real humility in this, and an understanding of how important it was that she be foregrounded. And Chrissy! So powerful in her demeanour, part schoolgirl, part-hag, so knowing. As one of my blog-gal-pals says, of herself: ‘so many kinds of wrong.’

Tonight, on a walk, two further things. One is how impossible it is to read deeply at the moment. I must not try. All I can hope to do is to survey the field. To survey, I think, is from the French. To overlook. It connotes a high place, the ability to get above to as to see much in the one ‘looking’, to scope and to grasp the perimeters. When I think about this I see myself standing on a high rock or some kind of monumental natural form and looking north, south, east, west. To one edge is the social science stuff on identity and ageing, gerontology, elder-hood. To another is my own personal practice as a writer. I don’t know what I want to make anymore; only that I want to be free to make whatever I want to make when I do know what it is. The other boundaries and borderlines are harder to define. One is about creativity as an action over time, as a practice. It’s more spiritual perhaps? It’s something to do with Dissanayake, and the importance of art as ‘the means to make special’ so as to embody and disperse ‘socially shared significances (1988, 200), her ‘art-ification’ (the autocorrect turns this
word into ratification when I am trying to write ‘artifying’). And the final edge is about something else. About the academy, perhaps, about pushing against it and opening up space for new forms? I don’t know. It feels though that when I define these four ‘fences’ I will somehow be able to corral myself within them, and then I will know what and how to read. And will need to read. Deeply.

There was something else on my walk today. The idea of ‘fitness’. Fitness to practice. Fitness to continue to work. I had a moment – was it last year, tramping across Umbria? Let’s say it was.

What I remember was a deep appreciation of walking, and the sense that I want to walk my whole life long, and how vital it is that I maintain my fitness for walking. If I can just keep walking I will keep my balance, my confidence, other essentials of old age. There was a vow made somewhere in the midst of this; some kind of pledge to myself: Keep walking. Through back pain and hip pain and dark moods. Keep walking. Today I sense something similar about writing. I must somehow find out what it is that connotes ‘fitness’ to write, fitness to create, so that I do the daily legwork that’s required to keep fit as an artist - I still don’t like using that word - as a practitioner. As one who would ‘wright’ into old age.
Something is happening. I buy travel sweets, but am going nowhere. I pick over words like bones. *Senescence. Accretion.* In the middle of the night, in the rolling over, on the bridge between sleep and more sleep, there’s a word in my mouth. *Porousness.* I do not consider it, but I say it, just once, to myself, before sinking into black.

How to account for these days? This feeling of something trying to form itself? How useless thinking is. How pointless planning is. It is like - what is it like? - it is like following a thread. And having the end of it fray, and make new threads. Root-like. *Rhizomal.* This is one of my new words. It is a free ranging, a whiff of something smoke-like. It is following the frayed ends of my curiosity across books and pages. It is letting my eyes scan a page of Deleuze and a page of Dissanayake looking for something that might just be there.

This morning when I woke up I said to her: *What is bone china? How do they make it?*

*It is with bones.* She said. *It is with the ash of the bones of the beasts from the slaughter yards.*

I might have known this, but not known it. Now I know that I know.
Calcination. That is today’s new word.

Bone china, she says, reading from Wikipedia, is a type of soft-paste porcelain composed of bone ash, feldspathic material and kaolin. It has been defined as ware with a translucent body…

ware with a translucent body

How’s that for a title?

What is ‘ware’?
Ware

1. Usu., **wares**.
   a. articles of merchandise or manufacture; goods.
   b. any intangible items, as artistic skills or intellectual accomplishments, that are salable.

2. a specified kind of merchandise (usu. used in combination): silverware; glassware.

3. pottery, or a particular kind of pottery: delft ware.

4. Archaeol. a group of ceramic types classified according to paste and texture, surface modification, as burnish or glaze, and decorative motifs rather than shape and color. [before 1000; Middle English; Old English *waru*, c. Old Frisian, Middle Low German, Middle Dutch *ware*, Old Norse *vara*]

**ware** (wɛəә) adj., v. Archaic. adj.

1. watchful, wary, or cautious. 2. aware; conscious. v.t. 3. to beware of (usu. used in the imperative).

Porcelain ware has a white translucent body. It is dense, vitrified and impermeable to water. To vitrify is to undergo a change in which the body is no longer porous.
In beginning this work I am aware of being like a bottle or a vessel. I become quickly full. I must step away from the desk, let things settle, drip through. There is some kind of filtration process in train. Things must pass through something porous, like sand. What emerges is clean and may be useful.

Later the same day I see a group of older women lunching in Melbourne’s Federation Square. They are all wearing purple outfits of various shades and hues with striking red hats. I know, immediately, why. I know the poem that inspires their acts of sartorial resistance. We all knew it, back in the day. ‘When I am an old woman I shall wear purple…’ it begins. It’s from Warning, by Jenny Joseph. The full poem is available online at many websites, and there is at least one poignant YouTube clip of the poet herself, as an older woman, reciting it. “You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat, and eat three pounds of sausages at a go, or only bread and pickle for a week, and hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes…” I can’t wait.
From June

I love that Warning poem. Especially the part about bad shirts and hoarding. I relate to both. I also love anniversaries. Today is one. They are like little threads of wiring across time. They are the weld mesh of my life. I am sensing that I am grappling with how to write something about time and its impact on the body. Ageing me.

Yesterday I bought a box of white chalk. Two boxes. For the boniness of them. I think about all this thinking about holes and porousness. I think about this text and what it would look like if I were to perforate it (another word to look up) or begin to extinguish words at random. What if I were to duplicate it, and punch out every 55th word? What if I were to punch out 54 words and keep the 55th and then do it again?

I think about porousness. I think about pumice stone.

I think about my dead mother. I think again about pumice stone. Even now to write the word *pumice* makes me do something involuntary with the muscles of my mouth and lips. I purse them against the word and the very idea of the fact of pumice stone. I can barely bring myself to touch the thing. If it is dropped in the shower I must leave it for someone else to pick it up. I cannot abide its contact with my skin.
I think about my mother and what happened to her brain. I know some of the medical words, there is plaque involved. She was only a few years older than I am today when the first effects of it made themselves known to her. She had always been a prodigious keeper of lists. She bought multi-packs of rainbow-coloured notepads – no lines – in the supermarket stationery aisle. They were always glued together into one thick wad of rainbow and she would need to peel the adhesive off to separate them into individually coloured note pads – one apricot, one pink – and these she scattered about the house for her list-making pleasure. I wonder if my fascination with porousness is connected to this? To the wormholes in her brain that made themselves manifest when she was only sixty, and marked the beginning of the burrowing through, the rusting of the weld mesh. Until her mind was a chalky dust and a sieve of a thing that would hold nothing.

From July

Questions about the idea of creativity itself. What is it? Is it something whose supply shrinks or diminishes with age, like a hormone? Do we only have a certain allocation of it over our lives? If we come to our artistic practice late, do we have the same allocation that an eighteen year old started with, or is it spent, desiccated, or useless?
ware with a translucent body is the hole in the middle of all I do not know.

My sense is it must be written by a process of accretion. My task as a researcher is to try to record and reveal this. I am coming to this as a kind of creative naturalist, a David Attenborough. It almost requires a bird-hide and time-lapse photography; the process is so imperceptible and slow. And yet, as with vines, climbers, creepers, there are unfurlings, new tendrils, rootlets, leaflets...

I have too many metaphors. The most attractive are via the behaviour of plants – specifically vines – be they climbers, creepers or crawlers. I am interested in their stealth and their scaffolds. Other metaphors are via accretion. When I think of accretion I think of calcinous things, built slowly by a process of gritty deposits, growing outwards. So it may take some time for a form to appear. I am working inside out. I am working blind, and mollusc-like, secreting a calcareous exoskeleton that encloses, supports and protects the soft parts of the animal me. It is an uncomfortable experience.

This is bad writing, but I am allowed to write badly. This is my ‘uncreative writing’ (Goldsmith 2011). I am interested in his ideas of writing as a manipulable matter, a material in its own right (15). This would seem to invite playfulness, a recharging of possibility through new forms that invite
becoming. I am interested in writing myself into or through new forms. And of course at this kind of junction in a life there are other forms of writing that speak to one’s preoccupation with time: memoir, life writing, autobiography and confessional writing. I have been thinking about the idea of becoming one’s own archivist as a feminist stance against erasure – and what that might mean. And I guess that’s a later scope for my research: to ask how this kind of research, these kinds of acts I am proposing, could be cast as acts of resistance? I am interested in ideas of obedience and disobedience. I am interested in trying to write into and against my own experience as obedient and dutiful and driven. I would like to understand why I am so driven, by what and whom, and to what end?

Going to see my niece’s artwork, thinking about her as an eighteen-year-old starting university herself, sets me thinking about what exists in terms of the handing on of the torch. About art making as a generational thing. About my need to go on speaking to, and hearing from, others of my own generation and those who go before me. Is there always this need for torch handing? Maybe there’s not. Maybe we’re all better off without torches? Even so, there seems to be a need for some kind of illumination, even if it is just a flare or a beacon in the night.
NOTES FROM A CONVERSATION WITH RB

Ware with a Translucent Body will be an exploration of what it means to be female in the world of performing arts and how the journey from apprentice to practitioner to master (mistress?) is managed by women and for women.

It will be an examination of the frustrations of legibility, viability and invisibility for the female arts practitioner working inside and outside of arts organisations.

We want to look at the way language is applied to structure and to control creativity over a lifetime of practice and application.

*How are we placed and how are we displaced? And what toll this displacement?*

It is about skin; shared skin, fragile skin, translucent skin.

It is about daring to expose oneself and to stay sensitive in surroundings often at odds with this risk.

*Can you be thin skinned and survive? Must you grow a thick skin to be respected?*

It will be about the space between skin and the organs, the interstitial space of impulse and striving; the space just under the skin where light lives and where the complex struggle between power and vulnerability plays out.

*How do we remain, broken, and chipped, in an environment seemingly unsuited to the fragile thing?*
△ INVENTORY OF INVENTORIES

Did you know? The word *inventory* comes from the medieval Latin word *inventorium*, an alteration of late Latin *inventarium*, literally ‘*a list of what is found*’, from Latin *invenire* meaning to ‘*come upon*’.

Now it’s your turn. Make an Inventory of any Important Inventories you feel The Candidate has overlooked. Or go for a walk. Or use this Space to make an Inventory of your own:
△ACTIVITY PAGE: COLOUR IN AND DISPLAY!

THE WARATAH! NATURE’S LATE BLOOMER!


Text at this site written by Anne Boden for a booklet published by AGPS for the ANBG in 1985.
△ TRUE OR FALSE? See Answers below:

The botanical name ‘telopea’ means ‘seen from afar’. T/F

The telopea ‘flower’ is not in fact a flower at all. It is an inflorescence. T/F

An inflorescence is made up of numerous individual flowers grouped together in a tight cluster. T/F

In the case of the waratah there may be anywhere between 10 and over 200 individual flowers in any one inflorescence. T/F

The botanical term ‘speciosissima’ means ‘most beautiful’. T/F

The waratah thrives in poor, sandy soils. T/F

The waratah is a late bloomer. This is because it is slow to mature and its short flowering period is unpredictable, varying from year to year. T/F

The waratah is an even later bloomer in cool climate areas. T/F

The inflorescence of the waratah will generally comprise functional male and female flowers at the same time. T/F

Waratahs may be grown from seeds and cuttings. T/F

Seedlings take up to five years to flower. Cuttings may flower within two years. T/F

Waratah seeds have wings for wind dispersal. T/F

One inflorescence may release more than 250 seeds in a good year. T/F

The waratah shrub or tree lives for a long time. T/F

Fires are common in waratah habitats, but the plant has the capacity to regenerate from a ‘lignotuber’ – a swelling of its root crown from which new stems may bud and sprout. T/F

Other useful adaptations of the waratah include thick waxy leaves that hold water during dry spells, and a unique design that attracts an array of pollinators. These adaptations allow the plant to endure, even in challenging environments. T/F

In this folio, the waratah is either a symbol or a metaphor, emblematic of but one model of creative ageing. T/F

ANSWERS: True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, True, and True.
FIRST DISQUISITION OF DOCENTS:

LOOSE: *Voilà!* A curious confection indeed. One is inclined to declare it, with a nod to composition theorist Peter Elbow, a mess of ‘crottage’ (2000). A quote from someone would have been nice here, something from Steve Fellner, perhaps, On Fragmentation, “What is complexity but a lot of simple things strung together?” (2013, 177). One might also have referenced key works singled out in Dinty Moore’s survey of “more radical examples” of what he entitles the Positively Negative (2013, 184). If only one had the forethought. So! What had we here? Applications for funding, letters, musings and jottings, tabled heretofore in no particular chronological order, you understand, but simply because each performs… well… who can say what… upon the page? Is this scholarship? Acting Professor Lusst, of course, will have her own ideas, but we must keep in mind that she is Acting! I myself, as a Live Art practitioner, am not. A sideways glance at my body – of work, that is – will assure one and all that I am fully apprised of the notion of the encounter and the counter-en-counter as core tenets of this work. Each has its precedents in happenings (Kaprow, 2003), in socially-engaged, participatory practice (Jackson, 2011), in ‘restless art’ (Matarasso, 2016) and in a growing appetite for what those who enjoy assonance appear to be calling Anywhere Art (via Arts Hub online). I am as you see, fluent in the moves and manoeuvres that ‘turn’ creative practice into research. That allow one to ‘pass’, dare we say, as the other. My quotation marks are designed to ironise, do you see? For this reason, one surely need not invoke Barrett and Bolt? Haseman? Krauth or Kroll? But whither, hither, the creativity? My question is rhetorical. Please continue with your colouring in. (PAUSE) I shall continue overleaf.
Where we perhaps find missed opportunity of course, is in the testimony and the history. The Candidate’s reference, for instance, in that lecture, to a drag queen in a twentieth-century play, invites one to question whether she might not go on to consider (with Shapiro, 2007) the place of the drag king today? One might consider too whether she might not have commented further upon transgressive gender practices, cross-dressing tropes and traditions, or upon their capacity to illuminate complex questions and destabilise fixed categories (see Halberstam 1998; Kofsky-Sedgwick 1990). One soon finds oneself pondering whether it has even occurred to the Candidate that the employment of such dis/guises may be not so much drag as dragnet, inferring a means or a system through which to sense or, better still, to catch meaning, thereby affording one an altered apprehension? (One need only think of British artist, Grayson Perry’s Claire, or Canadian Performance Artist, Margaret Dragu’s numerous alters – Verb-Woman, Lady Justice – you may chase them up online – to arrive at the phenomenon of what Dragu herself claims as ‘multi-personae disorder’. But what of drag-netting as a discourse? Where is it in the literature? Or are my digressions mischievous? And if so, do they still have value? Do we listen to Lopate, when he declares that: “Nonfiction writing thrives on darting, subjective flights of thought. You must get into the habit …” – that underscore is all my own – “…of inviting, not censoring, the most far-fetched, mischievous notions…” (2013, 24). Or do we remain, fixed upon the essay, and essaying, with Singer and Walker’s contention that: “Essays like to dress up as other things” (2013, 75).

Enter WANDA, dishevelled. She wears white gloves and carries an archive box.

LUSST: *What a dump!*
LOOSE: That was extempore. I was soliloquising, intertextually…

LUSST: Not you. Nor your summation.

LOOSE: Ah! What’s all this?

LUSST: I have been divining. Deeply. My remark was a deliberate act of misappropriation from *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Albee 1962).

LOOSE: And this? From the hoard? The stash?

LUSST: Yes.

LOOSE: No joy, then?

LUSST: *Au contraire, mon frère!* It is a dynamic dump. I find it to be a site of only passing rigour, yet great industry.…

LOOSE: Really? Thus far I have tabled nothing more significant than evidence of a bit of foot-stamping. Not a footnote to be seen. Notes, yes. Journal entries. Interminable. Scratchings at memories. Archival stuff. Is curation really a contribution?

LUSST: Ah, Buster. Sometimes I wonder how you remain so un-re-constructed. Need I remind you of Sara Ahmed’s recent exhortation, from the Introduction to her new work, *Living A Feminist Life*, that feminism may be thought of as “a fragile archive, a body assembled from shattering, from splattering, an archive whose fragility gives us responsibility: to take care.” (Cited at Feminist Killjoys weblog, 4 February 2017, ‘Out and About’, emphasis in original).

LOOSE: Shattering and splattering! Bring it on! My name is not Buster for nothing!

LUSST: It would take one stroke to turn your Buster to bluster.

LOOSE: As it takes but a single stroke to turn your ‘care’ to ‘cure’.

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LUSST: Man-icure? Pedi-cure?

LOOSE: Curatus.

LUSST: Your new project?

LOOSE: The Curatorial-Sartorial? I wish. In point of fact it was the spectacle of you, Wanda, your archive box rampant, that called to mind Francesca Rendle-Short’s provocation of ‘writing as curatus’, wherein having teased out the etymology of the word curation she urges: “If we are able to think of our writing and researching as curation we will subject each newly written word in the future to our tuned-in curatorial – our storytelling – eye” (2012, 2).

LUSST: I am getting warmer.

LOOSE: Let me open this door.

LUSST: I mean I am feeling more warmly disposed towards our absent friend. Though not ready to leap to any conclusions. Nonetheless, let me dump further findings here. I shall table evidence of application, correspondence, planning, and even… wait for it… a case study! All this, and yet you make a move?

LOOSE: Time to get my hands dirty.

EXIT Buster Loose.

LUSST: (TO ESSAMINERS) What would you like to know?4

4!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
AUTUMN
CASE STUDY: The Dead Ones - Margie Fischer

This is an inventory-based work, of sorts, following the story of the emptying of a family home in preparation for its sale. Margie Fischer, theatre-maker, returns to the home of her childhood after the death of her parents.

Her mother has been cared for in the house after the death of Margie’s father several years earlier. One morning, she dies, suddenly in the backyard pool. Margie returns to her North Shore home in Lindfield, Sydney, to deal with the furnishings and goods and chattels. This is the first of many visits over a several month period, through which Margie charts the process of taking stock in her family’s home, and the business of dispersing, discarding or souveniring family possessions. Margie keeps a detailed journal throughout this exercise and it is effectively a series of journal entries that makes up the resulting ‘theatrical work’.

This is a long, slow piece. The length and the slowness of it are fitting and effective parts of the telling, even though at times we strain against it, wanting it done. Just as the writer herself must surely have experienced the process, and the strange temporal disjunctions that must have arisen as she undertook this Herculean task. If she is telling us the truth, it is mostly she, alone, who goes through every room, cupboard, drawer, cardboard box, examining every article, every shred of evidence of the existence of her dead ones – her Oma and Opa, their extended family, many of whom were murdered in the Holocaust, and then to her own beloved parents and brother. Even a family cat will be extinguished in the course of the telling.

How does she do this? She records, photographically, and in writing, the most significant objects. It is by no means an exhaustive inventory; only the artifacts that are really resonant or full of story are given the treatment. Her father’s mountaineering books and equipment, her mother’s nighties, photos and a wooden boat belonging to – built by? – her late brother as he succumbed to a rare and aggressive cancer in his early twenties – these are the objects given Margie’s eye.
The work in performance is a simple, unadorned thing. A wooden lectern waits on the stage, and the script, the text is, too, bound as if a book. Margie enters as 'herself', wearing what appear to be her own 'street clothes' - black trousers and a patterned shirt. She wears the red-framed spectacles of a middle-aged woman.

She reads to us. She reads 'the book' from cover to cover, as, on a screen behind her, photographs are projected in turn, beginning with the house. Some are old photos from the family's albums. Others are images of documents Margie has turned up, and photographed, as she packs up the house. Most demand decisions. To keep, to disperse, or to destroy?

This is the story of a Jewish family in Australia, one that arrived here as refugees. It's also the story of a lesbian daughter and her own choices, set against the context of the hetero-normative family structure. It's many stories - of the past, of that family's history. Of the present, as Margie herself seeks to make peace with her dead. And of the future, as Margie looks to her own disappearance, and extinguishment, to ask: what will remain of me? What may be salvaged, to become significant to my own partner and daughter?

Watching a DVD of the work, an archival recording, captured at a live performance I am struck by the simple unadorned telling style. She simply speaks to us, reads to us, this bald and, at times, repetitive account. The work does not appear - I underline this deliberately - to have been particularly shaped, or edited or 'artified' - yet no doubt it has been. She could not be telling us everything, surely? The work is a series of diary entries, and also a litany. There are lists. Few laughs, little emotion, scant reflexivity. 'I found this. It's story is this. I do this with it'. Few objects are kept. Some are given to Jewish charities and causes. Some are put out with hard rubbish. Many are burnt.

Gradually, the pencil lines give way to more fully rendered depictions of Margie's Dead Ones. And I'm not quite sure how she does this, or when, but the diction changes too and we are slowly and subtly delivered into a heightened utterance, a more poetic voice, so that when the narration itself ends, it seems right and
fitting that we observe Margie in an extended ritual of candle-lighting. We may not have noticed before, but there is actually a set – designed by Kathryn Sproul (and the work is also directed by Catherine Fitzgerald) – so that behind her is a wall with little inset niches, each of which holds a single tea-light.

The lighting of the candles takes several long minutes. There must be a hundred or more candles to light. Margie moves along in a sequence, lighting them one by one. The audience is quiet, still, witnessing, reflecting. When all the candles are alight, the work is complete.

CASE STUDY 2: MY LIFE IN THE NUDE – Maude Davey

This work had a premiere season in the intimate confines of La Mama in Faraday Street Carlton and then went on to have a return season at 45 Downstairs. I saw the former, and later obtained a copy of the text from the writer-performer. I am not certain I am correct, but I have an inkling that this piece began as part of the performer’s observances around a looming 50th birthday. My understanding is that it became a kind of a reckoning. These are juicy words, redolent with religious and ritual practice. Hence my underscore.

I also have the impression that Maude Davey ‘essayed’ this work so as to either perform her own personal ‘swansong’ to three decades of performances ‘in the nude’ or as a means of publicly performing her personal deliberations about whether she would continue to give these into a new decade. In each case some kind of witnessing was clearly required.

The work began with an invitation to cross a threshold. As I write this, I realise that so did Margie Fischer’s in its way, when she showed us the doorstep of her family home, as does Nicola Gunn’s work, In Spite of Myself, when it begins in the foyer, where Gunn is disguised as an invigilator. This is interesting. There seems to be some need in these pieces to actualise a crossing over into another other space, the ‘performance’ space, to pass from one world to another, reality to another, truth to another?
Staying with Maude, it is quite a thing, in the middle of winter, to huddle around the brazier in the courtyard at La Mama, until bid enter the theatre by Maude herself, nude, but for short rabbit fur jacket and perilous heels. It is she who takes our ticket stubs and welcomes us in, where someone else presides over the traditional La Mama raffle. When next we see Maude, she has duplicated herself, by speaking into the lens of a video camera that is streaming her image live to a television screen suspended aloft.

So, now I see that both Margie Fischer and Maude Davey make use of technology and the projected image, Margie with her slideshow, and Maude with this double act as she comes to us 'live' yet not live. We are urged to watch the screen, even though she is present, real and visible to us throughout this opening address. The text itself is slippery here and it is not clear who she is. There are declarations appropriated from Jeff Kennett and from John Howard in the mix.

Unlike Margie Fischer who remains 'herself' throughout the entire performance - even though we see photos of her as a child, and as an adolescent - Maude Davey's piece presents a cavalcade of Maudes, most of whom are personas she has inhabited (or who have inhabited her?) over the course of her long career.

Structurally, Maude's piece is a quasi-retrospective. She revives, and gives us, turn by turn, her most famous acts, from her days in the Ms Wicked competitions and the queer world, through to her current work in burlesque. Along the way we see Maude as vamp, Maude as ape, Maude as Man, Maude as demented pasties-and-feather clad groupie/show girl and Maude as a bruised shell of a thing, hoisted aloft by a skilfully-placed piece of rigging that allows her to dangle, broken, above our heads. In between the acts themselves is the telling, in brief monologues, of how she came to devise each of these performances.

With her occasional digressions into the reflexive and theoretical, Maude is, in passing, musing, 'essaying' upon what it means to work nude. One of the passages that endures is a section in which Maude herself leaves the stage (probably for a costume change) while certain audience members are charged with carrying on with
the ‘show’ by reading aloud from correspondence Maude has received from other artists. These are mostly positive accounts of how empowering the experience of working in the nude has been for these performers, and it is touching to hear them read with earnest sincerity by a range of ‘random’ audience people.

Until the last, when one gives voice to a male performer, who, in a candid and touching email, explains that he has stopped performing, and is now dealing with an extended period of depression. He then tells how in his show he would conclude each performance by placing his nude body in the path of the exit (another threshold) and require that audience members step over him to leave the space. He tells of being kicked and brutalised by two punters. This was his final performance.

Maude’s piece is valedictory - part mourning, part defiance - expressive of the complex emotions and ambivalence she clearly feels about her work.

‘I can’t go on, I’ll go on...’
APPLICATION TO VARUNA

VARUNA FOCUS WEEK – APPLICATION COVER SHEET

FOCUS WEEK: Creative Audio - Writing for Radio in a Digital Age with Siobhan McHugh

DATES OF RESIDENCY: Monday 3rd – Sunday 9th November 2014

APPLICATION DUE BY: 21 August 2014

APPLICANTS NOTIFIED BY: 15 September 2014

NAME: Peta Murray

EMAIL ADDRESS: xxxx@xxxxxxxx.xx

PHONE (LANDLINE): ( xx ) xxxxxxxx

MOBILE: xxxx xxx xxx

UP TO 5 PAGES TO BE SUBMITTED: Please include up to five pages of your most recent and relevant work along with your application.
BRIEF PUBLICATION HISTORY (Describe your experience in the audio medium if any):

I have been writing professionally since 1988. I am mostly a playwright with plays produced nationally and internationally. Three of those plays are published by Currency Press and I have also had short stories published by Scribe and Sleepers Publishing. I read one of these stories for broadcast on community radio (3RRR). I also adapted my play Wallflowering for broadcast by ABC Radio – this, to date, my only professional experience in the medium. Stage plays include Spitting Chips, a work for young audiences on grief and loss, Room for the Melbourne Writers' Festival, Two Hats and Sacrament for Finucane and Smith's Carnival of Mysteries, and the Melbourne International Arts Festival and numerous community theatre works including This Dying Business, in association with the Hospice Society. Other such works include The Law of Large Numbers, about women and poker machines, and The Keys to the Animal Room, winner of the 1994 Gold AWGIE, a work about family violence, The Procedure, on politics and corruption, for Melbourne Workers Theatre, and Salt, winner of the Victorian Premier’s Literary Award for Drama. My most recent project was a large scale music theatre project, Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda presented at Footscray Community Arts Centre for International Women’s Day, 2014. This was a cross-generational hybrid arts community-based extravaganza, and was captured in a live audio recording during its one and only performance.

WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE FROM THE FOCUS WEEK?

I’m in a transitional space, my last project having been a kind of swansong, possibly a farewell to the theatre. I am now very early into a research phase of a new project about women artists and ageing, and am looking at notions of ‘elderhood’ in arts practice. I still don’t really know what the creative output will want to be; but I sense that polyphony is a part of its web. Content aside, I am actively looking for new spaces in which to continue to work as I age. I find myself moving away from drama and fiction, towards memoir and other forms and gestures I think of as being ‘essaysesque’. Through this residency I hope to begin to understand audio storytelling from within, and to grapple with what this medium can do through its capacity to engage both the heart and the mind. It strikes me as a playful and a democratic space in which audiences and makers might meet and mingle in new ways. After years of working in theatre, I’m interested in more pared-back approaches. I am drawn to intimate containers for storytelling, whilst still exploring the powers of utterance. I’d love to examine some of the complex architectures possible in sonic storytelling; I’m also interested in the dramaturgical fluencies of audio features, their interiority, the paradoxes and tensions between micro moments of emotion, insight and empathy and the macro canvas of ‘the big story’. I have been a listener all my life, and long fascinated by the interplay of music, silence and the human voice. I hope this focus week will open up new possibilities for my continuing creative practice.

Sample: Script of a digital memoir: An Apple a Day (2 pages) – made for The GroundSwell Project
SOUND: Gentle piano music. Continues under:

FADE UP: STILL: A bowl of beautiful apples, red, green gold, rests on a dark wooden table.

VOICEOVER: My mother was generally indifferent to food.

VIDEO: In slow motion, my hand enters the frame. It removes a single Granny Smith apple from the bowl.

DISSOLVE TO: STILL: Christmas. Me and Mum in silly paper hats.

VOICEOVER: Fancy food. Fast food. Foreign food. She really couldn’t see what all the fuss was about.

VIDEO: Close-up on Mum’s smiling face.

VOICEOVER: Tinned tuna and a piece of fruit were more than enough to sustain life.

DISSOLVE TO: My hands, holding apple and peeler. In slow motion, I peel the apple.

VOICEOVER: As her dementia took hold, my mother moved into care. To make her room homely, my sisters and I brought fruit to fill her fruit bowl. Most of it remained untouched. Bananas would turn brown. Peaches would bloom fuzzy mould and the grapes would shrivel.
VIDEO: My hands continue to peel the apple.

VOICEOVER: But the apples? They would always disappear.

DISSOLVE TO: Close-up on STILL PHOTO of Mum, in nursing home. Smiling, fading.

VOICEOVER: My sisters and I stopped buying other fruits. We bought only apples. Bags and bags of them. They looked beautiful in the bowl, but they were never there for long.

VIDEO: Fruit bowl. My hands. Long thread of green peel falls away.

VOICEOVER: Finding each new apple was a fresh delight for mum. She would eat, and eat until her bowl was empty.

VIDEO: Hands continue to peel the apple.

VOICEOVER: So we rationed. We still bought bags of apples, but we'd hide them in the nursing home fridge, and put only one, or two in her bowl. This made her cross.

VIDEO: Camera pulls away from close-up image of 'mad' Mum, wild hair. Furrowed brow. Lost.

DISSOLVE TO: STILL. Apples in bowl.
The peeled apple is held down upon a cutting board. My knife cuts in.

My sisters and I kept a Visitors Book in Mum's room. It was a way of telling each other we'd been to visit. We'd write about how we'd passed the time with Mum.

The apple is cut in two. Its twin halves loll, briefly, on the board. Hands and knife take up one half, and cut again.

We'd finish each entry with an audit. 'One apple in bowl.' 'Three Royal Galas left today.' 'Four Pink Ladies, gone, since yesterday.'

The apple is cut into pieces. Four quarters now rest on the board beside the discarded skins.

On her last birthday, I left Mum a bright green Granny. And at her funeral I put one in her coffin.

OLD SEPIA PHOTO: My mother, a child of about four, coy smile, hand knitted dress. Bow in hair.

Colourised, half-eaten apple, in her little hand.

I wonder when my mother ate her first apple. Was it cooked up and pureed for her by her mother?
VOICEOVER: Was it fed to her, spoon by spoon, by her doting father? She was the apple of his eye.

VIDEO: The cut apple, waiting, on the chopping board. One quarter has been prepared for eating. Its seeds and core removed, it has been cut again into pale slivers, as if for a child. The knife is set down.

VOICEOVER: I wonder how many apples my mother ate over the course of her whole long life?

DISSOLVE TO: STILL. My mother's deathbed. Me, leaning in to her, my hand resting on her shoulder.

VIDEO: The apple, and its discarded cores and skin, one day later, browning, still on the board.

FADE TO BLACK.

DEDICATION AND CREDITS

THE END
The Bamboo Shirt

Over the summer break I had a wardrobe disaster. Before going further, I must make it clear that when I use this phrase, I am not referring to the typical wardrobe disaster that many will already be imagining. I did not turn up at a family wedding wearing the same dress as another guest. I did not attend a public function with my hem hanging down, or with bird shit all over my sleeve. I did not allow blue and green to be seen without another colour in between.

What happened was this. We were at our little shack down the coast and the sun was shining so it was washing day. I was charged with transferring our soiled clothing into the washing machine, adding the soap powder, pouring a little white vinegar into the rinse cap dispenser to ‘de-fuzz’ and de-pill and so on. I am usually the washerwoman in our household. I prefer to be. I’m good at washing. In fact, it’s actually less about the washing than it is about the hanging out. But that’s another matter. And we may come to that later. Or not at all.

On this particular day we had let the washing accumulate. I had a difficult call to make. Would I split the load, sorting the garments into, say, whites and coloureds, or ‘hers’ and ‘hers’, or indoors and outdoors, or would I shove everything into the machine together, call it a load, and rely on water and buoyancy and centrifugal force to ensure that everything got enough of a pummel and a spin to come out clean? Being tight for time, and yes, all right, a little lazy – I did not want to make two trips to the clothesline – I chose the latter. I crammed the lot into the belly of the beast, dialled up ‘Maxi-Wash’ for the top water level, closed the lid and walked away.

Half an hour later I stood over the machine to give it an extra spin cycle. Our washing machine is a cheap Hoovermatic with a few years on the clock, and it doesn’t always extract enough moisture from the clothing on a first run, so I’ve got into the habit of giving it an extra whirl. It’s always quite satisfying to stand and watch the hose at this point, to see the little jets of water it spits into the sink on that second spin. Once this is done the machine clunks to a stop, and it’s time to lift the lid and pull out the contents and dump them in the washing basket. Then out to the line. And so forth. Nothing particularly challenging or prosworthy there.

Now, I am used to this machine and its idiosyncrasies. I am accustomed to its tendency to lose its balance, particularly if there are heavy sheets or waterlogged towels in the mix. So I am not surprised, this day, when the machine seems to labour through this final cycle. Nor does it faze me too much when I open the lid to find that the garments are knotted together in a mad tangle. Legs of pants are plaited with sleeves of shirts, t-shirts are wound up with socks, the entire wash is bound into a kind of fabric ball-like mass a giant cat might cough up.

My task is to extricate each item, one at a time, but as I do, I notice some kind of finer thread clinging to everything, tying it all together. Oh no. Has something frayed? Unravelled? I detach garments, one
by one, from the terrible clump. My heart sinks when I realise the source of the fibre. It is one of my favourite shirts, the white one, with the pattern of crimson bamboo. I cry out. Oh no. Oh no.

My partner comes running. I hold up the shirt, what’s left of it. The back panel looks like it has been flayed with a whip. The fabric is rent into narrow strips. The structure of the shirt has broken down. I am holding limp clumps of fabric in my hands. I do not know the names for the parts of a shirt. I should know. I want to say them, intone them, as I mourn this beloved shirt. There was a pocket, a collar, two short sleeves. What is the name for the part that covers the shoulders, the upper back of a shirt, that sits at the nape of the neck? What is the name for each of the two front halves?

There is nothing that can be done. It has dissolved into shreds and string. I had not realised it was so worn, but it must have been threadbare, a tissue of itself, for the violence of an overloaded wash cycle has destroyed it beyond any hope of repair. It cannot be patched. There is not even enough of it left to cut it up for rags. Nothing is salvageable, not a button, not a sleeve, not a remnant. I do not have a photo of this shirt. Not even among the portraits of the other garments. Somewhere on one of the computers or in an old album there may be a picture of me wearing it, but I did not include it amongst the first round of the inventory. And now it is gone. So I must try to capture it with words.

I bought the bamboo shirt about seventeen years ago. I bought it in Torquay, on the Surfcoast, about an hour and fifteen minutes out of Melbourne. I can be quite precise about this, because the shirt purchase is connected to a house purchase. It’s connected to a big shift, a ‘lifestyle’ change.

On the edge of Torquay proper, then a fairly sleepy town, was a small industrial estate, and one of the businesses in this complex was called Baines Beach. I have no idea why. It was essentially an outlet store for last year’s models and designs and for us, then a pair of forty-year-old women who couldn’t give a toss about what was in or out of style, the place was gold. We would call in there on overcast days when there was nothing to do, and make a killing at the bargain bins.

I have to push through the weariness that descends as I write this drivel. Try to get to something underneath. Story? The thing is, I don’t have stories. I don’t have a pile of memories or moments I’ve been waiting to write about. I can hardly remember a thing. Over the last couple of years I have started writing a daily diary entry, a bit like my mother did, just to simply record what happened. So I have some record. Someone told me the word ‘record’ has its etymology in a link to the word for the heart. The ‘cord’ in record. So to record is to bring back to the heart.

I want to write about my lack of memories, because I think this may be what I am trying to get to through via this notion of essayesque dismemoir. See, here’s how I understand the memoiristic impulse. Someone has something happen in their life — something terrific, or dramatic or traumatic, whatever. Something that has character and incident. Something that has an unfolding narrative, high points and low points and turning points. Things they should have seen coming. Things they learn from.
At a certain point, when they have enough distance on that thing, they want to look at it again. They want to revisit it, using words, and somehow reassemble it, or else unpack it, as popular parlance goes. They need to take it apart and put it back together again, using words, to gain some fresh view of it, some perspective, or insight, or a new angle. This is part of incorporating the events of a life into the story of a life.

But what if you don’t have memories like that? What if you don’t have *storified or storifiable* memories? What if you have a kind of accumulating amnesia about your whole life? What if you can barely remember a thing about your childhood? And what if your mother had Alzheimer’s and has since died, and your father is stuck in his own golden age, his late adolescence, and all he wants to tell you about is his school blazer and his award from the Governor General for being Apprentice of the Year?

My memories are scant. Or they’re unformed, or malformed or something. They’re strange little miasmas of feeling. They’re little puffs of smoke. I’m getting somewhere now. I am. The words are starting to fall out of me, through my fingers, and I don’t need to think them so hard, I just need to collect them, in my mouth, my hands and onto the screen that stands for the page. No memories. Hardly any stories. And as I age. Same. The details, so sketchy. Who was there? Where? What happened? The shape of the story, its arc. And yet, and yet, somewhere, in my body, maybe, or in things that I own? If the stories and the memories are not in me, not accessible to me, not retrievable from my own cells, then perhaps they are somehow in *them*? And I guess that’s where this practice drills down. In the hope that there’s a kind of archaeology to be performed, an archaeology of the wardrobe, so that the memories are not in me, but perhaps in my cupboard, in my clothes?

There’s another part to all this and it’s the elder-flowering part and what is the nature and behaviour of bamboo, anyway? Why has it taken the bamboo shirt to get me to this? I have never known how to dress. I was never taught. Should one be taught how to dress? Can one be taught? How do people learn? Even without going item by item through my wardrobe, I know that most of what is in there is old, and was acquired either second hand or as gifts. I rarely throw clothes out. Things fall apart.

I am about to turn 57. Even at this age, I don’t know how to comport myself. I don’t know what to wear, how to dress. I would like to know how. Lately there has been a rash of films and books, documentaries and features about clothing, and about old age and what is age-appropriate and what older women wear and look like. There is something happening around this, exemplified in documentaries like *Advanced Style* and *Fabulous Fashionistas*, blogsites, and books like Emily Spivack’s *Worn Stories*.
Once, I was asked why I dress as a child? The interrogation became more pointed, uncomfortable. Why do I dress as an adolescent boy? Do I? I am not sure that I have ever had a signature look, but if it is, it is probably boyish. What does this mean?

*When I am an old lady I will wear purple* is the opening line of an iconic poem, by British writer Jenny Joseph. When I think of what older women wear I have two stereotypes in mind. One is that as one begins to age one begins to fade out. These are the beige years. My mother used the word ‘faun’. It is a gradual erasure, a leaching of colour, a greying away. Or else there is the opposite, which Joseph’s poem points to. Older women who enter a kind of ‘purple period’. Think Mrs Slocombe’s hair, hideous and hectic, florals and red-framed spectacles. And sensible shoes.

Florals. I am now quite taken by florals. When my mother was in a nursing home, in the final phase of her dementia, the staff took to dressing her in other peoples’ floral clothing. I am not quite sure when or why this started, I don’t have that kind of memory. It was something to do with the laundry system there. Residents were supposed to have their clothing labelled with Cash’s Name Tapes, or in indelible ink, like they were kids at boarding school. But even with the nametags, the system broke down. My mother’s sober faun and blue clothes disappeared from her wardrobe – perhaps other people were wearing them – and new garments appeared in hers. In the very final months of her life, when she was mostly confined to a kind of pushchair, a strange, tub-shaped thing on wheels into which they would strap her, they propped her in the day room dressed in other people’s dresses, and strangers’ wraps, and housecoats.

Oh god. I am remembering something. I have those books here on the shelves, don’t I? I have to stop. Check. Look for the two Visitors Books.

Yes. They’re here. I have them in my hands.
ESSAYING DEMENTIA

I don’t know what variety of dementia afflicted my mother. There’s something wrong with my phrasing there. Something about the activity or passivity of the voice. Reprise: I cannot say with which variety of dementia my mother was afflicted. I was never privy to the results of any formal testing she had in Sydney, and by the time she came to us she was nicely batty. Towards the end of her life, when she was briefly in the care of geriatric psychiatrist, the word Alzheimer’s was used, but I’m not certain it was a definitive diagnosis. Not that it matters what brand of gaga she was. Not that it adds anything really significant to this story. Whatever this story is.

It is a story of effacement, I think. And I write that word and I know that it is the word that I want; it is the word for the job, even while I cannot in this moment explain exactly what it means. There must be a French verb ‘effacer’ in its past. I would like to tease out its origins, but do not have the means to do so, (hear) here today. These parentheses around these errors will suffice. There is no need to erase them. Let my mistakes stand and be seen. What do we mean when we say someone is self-effacing? Sometimes the English I know dissolves under thought and I am lost for words.

What am I to do with these books? That is the question. What am I to do. Mother, with volumes one and two? How am I to work with these scratchings? Mine, my sister’s and my other sister’s, but most piercing of all, yours. Your last marks. The final inscriptions made by you, who taught me to write. I cannot say why they pierce me, but there is something so poignant in these final words, and a sense in me that if I could only write to them, to you through them, there might be some new understanding, rapprochement, and concord. The problem of description, the problem of using words to pin words, the problem of inviting others to see what I see in this is daunting. I don’t know what to make of it.

I don’t know what to make of it. Such a curious turn of phrase.

So I play with the texts as materials. I erase, and efface. If I open volume one, at page one, what then? Do I work backwards, perhaps from death? Do I spin everything around, and speak each entry as if by you, putting words back into your mouth, as it were?
Look up Peg and Ann.

This was your final inscription.

Look up is written in a tight hand, and all but the ‘p’ is capitalised. The pen was soft in your grip, there was no force, no deep impression. Then, those two names. In your first pass, in blue Biro, you have written PEG & ANN and underscored each, for emphasis. Later, in a moment of lucidity, you correct yourself, this time in black ink. The final ‘N’ on Ann is scribbled over. You know it’s wrong – and underneath in the same black, you put the right Anne, now capitalised: ANNE. The ‘n’s are messy, criss-crossed things, but the word is plain, as is the message: Look up Peg and Anne.

You never do.

A LIST: Things you did, in those last months, in that strange place.

You tell me that when you wake up in the morning you have no idea where you are.

You practise turning the television on and off.

You sing at the top of your voice. You know all the words.

You have a great afternoon. You make a joke.

You recognise a famous piano work. It’s by Chopin. You hum along.

You remove your jumper.

You look at photo albums. You like pictures of babies.

You are confused at night.

You stand at the tram stop. You say: a tram.

You talk to a lady in a neighbouring room.

You walk to the park.
You walk in the park.

You practise turning the television on and off.

You sit in the sunroom. You like the sun. You feel like dancing. You dance.

You see people walk a cat on a lead.

You attend an exercise class.

You read a story to your granddaughters.

You show us round the place.

You eat a sandwich.

You change the channel on your television.

You sit in the sun.

You sing your old school song.

You try on a new blue cardigan.

You stay in your nightie all day.

You try to write our names.

You worry about running out of toilet paper.

You have your hair done.

You write in the visitors’ book.

You write on a note pad: sausage sizzle tomorrow.

You say: we must do this more often.

You complain that you are bored.

You join in a sing-along around the piano.
You do some knitting. You remember you hate knitting.

You ride on the train.

You buy some apples.

You do some more knitting.

You have a mammogram.

You eat a Caesar salad.

You give me a kiss.

You give me a cuddle.

You eat all the apples.

You try on a new pair of shoes. You prefer your old shoes.

You watch a dog fetch a ball.

You eat too much chocolate.

You walk to the park.

You look at a computer.

You listen to a granddaughter play the clarinet.

You watch a granddaughter’s ballet lesson.

You watch children roll down hills.

You admire roses in neighbourhood gardens. You always hated roses.

You sing that aria from The Pearl Fishers. You remember every bar.

You browse in a bookstore.

You wear a new winter jacket.

You sit in silence.
You cannot picture your husband.

You ask to see a photograph of your husband.

You are inoculated against influenza.

You put photos of friends in your album.

You eat gelato. You love tram rides.

You attend Morning Melodies.

You drink a glass of milk.

You forget you like alcohol.

You eat a mandarin.

You receive a letter on blue paper.

You throw a ball for my dog.

You win a pink nightie in a raffle.

You have your teeth cleaned.

You eat too many green apples.

You lose your library book.

You close your bank accounts.

You have your nails cut.

You speak to cats and dogs.
EMAIL: THE DOUBLE PONCHO EFFECT

Paddy Bridie!

Happy Anniversary. Or near enough. X years since we met in New York in late October or early November 2001. We were on a panel at the New Dramatists Guild, in New York City, talking about our experiences as jobbing playwrights in our respective homelands. I don’t know if we were wearing the same shoes or shirt or eyeglasses on that occasion but we’ve gone on to do so, and so many times since, that it’s just about par for the course. You buy prawns and avocado, I buy prawns and avocado. You bring beetroot juice, I bring beetroot juice. You’ve been swimming, I’ve been swimming. These synchronicities and synergies have become part of our relationship – right down to physical ailments sometimes – so we joke that we must surely be twins, separated at birth. On the occasion of that first meeting the similarities were plain comical; it was as if we’d been living parallel lives in Ireland and Australia. We had both grown up and into theatre through the community theatre and group-devising gestures of the late 70s and early 80s, via performance work in feminist and activist street theatre and stand-up, becoming ‘accidental playwrights’ along the way. We had a shared interest in making works about women’s experience, and a mutual fascination with innovation and experimentation in form. We’d both written works for young people, works for radio, commissioned works and works that were, for better or worse, our own. We gave the same answers to the same questions about the obstacles and the challenges, the anxieties and the triumphs. At the end of the evening we stood side by side and people took photos of us, and laughed at our matching hairstyles and our similar complexions and our shared penchant for just one more glass of wine. It was bizarre and wonderful.

Subsequent visits to each other’s hemisphere allowed us to forge a friendship, and embark upon a continuing dialogue about our creative practice. The fact that we did not inhabit the same pond, did not compete with each other for grants or opportunities surely enhanced this? We were supportive of each other’s enterprise, always candid about the trials and the troughs. We watched each other’s wins and slumps. We compared our experiences at home and found many commonalities in the marginalisation of women’s work, in the difficulties of sustaining a career in the arts, especially as one ages, in the difficulties of writing the stuff and of getting the stuff on. All the stuff about the invisibilities. I’ve been more open with you about my struggles with my work than I have ever been with any of my peers here. I simply wouldn’t risk those kinds of confidences here at home; there’s too much imperative to maintain one’s professional face around such matters.

We’ve known each other for over fifteen years now, attended each other into middle-age and mid-life, muddled in tandem through health issues and personal crises and the little dramas of the day-to-day. We’ve also managed to see each other in real life some years – and of course over the past ten years or so, thanks to the Internet we’ve been able to meet regularly via Skype, to catch up, and to confer with each other about our work. When I reflect on this now I realise we’ve conducted one of these conferences every four to six weeks, for the past several years. I’ve come to rely on these sessions as part of my working life. It’s almost like being in one of those professions where you have mandatory supervision of some kind, where you are required to account for one’s self and one’s decisions or choices in a role. It’s part debrief, part confession.
This idea of ‘conferring/conferral’ is one that I think may be pertinent to our next chapter. Its Latin roots and the idea of conferre meaning to bring together, compare, consult with, derived from con (with) and ferre (to carry or to bear). To bear with its many meanings, not least of which include to hold up, to support, to press or push against, to endure, and to sustain.

And it’s all been about sustainability, as far as I can tell, you with your multi-disciplinarity, and me with this foray into the academy. I have watched, fascinated, as your work as an actor took you away from ‘the play’ (as we knew it), into the rich field of contemporary performance, with its hybridity, its radical acts of queering and deconstruction, and its new relationships with audiences. I have seen you shine in bold works that overturn everything I thought I believed about the conventions of the dramatic narrative. I have also seen you move with growing confidence into the role of director, in most instances serving as a kind of co-author/dramaturg on projects where a single artist arrives with a story to tell, but not quite the means or skill to tell it. It has been apparent on these projects that you have the capacity for deep listening required to register what lies under, between, around their words and stories. Over time I have come to rely on you as sounding board for my own tentative transpositions, and in my enquiries into the idea of late works, late bloomers, and as I bemoan the monumental disappointments that attend Things That Fall Over and sow tiny seeds of a more manageable form that may become essayesque dismemoir.

It is our own brand of creative symbiosis, no better modelled than in the democracy of my double poncho, the duo poncho, the poncho stereo – call it what you will. What is this? A garment built for two, or for one who is visible and one invisible, or vice versa. For the resident, and for the guest?

So here we are. You there in Ireland, me here in Oz. We have each arrived at the point where we no longer care to work alone; also that ourselves as the individual ‘subject’ of inquiry is exhausted, or holds limited interest. Collaboration and co-creation, then? Could they offer a way forward? We spoke last night about the idea of tendrils of work... tendrils being the means whereby one growing thing attaches itself to or twines itself around some other growing thing, borrowing strength to support its growth. I am interested in exploring this idea of collaboration through entwinement, through en-twin-ment, even, in the hope that it affords resilience and new flowerings of possibility.

So. These are my questions. How can we confer, together and apart, and how might we work to support each other’s projects at the same time? How can we work in a kind of exchange? Can we devise a methodology for this kind of practice and even a vocabulary for its performance? Thinking that part of my examination might include liveness and display. Thinking that some of it could be housed at FCAC, under the umbrella of their Creative Ageing thing. I’m just putting words on the page now, B, hoping something here may chime or spark.

Gotta go. Need to walk the new hound. (Yes. We did it. Her name is Loretta.) Talk to you when I do.

Aussie Bridie xxx
ACTIVITY PAGE: A QUESTIONNAIRE

A shirt? A poncho? Consider a garment you are wearing today. Answer the following questions:

When did you last wear this garment?

Why have you chosen to wear this garment today?

Did any other factors influence your selection?

Now consider the provenance of this garment:

How long have you owned this garment?

Where was it made? Did you buy it? If so, was it new?

Why did you procure the garment? Were you alone?

Did you seek another’s advice around the acquisition of this garment? Who?

Now, considering your entire outfit, identify the newest piece of clothing you are wearing today. And now the oldest piece of clothing you are wearing today. How old is that item?

Do people give you clothing as gifts?

Do people ever give you clothes they no longer use? Do you wear them?

Finally, thinking about your wardrobe at home:

How are your clothes arranged or displayed?

How regularly do you clean out your wardrobe?

What do you do with clothing you no longer want or need?

If you had to choose one outfit***** to wear, everyday, as a costume for the rest of your life, what would you select? Please describe your chosen ensemble in the space provided:

____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________

*****Please wear your chosen outfit to the Essamination on _______
Copyright-free image of Australian Bamboo (*bambusa arnhemica*) designed and prepared by Jane Murphy. Word is The Candidate, like some bamboos, has done a runner, but join the dots and something may appear. Perhaps she’s lying dormant, waiting for more conducive conditions?
WHO'S WHO? (OR: Which bamboo are you?)

Brandis (1907) distinguished three categories of bamboo, distinguished by flowering behaviour. There are bamboos that flower gregariously, those that flower annually and those that flower irregularly.

The most intriguing, perhaps, are the ‘gregarious’ flowerers. At the end of a protracted period — we’re talking decades — flowering occurs synchronously in all kindred clumps, regardless of geography. This means that the same plant in Asia is flowering and dying in synchronicity with its cohort in America.

Yes. All such clumps of common parental origin are called ‘cohorts’.

Some species of bamboo only flower every four decades or so. Others have been known to have intervals between 60 and 130 years.

Most gregarious-flowerers die after this mass flowering event.

Different evolutionary hypotheses have been propounded for the behaviour. These include parental competition (parents yielding space to offspring), consumer satiation (high predation) and climatic periodicity (drought, etc). All these theories remain contentious. However it is believed that flowering cycles are genetically encoded so that once a species reaches its life expectancy it must flower.

Sporadically flowering species are not as interesting. Here, flowering typically occurs on an individual basis, or else among a group in the same place. The flowering cycle is in sway to environmental factors, not genes, and flowering events occur regularly.

Which would you rather be as you grow old?

Will you flower in a cohort or flower alone?

Discuss.
SECOND DISQUISITION OF DOCENTS:

LUSST: Autumn. *Season of mists and mellow Fruitfulness*.... In this Folio we saw evidence of prepositional-thinking, new bracts, a reaching, even a branching *out*. If only our Candidate had thought to cite Mary Capello who declared: “Creative nonfiction appreciates the power of prepositions. Instead of writing *about*, as in ‘what is your book about?’, it writes *from*. Or nearby, toward, under, around, through, and so on. Rather than mean, it does. It animates. A process and a set of relations more than any Thing” (2013, 66, her capitalisation of Thing).

PAUSE

ENTER Buster Loose, dishevelled, with a second archive box.


LOOSE: You are playing Lusst and Loose?

LUSST: ‘L’ For Litany. And List.

EXIT Buster Loose.

LUSST: Where are you going?

EXIT, Buster Loose, with a third and fourth archive box.

LOOSE: This may become my life’s work!

LUSST: The case studies were interesting.

LOOSE: I found more of them, here….

LUSST: And yet, perhaps she herself is our Case?

LOOSE: Indeed.

LUSST: Triangulation?

LOOSE: Oh, for a copy of Denzin and Lincoln, circa 2005.
LUSST: Yes. Or if only she were familiar with the work of Ian Bogost she might have noted, too, that Bogost’s emphasis upon philosophy as grappling (2012, 31), through carpentry and craft, is not unlike her own. As is his proposition that one “adopt ontography as name for a general inscriptive strategy” about which he soon elaborates: “Like a medieval bestiary, ontography can take the form of a compendium, a record of things juxtaposed to demonstrate their overlap and imply interaction through collocation. The simplest approach to such recording is the list, a group of items loosely joined not by logic or power or use but by the gentle knot of the comma” (38).

LOOSE: Such a lovely turn of phrase!

LUSST: Indeed, it was Bogost’s notion of speculative thought based on metaphor, litanies and list-making that influenced my choices in the de-composition of this folio, Buster.

LOOSE: It was the list you could do!!!

EXIT Buster Loose.

LUSST: So where does this leave us? Buster! And what’s all this?

ENTER Buster Loose with further archive boxes.

LOOSE: What would you like to know?

LUSST: Everything. You have to tell everything⁶.

LOOSE: Don’t look down.

LUSST: I wont. I have an aversion to heights. Where are you going?

EXIT Buster Loose.

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⁶
LUSST: But darling… I was about to make my exit! It was my turn to go without!!!

ENTER Buster Loose, wheeling a portable clothes rack, from which hang an array of colourful garments, shirts, dresses, blazers and so on.

LOOSE: No, Wanda. There is nothing without. It is all within…

LUSST: But… What’s happening? I’ve never seen you quite so butch.

LOOSE: I know. I’m not sure what’s come over me. Let’s just say I have findings. A theory or two. And what’s more, I have this!

Buster produces a bizarre garment. It is a poncho built for two. Wanda moves to go.

LOOSE: Stay!

LUSST: But I had made up my mind. There is so little substance, so little style!!!

LOOSE: You are not partial to a poncho?

LUSST: Hardly attire for the retiring!

LOOSE: I am not going anywhere.

LUSST: Have you chosen your Ensemble for Elderhood, Buster?

LOOSE: I am, and shall remain, a Work-in-Progress. And that, my friend is a perfect segue to this. Here. Head first…..

Wanda and Buster slip into the double-headed poncho.

LUSST: Careful! My nails!


LUSST: I really would much rather…

LOOSE: Sit! Stay! Just for a while. In this poncho let us reside, beside…

LUSST: Beside?
LOOSE: Ourselves. Beside ourselves. You shall see. Reside beside is a pointer. Perhaps even a plant?

LUSST: What kind of a plant?

LOOSE: We might allegorise this tendrilly, in the image of the Vine.

LUSST: Vine? I thought you’d never ask!

LOOSE: Vine knot!

LUSST: Careful, bud! But whither the Candidate? Still lost? Still on the Loose?

LOOSE: Climbing? Clinging? Creeping?

LUSST: These are all valid Moves.

LOOSE: Yes! This is a turning point, Wanda, this is rich. Theoretically. I will table evidence of activity, innovation, experiment. Search and re-search… Look! Pass me a glove.

Wanda does so. Buster puts on a glove. He picks through the archive box. He brandishes a document.

LOOSE: Look! Look at it, closely…

Wanda examines the document.

LUSST: But. But.

LOOSE: Do you believe it?

LUSST: I hope I do. I fear I don’t. The font!

LOOSE: Here…

Buster produces a magnifying glass. She holds the paper, he the glass. They pore over the text.

LUSST: Are they real…?

LOOSE: Yes, Wanda!
LUSST: Footnotes.
LOOSE: Indeed.
LUSST: In the first person.
LOOSE: Singular.
LUSST: And in the candidate’s own voice!
LOOSE: Yes. What we have here, Wanda, is a personally forged work of faux-scholarship. An actual academic artefact! And I am at pains to emphasise that I have not doctored this, in any way. This finding is as I found it.
FX: Tock-tock, tock-tock.
LUSST: Be still, my beating heart.
LOOSE: That’s not your heart!
LUSST: It’s not?
PAUSE
FX: Tock-tock, tock-tock.
LUSST: It’s not!
WINTER
ACADEMIC ARTEFACT: PERFORM YOUR OWN MCR

There is a screen upon which to show a PowerPoint presentation as backdrop, and a small table based ‘installation’ front and centre on which is displayed an anatomical model of a human foot, a children’s jigsaw puzzle showing parts of the human eye, and a pair of plastic ears from a magic shop. All speak to ‘stories’ and memories of ailments and weaknesses in my own body at this time.

FX: A METRONOME, TICK-TOCKING AWAY.

As I limp towards the audience, the Chair of the Panel reads the title of my presentation and announces the nature and process of the MCR proceedings. She introduces my co-supervisors and the independent panellist. She announces that she will keep time and give me a windup signal at the twenty-five minute mark.

There is a window behind me. The light is strong, and it bleaches definition from me, from the room, from my first slide, which is merely a title page.

CANDIDATE: (Hands behind back) Thank you, and thank you to everyone who has come along to my mid-candidature review presentation this afternoon. I want to preface this by saying that I am going to attempt something today that may not have been tried often in the academy before. And that is to make my mid-candidature review presentation a piece of research in its own right. (Hand gestures.) So for the next twenty-five minutes I’m going to be actually conducting an experiment. And I’m afraid whether you wish to be or not you are now unwitting participants.

Reveal a Visitors Book

CANDIDATE: So before you leave this afternoon I’m going to ask each of you to sign a Visitors Book as evidence of your presence here this afternoon as witnesses to what is about to unfold. And as I say, this has not been attempted – to the best of my knowledge – anywhere else, at this time. So.

Candidate brings up Slide 1. The original, now superseded title is displayed.

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7 The MCR is a mid-Candidature Milestone. Readers may like to use this as a template for the staging of their own personal mid-life crisis or mid-career review.

8 I wore jeans, a black shirt, my boots. I recall my body’s asymmetry, its list, its scoliotic tilt. If that is not a word, scoliotic, then it should be. I had a walking stick nearby as I was afflicted by plantar fasciitis, an inflammation in both feet. This hobbled me throughout the year, and was compounded by a stress fracture in my left foot as the year went on.
‘Elder/flowering: creative endurance and the theatre of resistance.’ Last year, or indeed a little bit earlier, when I presented my confirmation of candidature presentation the title was slightly different. It read: Elder/flowering: creative resistance and the theatre of endurance! On that afternoon, travelling slightly out of my body – as one does in these kinds of situations – I transposed the words ‘endurance’ and ‘resistance’ – and in so doing, soon realised – thanks to one of my supervisors – that I had performed what I have come to cast as speech act “in which to say something is to do something” (Austin 1962, 31). A declaration of intent in which I had removed myself from what I saw as a kind of dug out of endurance into what I am now seeing as being a more active place of resistance. So what I’m going to try to present for you this afternoon, simply through an act of storytelling, is where I am, at this point in time, in my candidacy. And I’m going to try and drive all of the technology. By myself.

CANDIDATE brings up SLIDE 2: It is a quotation from Somerville

CANDIDATE: So where I am is what Margaret Somerville casts as “the chaotic place of unknowing” (2008). And I put that up at the very beginning as a declaration of the fact that the methods I am working with are unruly. (CLAP HANDS TOGETHER) Defiant. (CLAP) Messy. (CLAP.) Playful. (CLAP) And above all, intuitive. I’ve been using an intuitive inquiry approach. So I’m following leads, hunches, serendipitous arisings and so on. And I want to start by telling you a little about my background, and what I’m doing here, the nature of my research is, and where it is at the moment. I came into the academy as a superannuated playwright. I had twenty-five years of experience in the ‘industry’, as a commissioned writer and as an author of works that had been seen nationally and internationally. I’d had commissions and I’d had various other kinds of writerly occupations: dramaturgy, directing and various other kinds of theatrical things, not least of them ‘usheretting’. I did just about anything that I could do to keep my connection with the theatre. Then, in the noughties, around 2001, 2002, I noticed a (sweeping gesture with hands) change in the landscape in which I was operating. I realised I was not alone. Other women playwrights of my ilk – in fact, playwrights of my age had started to find that the world in which they were practising had changed. There weren’t the same kinds of opportunities to continue to practise our work.⁹ (CONTINUES)

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⁹ I wish I’d said ‘vocation’.
CANDIDATE: So at that point I entered the academy for the first time, interested in the experience of what I thought of as the ‘late bloomer.’ Those older kinds of artists who had yet to even begin their practise.

FX: METRONOME TICKING STRIKES ME HERE. I HEAR IT. I WRING MY HANDS.

CANDIDATE: I did an MA through QUT and my inquiry there was into the experiences of women artists, notably Rosalie Gascoigne, a visual artist who did not begin her practice until she was in her late fifties. And Elizabeth Jolley. Many of you will know of her. Another woman writer who did not come in to her own – although she had been experimenting and writing privately for many years – and did not receive any kind of public attention until she too was in her late fifties. These women then went on to have decades’ long careers. So I researched that, and out of that, wrote, in the idiom that was still familiar to me, a play, a grand play. With music. With everything. I fact if I tell you the title you will understand that my ambitions far exceeded what it was. The work was called: Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda. Now, what I was trying to do at that time, I think, was to express the frustration, the hope, the desperate wish to continue to practice, and some kind of a bid towards a very extravagant and outlandish kind of claim on some sort of space – because as you may know – as a woman matures and arrives at mid-life, so her visibility begins to recede. Or so it seems. So….

New Slide: Comic image with text reading ‘Choose Your Proper Vocation’

CANDIDATE: So I completed a draft of that piece of work and since then I have been continuing to work inside the academy. And today I am at RMIT doing this PhD on this idea of elder/flowering. So, elder/flowering builds on the work on late bloomers and I am now looking towards the next chapter of my life and to the lives of other women artists of my era to ask: how do we sustain a practice into our advanced years?

New Slide: Quotation from Beckett’s The Unnamable: ‘I can’t go on, I’ll go on…’

10 Or more accurately, beside. I wish I’d said ‘beside.’
CANDIDATE: Now, I am fifty-seven. So I am not old. Even so, at this point in my career, I find these words from Samuel Beckett, this quotation very expressive of the tensions an artist experiences at this stage of being so-called ‘established.’ I’ll go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on.

New Slide: A photograph I took of a Dandelion Clock

CANDIDATE: (ASIDE) I’m trying to drive a lot of technology here. Time is at the centre of this piece. And what I have realised I’m trying to do is to speak to the process of coming in to my own eldering. I’ve been using mixed methods. Play being the predominant one. I’m also using other kinds of technologies. Photography. Sound recording. Making of all kinds. And in fact in this second year of my candidacy – and I’ve tried to speak to this through the dossier I’ve presented to the panel – it has all been about making, in various different kinds of forms – in an attempt to kind of ‘feel’ my way forward into what it is that will become the central artefact of this research.

New Slide: Three words ‘queered, feminist, ex-centric’

CANDIDATE: Now. Theoretically. Where am I? I’m bringing a queered, feminist and defiantly ex-centric approach to the work that I’m doing. I have always seen myself as sitting outside the mainstream. The bulk of my work, back in the day was with (counting on fingers) community theatre, was with indigenous theatre, with gay and lesbian theatre, with feminist theatre. I have had occasional forays into the mainstream, but generally speaking I sat on the edges. I’m comfortable there. I think it gives me an edge and an eye on the world that allows a particular kind of engagement. Recently I have been trying to come to grips with feminisms for the twenty-first century. I’m reading about Bracha Ettinger – and her ideas about the matrixial borderspace, as elaborated by Pollock, 2004 and by Giffney et al. in 2009. I feel her work may be critical to the next phase of my process.

New Slide: Judith Halberstam quote on disciplinary coherence

CANDIDATE: I’m also using Queer Theory. Queer methodology. Refusing “the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence” (2013, 13), so that if what unfolds over the remaining fifteen minutes lacks disciplinary coherence I will draw you back to this manifesto, really, and my method, which is to allow myself to make a mess and clean it up.

11 I wish I had said ‘sense’. Always the wish/regret.desire?
CANDIDATE: And this is what I know of... this is what I have learnt is my creative process over many years of practice. I make a mess and somehow eventually, I clean it up. And I leave some kind of trace, or husk, behind me, and that, usually, is the artefact.

NEW SLIDE: A subtitle: ageing as a narrative

CANDIDATE: So in the first year of my candidacy I did the usual things. I tried to find my way across the humanities and into the social sciences where I looked particularly into gerontology. It’s a rich field in both the humanities and the social sciences, and literary gerontology, particularly, is a newer, but burgeoning field – the study of ageing through literature, through works of fiction and works that specifically address the experience of ageing, (see Sarton 1992). And in a dossier presented for my confirmation I was able to provide you with a large survey of work that’s out there, including in theatre, and that uses literature to speak to that experience. Basically in the scientific arena we find these dual narratives. Progress or decline? Triumph or decay? So we remain squarely in the Cartesian world of ‘this’ or ‘this’. My question – in elder/flowering – with its (vineslike hand gesture) unfolding is to ask if there are alternative models to this in terms of creative ageing in arts practice?

FX: TOCK–TOCK TOCK–TOCK

NEW SLIDE: A graph we made about my flight to and from Ireland

CANDIDATE: Now, at fifty-seven I am nowhere near old age. But I want to demonstrate the scientific rigour of this inquiry, by showing you the lengths that I have gone to in order to actually experience the ageing process within a very short period of time. For in order to do so, to prepare for today’s presentation, I flew to Dublin and back in six days¹².

¹² Indeed, the twin reasons for my whirlwind trip to Dublin in 2015 were (a) scholarship and (b) to surprise Paddy Bridie who was appearing in a new production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the famous Abbey Theatre. The production, delivered by directorial and design team, Gavin Quinn and Aedín Cosgrove from the experimental theatre company Pan Pan, was distinctive for its setting in an aged care facility, and the mean age of its extraordinary ensemble of elder-actors, all of whom were over sixty. I need only write that the Fairy King and Queen, Oberon and Titania, were white coated geriatricians, the fairies were residents of the dementia ward and all over 80 years of age – beloved Irish actors brought back to The Abbey for a last ‘hurrah’ – and the ‘young lovers’ (my twin was one) were residents of the facility who had fallen in love with one another in the ‘home’, much to the disgust of their children who then pursued them into the woods (an inversion of Shakespeare’s plotline) – to give you the flavour of this sublime and moving re-visioning of this glorious play.
CANDIDATE: This graph, which I put together over the past couple of days as a demonstration of the scientific rigour of my work, is meant to show you how I was able to accelerate my own senescence, via the experience of crossing multiple time-zones with minimal legroom, variations in temperature and no spare economy seats. I put that up there for those who are concerned that the playful side of things may be over-riding a more serious scientific inquiry.

NEW SLIDE: The words ‘methodology and methods’

CANDIDATE: So. Methodology and Methods. Improvisation and play. Abandon. Metaphor and mess. Together these add up, to an idea of propositional performance. That’s where I’m going with this, and that’s why today I’m working without a net, without a script, because I’m actually trying to explore the possibilities of improvisation and the essay. And a third thing – what happens when one, on one’s feet, one tries to ‘rhapsodise’ – R-H-A-P-S-O-D-I-S-E – to rhapsodise with those elements in order to create something in the moment. So, propositional performance is what I think I’m making.

NEW SLIDE: Quote from David Pledger on the artist as secular shaman

NEW SLIDE: A photo of my plastic Briedie doll

CANDIDATE: Now I have been of course continuing to read widely, and I haven’t entirely (umbilicus cord mime gesture) detached myself from the theatrical landscape. In fact, these past twelve months has seen me through a series of rites and rituals of farewelling the world I have come from and starting to look forward to something new. In a critical essay published by Currency Press early in 2013, David Pledger argued for “the value of the artist as a mediator, communicator, interpreter, a secular shaman” (33). I like that. He also said: “…if occupation inspires resistance then separation…” – that’s what I have been experiencing – “…conjures grief. And to conquer grief, a new life must be made, a new identity forged” (33). In order for me to continue in my practice it would seem that this is the… (hand gestures in loops or spirals)…the path that lies before me.

NEW SLIDE: A further quote from David Pledger’s Epilogue

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13 Further sub-textual reference to plantar fasciitis that at this point I have had for three months alongside the intensive development of these ideas and in preparation for this presentation.

14 I now know this to be the first phase of a rite-of-passage, see Turner (1969), after van Gennep.
CANDIDATE: ‘Artists had inserted themselves… (2013, 54)  

NEW SLIDE: The word ‘bricolage’

CANDIDATE: Play. Abandon. And exploration. And using the elements of the world I know so well.

Candidate takes up a purple sash.

CANDIDATE: So… as a theatre practitioner, or as an erstwhile theatre practitioner, my way of understanding the world is in three dimensions and in real time and space. And with props as well, odds and ends and artefacts of those elements… so…

Candidate struggles to put on the sash whilst sustaining a train of thought.

FX: TOCK-TOCK THROUGH THE PAUSE, LOUD IN THE SILENCE.

CANDIDATE: I’m just going to move forward in the presentation. ‘Unfunded Excellence.’ This sash is an artefact of one of the works of my making over the past twelve months. So in order to leave the theatre I’ve gone through a series of what I’ve come to realise are play/writes. And a stocktaking as well, of sorts.

SLIDE: The word ‘inventory’

CANDIDATE: One of the works I made was a music theatre piece called Swansong!!! The Musical!!! It was a community-theatre based work, the text of which is in your folios. It’s a work that tries to capture the experience of intergenerational exchange, the handing on of the legacy of an elder-practitioner to a younger. That work was performed in RMIT’s First Site Gallery towards the end of 2013 with a large ensemble of community artists. My role in that was as a kind of director, producer and deranged behind-the-scenes person. And it was the first of the leave/takings that took me forward to the next step.

SLIDE: The title ‘Intuitive Inquiry’

CANDIDATE: I’ve mentioned intuitive inquiry

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15 Looks like I was beginning to lose it here. Losing the thread. The structure. Must find that quote.
16 I wish I had said ‘gay abandon.’
17 I use this word a lot. I’m not sure why. Is it because it’s slightly archaic? It always gets a mention – a rise – from my supervisors. It disturbs them, somehow, for some reason.
18 First mention of dérangement. I think I recognise this as a French word, the verb déranger meaning to trouble, bother, disturb, to disrupt and upset, to disarrange. According to my Collins French Dictionary. But it is a kind of a signpost to where we are going, perhaps, towards the idea of dementia?
SLIDE: 
A photograph of my floral bodyshirt

CANDIDATE: 
And all my slides are now out-of-whack.\(^{19}\)

SLIDE: 
The word ‘play/writes’

CANDIDATE: 
The next thing I did was that I was able – through the Footscray Community Arts Centre – to present a one time showing of *Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda.* (SIGHS) It’s exhausting even to say it. To be there was worse. It went for about five hours. It was an extravaganza. But (*gestures to sash*) it’s critical to the story I want to tell you this afternoon because what happened at that point was (*backing away*) instead of being simply the deranged behind-the-scenes person director, finally, in this work, for some reason, I was compelled (*moving forward*) to step into it. I became a performer in this work. My role was one of improvisation. A space-holding\(^{20}\) kind of a role (*circular, arena-like gesture*). Through which I conducted our large audience and the seventy or so participants (*orchestral conductor’s arm gestures*) – a seven year old girl was the youngest, a seventy year old woman the oldest – through the experience, through the corridors and the basements, the verandas and the amphitheatres of this enormous work.

NEW SLIDE: 
Posters promoting *Swansong* and *TTFO*

CANDIDATE: 
Now, it took me some time to realise that this was a critical turning point in my practice. As a playwright of course, you are invisible. The only good playwright – often – is a dead playwright (*gesturing over my shoulders*) so if you can stay out of the way it’s often a very good thing. So, for me to step forward and to insert myself physically and visibly into the space\(^{21}\) was – I realised in hindsight – a gesture of defiance. A gesture of refusal. A gesture of recovery. A gesture expressive of an intention NOT to go away or disappear, but to somehow continue, and to find and use my own voice…\(^{22}\)

FX: 
TOCK-TOCK TOCK-TOCK TOCK-TOCK-TOCK

SLIDE: 
*Photos from the productions of TTFO and Swansong*

\(^{19}\) They are now, in essence, de-ranged!

\(^{20}\) Space-holding? Aha! This is a major moment.

\(^{21}\) The Space! The Space!

\(^{22}\) Aha! There it is. A declaration. A boast? (If so this would be a perfect moment to reference Dwight L. Conquergood, who did his own PhD on *The Boast* in Beowulf as Joseph Roach tells us in a tribute essay called *Eloquence and Vocation: Dwight’s Calling*, to be found in Conquergood 2013: 228.)
CANDIDATE: So, those makings were a critical part of the first twelve months. Here are some images of those works, both at RMIT First Site Gallery and later at Footscray Community Arts Centre, as a work that was staged as a promenade performance. So the audience moved and by the end of the afternoon had travelled all the way around the building. I wrote the text for that, and co-directed it, and also appeared in it. And you would think that should be swansong enough! But apparently not. Because here I am…

SLIDE: Photograph of The Candidate, on stage, in the performance

SLIDE: Photograph of children at the St Patrick’s Day Parade in Dublin, 2015

CANDIDATE: And this is a photograph from Ireland, where I was just last week. Just to prove that I’ve actually been there.

SLIDE: The Candidate as Buster Loose.

CANDIDATE: Now. Once you’ve performed… once I have performed… (stepping forward)… now I have been out there, I don’t want to (gesture behind) go back. I don’t want to go back behind that wall of the words. I actually want to stay out in the performance space. So much so that it’s not just me anymore. I am actually working with a team. A team of altered egos. And one of the reasons I went to Dublin was to meet with them. I tried desperately to persuade them to join us today. They would not.

CANDIDATE removes a garment from a travel bag.

CANDIDATE: However, they provided evidence of their existence and I’m going to ask for a couple of volunteers… participants in this research act to sit for them in the roles of Buster Loose, Visiting Fellow, and Wanda Lusst, Professor of Applied Manicure from the University of the Third Age, as these docents have been assisting me into the next phase of my creative process. (GESTURING TO TWO WITNESSES) If you wouldn’t mind?

CANDIDATE reveals the garment in all its glory.

CANDIDATE: It’s a poncho built for two. So if you wouldn’t mind…? Putting your head through one hole and joining my learned friend here in the poncho, just to sit in, symbolically, for…

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23 Interesting phrasing here. I don’t remember using this expression ‘that wall of the words’ but opening it out to the idea of being ‘immured’ I think of my mother, immured in that nursing home facility. I also think of my plans for this dissertation. If it’s ever done.
Acting Professor Wanda Lusst. She couldn’t be here with us this afternoon, but she, too, is a critical part of the work we are doing in terms of elder-flowering, and demonstrating creative endurance and the theatre of resistance. Wanda Lusst publishes widely on The Fingernail as Art.

So. I made an oratorio. *(Counting off on hands).* I made a work in which I appeared. I made an expedition to Varuna to learn some new skills. Audio recording skills. Because I feel like if I can’t… *(struggling for the right words)* be there, here, physically, I can start to capture things through audio. And to the panellists I supplied my first audio-composition – I don’t know whether you’ve had a chance to listen to that – a soundwork called *Making A Cake*, which I produced at Varuna under the tutelage of Siobhan McHugh. So I’m trying, in my elder-flowering to acquire new professional skills that will allow me to get my work out there. Out. There. *(Pause. Lostness.)* The work continues to grow. At times it… *(looks to metronome)* baffles me. I’ve lost my way for the moment and so while I recover I’m happy to provide you with some colouring in activities – if you like you may circulate these, there are coloured pencils in there…

*CANDIDATE distributes the colouring sheets and pencils.*

It’s a Waratah! The floral emblem of my work at this moment. Free! Colour in and keep! Help yourself! Feel free to take that with you.

*CANDIDATE returns to the lectern area.*

Images from botany have been essential to this work all the way along. I mentioned the late bloomer, earlier. The waratah is the emblem for that work, the reason being that it is a notoriously difficult plant to grow, one that comes into its own very late in the season, and if it flowers at all it does so under extreme duress.

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24 Interesting word, somehow connected to sound recording? We ‘baffle’ sound, sometimes, I think, don’t we to deaden it? Need to look it up.
CANDIDATE: So that image of the Waratah and more recently of the bamboo – for its bendiness and its strength, the rhizomal characteristics, its capacity to go where it is not wanted – these botanical elements have been very critical to the process of my research over the past while. May I have an indication of how I’m going for time please?

CHAIR: You have about nine minutes to go.

CANDIDATE: Fantastic. So. I have been continuing to conduct writerly experiments and over the course of the year, in relationship with the non/fictionLab, have realised that leaving the theatre behind has released me from the fictional landscape and permitted a move into a space of creative nonfiction. In the course of the year I came across some work by the Australian writer Noëlle Janaczewska. Noëlle presented a couple of years ago at the first NonFictioNow Symposium, which was held here in Melbourne and she performed a piece called *Hardheads and Woolly Thinking*, which brought together her craft as a playwright with the essay form. And it’s my understanding that it is Noëlle’s claim – in an abstract accompanying that work when it was published in a TEXT Special Issue 18 in 2013 – that the phrase ‘the performance essay’ is one she herself has invented. So having said farewell to the theatre through grand fictitious acts, I am now moving toward a new form of creative nonfiction that unites performance writing and the essay, but not in the writerly way that essayists know it. More from a theatrical point of view. And I’ve come up with a form based upon a number of experiments I’ve conducted in memoir and in taking inventory. I’ve come back to the story of my own life, and to the stocktaking that one does in midlife, to start to look at the idea of the memoir. And I have come from that through to a new form that I am naming *essayesque dismemoir*. I’ll say that again. Because it sometimes doesn’t sound like what it is. *(Moving to the PowerPoint)* It’s actually written down here somewhere.

SLIDE: *The word ‘accretion’*

SLIDE: *A photo of an ancient typewriter*

SLIDE: *The phrase ‘essayesque dismemoir’*

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25 Not wanted. In other words, its capacity to be a pest. There are other allegorical readings to be unpacked, but there’s no time, no time…

26 Missed opportunity for more on what it is, what NJ says about its protean qualities?
CANDIDATE: There! Essaysque Dismemoir. That is what I think I am making as the centerpiece of my PhD. The central artefacts of the work will be a series of performances, like this, that are built on (enumerating gesture) pre-prepared writing, found text, and improvisation. So a fusing together of those three things and the improvisation giving it a third, unknowable, uncontrollable, dangerous and risky kind of property that I hope speaks to the unfolding and continuing that informs the idea of elder/flowering. I don’t want to be elderflowered. But rather, I’m elder/flowering and I see this as a continuing process. So. Essaysque dismemoir…

NEW SLIDE: Definition of ED as ‘dismemoiresque by illuminated manuscripting and acts of polyvocal prospectivity’

CANDIDATE: It’s going to fuse together three things. I began by conducting an inventory of my own wardrobe – and there was a photograph there of a shirt from my own wardrobe… Again, this idea of play and of following hunches has been absolutely critical to this process and it was at the CLELAB Symposium in Sydney last year that the idea of investigating what I was wearing that day as a source of story – in a slightly amnesiac body – arrived. I seized upon that idea and went home, and with my trusty Lumix-SLR camera, began to make an inventory of the objects in my wardrobe. I then started to write about those objects and – I don’t have time to go into it now but my wardrobe is probably rather peculiar in that most of the objects that I own have been given to me. Or found. I’m not a shopper and I don’t really know how to dress or… hab… hab… Whatever the ‘hab’ word is… myself, to present myself in the world. I conducted this inventory and through the writings that came from some of those objects I’ve been led towards what I suspect is a memoiresque work about my own ageing in the light of my own mother’s (CLICKS FINGERS) disappearance, beginning at age 60 as she began her descent into dementia. Dementia arrived for my mother very early. At sixty years of age she began a very long, slow fading. So I don’t have a model, in her, for ageing. I don’t know how to dress for old age. Because by the end of her life she was wearing whatever the nursing home could find. Very rarely her own clothing. In order to present herself as the elder that she was, and as she faded away. I’ve rambled. I’ve gone all over the place. In lots of different ways. But I really wanted to try this experiment today of arriving and making this assemblage, live, extempore.

THE CANDIDATE bends down to gather some items.
CANDIDATE: Thinking on my feet27.

*The CANDIDATE puts on souvenir St Patrick’s Day leprechaun hat*

CANDIDATE: Drawing things together in the moment28.

*The CANDIDATE opens Wanda Lusst’s handbag.*

*The CANDIDATE takes out a small Tupperware container. Puts on a moustache.*

CANDIDATE: I have a number of different artefacts that I’ve brought in over here. Things to do with my mother and my work, and the idea of illuminating those will be critical as I go into the next phase which I hope will also take place on the floor. I hope with a collaborator, in the form of lighting designer, Rachel Burke29.

*CANDIDATE puts LUSST’s handbag over her arm.*

CANDIDATE: I’d like to conclude my presentation with something from where I began my confirmation of candidacy and that is with a prayer from the poet, Judith Wright. It’s an invocation.

*CANDIDATE takes up the book from which to read Prayer, by Judith Wright.*

*After the reading, the CANDIDATE removes the moustache and sets the book aside.*

CANDIDATE: I now invite you to view my arty-facts. There’s a chapter from a book, a scholarly publication, here. These are the Visitors’ Books from my mother’s nursing home. They may become the centrepiece of a memoir of my experience of the last few years of her life. These are arty-facts from Swansong. And I would also ask anyone who is here witnessing these proceedings today to please sign my Visitors Book. And there I’ll finish. Thank you.

PANELLIST: I wondered if you could talk about how those three elements go together? The pre-prepared writing, the found text and the improvisation? How do you see them relating?

CANDIDATE: I need to build up a bank of materials. And there’s more writing to do. The next few months, I hope, will be an immersive time. I’ve arrived at a revelation that I have these visitors’ books and another thing that I didn’t show, during my presentation… This is something I gave to my mother…

27 And other feats of performance. Of memory. Of endurance.
28 Strictly speaking, to *rhapsodise* is from the Greek word for ‘to stitch’.
29 And in fact, plans are well afoot. Footscray here we come.
CANDIDATE: (Show The Hiliad) Called The Hiliad. On her forty-fifth birthday. So it references The Iliad, by Homer. And everything I’m doing around this Homeric rhapsodic idea actually comes back to this. The rhapsodists drew from texts they had memorized, as well as texts that they carried as well as current events of the day, improvising on these, riffing à la commedia dell’arte, as I understand it. What I’d like to do over the next few months is build up a bank of such things. Some I’d like to commit to memory. Also in your folios is an example of case studies I’ve been making of other women artists round the same age… I’ve conducted interviews with other women artists of about my age and my level of experience and I’ve made transcripts. And I’ve been thinking about trying to cut some of those together into various kinds of monologues and perhaps committing them to memory. So that when I give a performance of an essayesque dismemoir – and this was really just an experiment with how that might feel, today – I will have material that I have committed to memory, material I can read, and then this third part that will somehow come from the floor. And I hope it will come from my live engagement with other… preferably? possibly? …mature female artists who are in a similar space and place. The word ‘porosity’ came up (indicates PowerPoint) – I didn’t get all the way through to the end – but all the way along these two words – ‘porosity’ and ‘accretion’ – have been critical in terms of my understanding of what this work feels like to make. The accretion I guess being a gradual build up of material slowly solidifying, I guess, as I perform and re-perform it in repertory. So that will give it (egg-shaped gesture with hands) form. But at the same time I want it to be an open piece that has space within it to gather the voices and the stories of other people who are having a similar kind of experience. And it probably sounds completely gaga but there have been moments over the past few months, and particularly – thankfully – in drawing together the dossier for today – when I have had a very clear sight of what I am trying to do. So I hope that answers the question.

PANELLIST: I don’t know Ettinger’s work about the matrixial borderspace. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about that and how you’re connecting her idea to what you’re doing.

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30 More accurately the rhapsodes.
31 But I never took that idea any further and now doubt that I will. I no longer seem to need those other ‘voicings’ in the mix in that way, but it interests me now that I sought them out at that time when I myself was in the first separation phase, and to all intents and purposes, mute.
32 As I type this up I think of something like lava that remains liquefied for a long time, and only gradually cools and hardens into a ‘finished’ mass, thereby finding its form.
PANELLIST: And I have another completely different question – or maybe it’s connected – which is coming back to the idea of intuition. I wondered if you could talk a bit more about that idea of intuitive inquiry.

CANDIDATE: Both of these are very recent accretions to the project. Intuitive Inquiry was actually theorised by Rosemarie Anderson (2004) and I’ve started to read her work. And she has come up with – ironically – quite a prescriptive method for the practice of intuitive inquiry having a “forward and return arc” (314) not unlike my metronome. She talks about the need to, in a way, to predict, to guess where one thinks one wants to go, to register or record that in some way, and then to constantly measure one’s findings against those initial predictions. I don’t know that I’ve been doing that, because I didn’t have the schemata of it at the very beginning (clasps hands) but it’s something I may look at more closely. In terms of Bracha Ettinger – what I glean from what I’m reading so far is that she comes from a psychoanalytical and artistic background, and is a feminist scholar. She proposes an alternative approach to the complexities of subjectivity. According to Pollock, she “invites us to consider aspects of subjectivity as encounter occurring at shared borderspaces between several partial-subjects” (2015, 7, emphasis in original). And she actually speaks about subjectivity as begun to be formed in utero. So rather than the Lacanian or Freudian models of traumas and separations, Ettinger’s work is about co-events (8), (lacing fingers) co-joining, co-experiencing. She talks about borderspaces and borderlinking and the idea of things being able to co-exist as “neither absolute separation nor symbiotic assimilation are possible” (10). It’s a very ethical theory as far as I can tell so far and so that’s kind of where I am…

PANELLIST: It puts me in mind of Kristeva and her notion of the chora.

CANDIDATE: Yes. Look. Coming from practice and then starting to try and engage with theory has been a steep learning curve for me33. I have a little read, then I run away and hide. I have another little read, and then I hide again. With this work on Ettinger – reading Griselda Pollock34 – I feel I’m starting to understand before I know! It’s a kind of pre-knowing that this is a valid container for the work that I am doing.

33 Is this a good place to confide that I believe I suffered from what I’m coining theopophobia – a fear of theory? And to add that a shift in this occurred with the realization that theory and theatre are both about ways of seeing. It seems to me that I have always theorised through theatre, and may continue to do so here, now.

34 Exact quotes added in the retroscripting process. And guess what? Ettinger’s birthday is 11 March, a day before mine. And mine is the same as Edward Albee’s. What, if anything, should we make of that?
PANELLIST: At the beginning you talked about being witness, which I think was really interesting. Because that’s about looking on, isn’t it? With a view. Then you talked about how you became a performer in this work. You were talking specifically about Things That Fall Apart but you could also be talking about this work. For you also are becoming a performer in this work. Then you also talked about being in the corridors as well. So we’ve got different kinds of spaces that we’re configuring with you. So I suppose my question is, where do you think you actually sit?

CANDIDATE: Two things. First of all, as Noreen Giffney and co-authors state, through the “neologistic machine” of Bracha Ettinger’s work, ‘witnessing’ becomes “wit(h)nessing” (2009, 2), so she transposes that idea and I feel that is very much a part of what I’m doing in my practice. Secondly, yes, there is confusion about where I sit, and it’s in this tension between I’ll go on, I can’t go on. Florescence. Senescence. The dying away and the last flowering. This is the tension I’m working with. I don’t want to get ahead of myself but I feel like what I’m trying to find is not one form of elder-flowering, but a series of elder-flowerings of various guises and different kinds of spaces within which to hothouse them….Some of them may have a tiny little inflorescence that immediately rots and falls away, and others may perhaps be a bit more longer lasting before they fade. So. Yes. Look, ‘lostness’ is central to my experience of the moment and it was an enormous relief to read Rebecca Solnit’s A Field Guide to Getting Lost (2005), and others like Tim Ingold and to get a sense of this idea of the meshwork and the maze and to be completely abandoned in the middle of that at the moment, which I do feel is very much like what’s going on…. But at the same time there is a sense of progress. I am not where I was. I am not on the outside of something anymore. I’m actually with-in it! I, myself, am now a Case Study in this research.

PANELLIST: I’m interested in the shaman idea, and your docents. (CONTINUES)
PANELLIST: These alter egos, this sense of intergenerational exchange between younger and older and older and younger. This alter-ego exchange, if you like? Is there something here about embodying other people as a form of exchange?40

CANDIDATE: I don’t know how ‘out there’ the academy will allow me to be in speaking of these things. This is part of the risk inherent in this research. To actually use those kinds of words. Shaman. Alter ego. To use the kind of playfulness I am employing as well, as a tool. It was at the CELAB-hosted symposium at Macquarie University last year, where Julie-Anne Long presented on “making seriousness funny” through her performance-based work as Val the Invisible (2010, 2012) – which I took as a kind of performative hoax – that the idea of mischief-making as method presented itself to me. I thought about the Lord of Misrule41, the Puck, ideas of pranks-giving! The role of a force that overturns and how it can illuminate and bring fresh eyes to things. It seems to me this is a legitimate approach, even though the words are loaded and possibly difficult in this context. I just hope that people don’t think I’ve completely lost my wits!

PANELLIST: I feel very much that there is a sense – I hope this doesn’t offend you - that you have presented something like what I would call a poetics of dementia. You’ve taken the logic of a certain experience or encounter with dementia and you’ve made it … enjoyable… which dementia can actually be. If you can put yourself in the moment with a ‘demented person’, a person who ‘has dementia’ – demented is an unfortunate name – there is a playfulness that can be there for people to be around. And I’m wondering how you feel about that? Moving between the ephemeral, and the present, and as you know, for the person with dementia, the present can go like that, and the past can be both painful, and returned to in all sorts of ways. There’s not a strong sense of the future, there’s no sense of future often. So there’s an incredible sense of being in the present, being in the moment. I’m wondering what you think of that?

40 This is a deeply interesting offer. The idea of im-personation (again the hyphen is intended) and where it might lead, vine-like. If only Wanda and Buster were here. They would have something to say about this.

41 I now realise this is well-theorised in Bakhtin, Turner et al. on the carnivalesque. And I intended to include a piece of writing about that suffix, -esque and how it relates to the emergent essaysque thinking.
CANDIDATE: Yes. I think a resounding ‘yes’. And I think the word *dismemoir* speaks to what you’re talking about. It’s only a little tiny etymological leap to *dismember* and I feel like that’s what I’m doing to myself, to my own memories, through the fragments in these visitors’ books – which I should add are dialogues between myself and my sisters as we cared for our mother. I would be happy if this work speaks to that idea of a poetics of dementia. And I love the idea of being able to interpose my own ageing, my memory and forgetting, with stories I may be able to recover through revisiting those books. So thank you. That’s a helpful observation. And touching.

PANELLIST: Anyone else want to comment or ask questions?

WIT(H)NESS: In education we talk a lot about ideas of explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge. And intuitive knowledge. And once you sort of start to articulate it, it becomes explicit knowledge; you’re able to explain it. And when you bring these artifacts they’re almost sort of evidence of your life. You talk about *dismemoir* and in bringing these in, it’s almost as if they are a literature review.

CANDIDATE: Thank you. One phrase I haven’t used yet is – *auto-ethno-archaeology!* That is what I think I am attempting. So to bring my artifacts as you’ve described them, and to release their stories, to dig in for their stories – because they’re not always given freely – I’ve found that I’ve actually had to dig quite hard to get some of them out. But to perform that kind of archaeology in order to present some kind of *auto-ethnographic* account is what I think I’m trying to do.

PANELLIST: You say the central thing is about time. And it makes me think about the meld between the *writerly* and the oral, or in this case the rhapsodic. It’s interesting that in traditional playwriting practice all the writing happens first and then other people perform it. But it seems like what you’re doing in a way is bringing the writing up front, into the live space in a way. You said that you’re going to have more writing, that it’s not yet as *writerly* as it’s going to be, but I think there’s something interesting about that… The non-linearity. Or that you’re trying to upset that opposition between writing being something back there in the studio, the room, the garret and this work in the here and now.

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42 It has occurred to me subsequently that this dissertation itself is becoming, in its own way, *essaysquely dismemoiresque*. It is a dismemoir of a PhD. And this footnote begs another footnote; because of course this will always be the case, as each idea sprouts anew. The possibilities are infinite.

43 My Supervisors tell me that there is always one in a crowd, one who must comment or critique. I am never that one. Why is it so?
CANDIDATE: In a way, I hope I was writing today. I hope what I’ve just done was writing, a kind of writing with my body.

PANELLIST: But do you think that the logical extension of that is to push further so that’s where the writing happens? Rather than thinking “Now I’ve got to do some ‘good’ writing!”

CANDIDATE: I think there’s a third path. I think there’s the inventory, I think there’s old fashioned writing, and that means ‘here is the source material and I’m going to sit down and I’m going to fashion something that has a shape and has a form and has a structure’ and I think there is a third cast of writing which is writing on my feet. The rhapsodic exercise is to then interweave those three kinds of writing in the moment. And I don’t know what that ends up as. But I think it is a contribution. In terms of nonfiction and performance and nonfiction, there is something new that is trying to emerge through this.

PANELLIST: The way you’ve just expressed it is more complex than a reversal. A new space with all these different things.

CANDIDATE: I think I’m trying to reject the solidifying of writing into something that is ‘That’! And there ‘It’ is. I don’t know where that leaves me but I feel like I’m trying to play around with what another kind of writing might be. That never fully – if you take the accretion idea – crystallizes into its final form. That remains a thing that is ungainly and shape-shifting in a lot of ways, and its playfulness is a part of that too.

PANELLIST: May I potentially dumb down what I think I’m hearing you say? Are you trying to avoid the letter? Are you trying to avoid the alphabet? In speaking of writing here in a performance, you talked of writing with, writing through the body – are you trying to find or articulate something that doesn’t involve….

CANDIDATE: Script?

PANELLIST: Well, not only script in the playwriting sense, but quite literally a non-alphabetic… See you’re fifty-seven and your mother started her dementia at sixty. It’s so close. (CONTINUES)

44 What it is, in point of fact, is wrighting.
45 I wish I had said ‘YES!’ to this. As time passes I see more and more that this is precisely what I mean to do.
46 i.e. queer!!!!!
PANELLIST: And this idea of performing and then redaction, things dropping out… It’s like a kind of writing but a writing that disappears… is disappearing. Or might disappear. There is that threat to it. Using convention, yet flouting it because of the way the mind works, because of memory, because of the incapacity of not remembering… It’s like you’re right on this cusp of performance and being fully functioning, yet, not so… 47

CANDIDATE: You’re right. It’s not quite a renunciation. 48 But I think it is also… It’s allowing for amnesia. It’s allowing for dementia. It’s allowing for the dismemberment of memory as well. Who knows, when I am sixty, what mental capacity I’ll have? Hopefully I’ll still have some kind of capacity to make and to write, through these tools that I’m playing with here….

The Candidate gives a small bow to the assembled.

She picks up The Hiliad, and packs it in an archive box.

She puts the moustache into a small plastic container and packs it inside the small black handbag.

She packs away her souvenir Leprechaun hat.

She retrieves the coloured pencils, and the Visitors Book, and packs them away.

She takes off the purple sash she is wearing, folds it carefully, and stows it away.

She goes to the installation. She packs away the anatomical model of the foot, the plastic ears, the jigsaw puzzle, naming all the parts of the eye.

She moves to the metronome.

She stills it.

The ticking ceases.

She packs the metronome carefully into her archive box.

She takes up her walking stick.

Archive box under one arm, she limps from the room.

47 Again, a resounding but belated ‘Yes’! This is so perceptive, so prescient. And connects me to the last words my mother ever wrote, her note to self. ‘Look up Peg and Anne.’ What will be my final inscription, I wonder? The End?

48 Some months later, while revisiting this to transcribe it, I am no longer quite so sure. Perhaps I am renouncing script? Again replacing writing with wrighting? Also refusing to write alone?
Hang on! Who is banishing whom here? The End? This is no ending. Do you read ‘me’? Am ‘I’ here? You cannot release me into the text, only then to put me out. Hello! Hello! This is the Candidate squeaking, all these typos, this tiny font? Who’s driving this dissertation? Is there a doctor in the house? Can I upsize myself? Yes! CAN I CAPSIZE MYSELF? YES!!!! SHALL I ABIDE? MAY THE CANDIDATE YET RESIDE HERE AT YOUR FEET? WILL YOU ABIDE WITH ME? MAY I BORROW YOUR PHONE? IS ANYONE THERE? HELLO? HELLO? HELLO!
ON PLAYWRITING VS ESSAYING

Distractions. Phone calls. Something stuck behind my teeth in the ridge of hard palate behind the incisors. The ageing body demands more time, more attention, more floss. There is always something wrong. The sun comes out. The sun goes behind clouds and the air is chilly. The baby dog is too cute for words, purring, summoning me to play. I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know what I’m writing. I don’t know what I’m making. I don’t know what this is. Is it perhaps essayesque dismemoir, here, already in these excursions and meanderings?

Playwriting is so different. In playwriting I am a pressure cooker. An old-fashioned pressure cooker, so heavy one can hardly lift it, with a solid pot, and a lid and a valve and a regulator. My mother had one of these. She sometimes cooked a piece of corned beef in it, to be eaten with white sauce flecked with parsley, and with potato mash. I remember the pressure cooker on the stove, and how its head of steam set up a rhythmic ticking, tolling sound in the valve department. Tock-tock, tock-tock. The pressure cooker was like a train in our kitchen.

In playwriting I am that train. I am that pot. Inside the pot is a whole whirl and swirl of notions, ingredients, flavourings and facts and they are all added slowly, over time, as I am drawn to them for one reason or another. Mostly I don’t know why. Mostly I have hunches and niggles. Something sticks to me and I can’t shake it off. Something is of interest. A word is of interest. An image is of interest, an action, sometimes a thing. These interesting things, this assortment, goes into the pot, and the lid is clamped on, and the heat is set to its lowest possible setting, and the steam builds in the cooker, and sets the little bell-chime thing to waggling, and under pressure, something I do not have a verb for, occurs. Something is synthesised in that clanging pot. Fibres break down, fats melt, flavours are released, and one thing infuses another. Fusion. Is that what it is? Some new form is fused by the interplay of these forces under pressure, under heat. When the time comes to write, all of these items of interest have melted and melded together into something that is the sum of their parts. It is something I haven’t seen before, not so much written, as wrought.

And now? With this essay business, with the business of essaying... Is this same synthesis likely to occur?
Just spoke with RB who is on board to come into the FCAC residency for a few days’ play\textsuperscript{50}. She tells me to walk on the beach instead of cracking my head uselessly against this computer screen. If only my feet weren’t so sore.

Even so I’m reassured. Knowing that if we can put our heads together for a few days, even if only to decode these words. Essayesque dismemoir. Ware With A Translucent Body. She tells me she’s working with SC, a woman – a theatre-maker – I’ve not heard of in a long while. Someone who used to make beautiful work. Then disappeared\textsuperscript{51}.

To make work. Not to write work. That’s the rub. Plays are wrought, not written. Wrought means worked, is connected etymologically to the idea of that which is worked or repaired. Ware, apparently is somehow lined to the idea of care. It is there in one of the dictionaries. Over there when here am I now in this chair. There’s someone nextdoor now, sneezing away. The sun shines. The beach calls. It’s low tide, now, and I might be able to let the puppy off lead. She’ll run and run.

But no. Sit here. Stay put. Tap and tackle. Sound. It occurred to me that each of these little chunks of waffle is like a kind of core piece. Like I’m sending down a drill and pulling up a sample of each new narrative possibility. Soil sampling, looking for interesting layers or inexplicable geological features, strata and folds. To extract. An extraction. Ex-traction. Each word taunts me at the moment. Each word invites me to dissect it into its component parts. Is it the right word? Is there a better one? There is always a better one.

Essay-esque dis-memoir. An essay is an attempt, a testing of some kind. One of the dictionaries here ties it back to words to do with the weighing of things. Those are its Latin roots, it claims, long before the French version. So to essay is to weigh something up. Weigh. Where’s that from? Look at it. One of those English words designed to perplex foreigners and dumbfound poor spellers. Weigh. Neigh.

\textsuperscript{50} The Candidate kept/will keep a detailed journal about this residency.\textsuperscript{51} Her name is Sarah Cathcart. The Candidate has not thought of her in years. She was a playwright, performer, both. Back in the day. Curious thing. She co-wrote with Andrea Lemon. Long before co-creation was a Thing, with a Capital T, they made astonishing, award-winning works together. Feminist works. The Candidate is remembering The Serpent’s Fall (1988), Walking on Sticks (1991), and Tiger Country (1996). How they were kind of plays. How they weren’t. How, maybe they were essaying, through performance, long before the others, the ones The Candidate seeks out now. The Gunns and the Fischers, the Daveys and the Brands. The Candidate should start a List. A List of Works of Essayistic Performance. The Candidate might do that somewhere. Yes.
Essay-èsque. The suffix is unequivocal. Something is like something else. Something is in the style of something else. Arabesque. Dadaesque. (Burlesque?) The essayesque, then, is the essay-like. It refuses to be constrained, defined, restricted to being merely, simply, only, just an essay. But it is willing to be like one, to bear a passing resemblance. For me that suffix also adds a lightness, possibly even a wink. There is a slyness here, an implication of the jest.

Maybe I cannot bear to write an essay because an essay is an essay. It is what it is. It is about what it is about. Maybe as a fugitive from the world of the play, I can only deal with simile and metaphor? I can only deal with things that have that gap, that sub-textual gutter, that moat between one idea and the other.

I used to exhort students, or playwrights with whom I worked as a dramaturg, to answer two questions: What’s it about? What’s it really about? In the expectation that there would always be at least two distinct answers. Maybe my stock in trade is allegory, or lies, and the essayesque allows that?

The essayesque releases me from commitment. It is essay-like, but it is not one. It allows for the slippage, the misalignment, the mal.

Dis-memoir. Dis – to diss, to disparage. Dys – as in dysfunctional and just plain wrong. With memoir. Which means memoir. So the disparaging and dysfunctional memoir. The memoir that is not accurate, that is built on falsehoods, guesses, fabulations. The memoir that is built on false testimony and failings and forgettings.

Essayesque dismemoir – dismembered narrative weigh-ins. In the likeness of an essay.

Bearing a resemblance to something we know, something we remember.

Something we wish we could remember.

Or to something we wish we could not.
Day One: 14 August 2015

It’s the morning after the launch, a few minutes off 11am. I’m seated on a triangular cardboard stool, in the Roslyn Smorgon Gallery, at the Footscray Community Arts Centre. To lift myself up to a suitable height to write this I’ve made a cushion from my double-headed poncho. Note to self: bring a cushion in J, one of the client-students in the ArtLife programme has offered to sign my guest book, and has taken it over to RL’s station to write his comments. RL is away, ill. HH is lugging in cardboard to start building her craft cubby. There’s lots of traffic in the main reception area and plenty of ambient noise.

I’m sitting at a cardboard desk, writing in public. Working at the computer – which is supposed to be verboten – but I need to try to get into a journal-keeping routine, and the computer will be essential for that, even though a big part of this whole project for me, is going to be about no screens. Maybe once I catch up on the launch, I can do my journaling at home. For now I want to catch up, here, on this week, and the launch. We are launched.

This week has been hard. HH had an elder’s death in her circle, and has been supporting the bereaved daughter of an old family friend. RL has been ill with a virus. I’ve been teaching, while being nervous about all of this, and also having worries about a friend’s terrible work situation at the moment, not to mention a relative being treated for cancer. This is life. Cancer. Mundane illnesses and aches and pains. My infernal feet. Dyings and deaths.

We cancelled or postponed several meetings and we made lists of things we were supposed to do, but didn’t always remember to write them down, or to do them. Things fell through the cracks, tempers frayed; yesterday one of us had a minor tantrum. I’ve not seen this happen before. It gave me a fright. And then of course, the icing on the cake, last night was the absence of any of my own guests in the house. Can’t explain it. Only that it left me sadly angry and pathetic, at the end of what should have been, and was, for the most part, a joyful night. And well attended, too, but not by my folk.

So. To the launch. In descriptive language. There is a threshold to cross between the polished concrete of the main reception space and the timber-panelled floor of the dedicated gallery space. Earlier in the week the previous exhibition was de-installed. A gallery guy came in to patch walls and repaint where necessary, so it’s all fresh and clean, a blank slate before the next hang. Which is us.

We are at three stations in the space. Each of us has modular furniture – cardboard desks and stools supplied by HH’s designer son. They have had a previous life at the NGV; I’m not sure in what context.

At RL’s desk is her colander helmet. It is decorated with coloured plastic clothes pegs, red rosettes and flowing red ribbons to tie beneath the chin, like a bonnet. It has two large plastic ears affixed to the sides. I can also see an in-tray – meant to be for our surveys, and her two weapons of choice, a rainbow coloured feather duster, and a bamboo back scratcher.

HH’s desk has a silver sugar bowl, with a butter knife suspended above it, slightly surreal, and some souvenir spoons. There’s a basket she’s crocheted from videotape. Coloured pencils and images we devised for colouring in purposes: My Failing Body and Other Stories.

I broke the rules, because we had agreed that we would have a singular objet on display for opening night, but when it came to the crunch I couldn’t choose one. Instead, I made a kind of tableau or still life. I had my gilt mini-death’s head. I had my Lumio lamp book, with its wondrous walnut cover. I had a metronome. I had a single, quill-like feather and a bottle of deep blue ink. I had a pair of white

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52 Here is that journal-keeping that The Candidate mentioned. The shrunken font should tell you that it does not require more than your most cursory attention. Whoever you are. In fact, these asides, here below, may prove way more interesting.
gloves for the handling of the lamp. I had two teacups, with matching saucers and plates. And under the desks, hidden mess, two boxes of shit: stationery, pencils and papers, and technology. My ZOOM, and my camera and so on.

At the threshold to the space is a stand. It invites people to make a DIY lanyard, cleverly bric-a-brac’d by HH. On a table outside the space we set out our images for colouring in, and people settled themselves there to work at the survey, which many tackled, earnestly, and at length. The idea is that there are opportunities for observation and for participation. We want to interact with gallery visitors, and in my case, I want to somehow enfold their words, and stories into my writing. The survey questions are probing and may turn out to be an excellent data mine. I’ll look at them later today, when I am robed up, and officially on duty.

It’s cold in here. I need my gloves. I’m glad I brought a blanket, but a crocheted knee rug would be more fitting. Perhaps I’ll learn to crochet one, or at least a few squares, in the skills exchange? I used to be able to crochet.

To the launch. AG spoke, and did an acknowledgement of country, before handing over to JL. We wore our academic gowns, specially customised for us by HH. We had all contributed cast-off clothing from our wardrobes. I brought in the handmade skirts I wore when I went through a skirt phase. This was not so long ago, perhaps a decade and a bit. Before I was diagnosed with lymphoedema. HH used panels of skirt material, and bits of silk pyjamas, from a burgundy coloured set of 'Chinese Pyjamas' that I never wear. (We had Chinese Pyjamas in New Guinea.)

(It’s gone midday. HH has filled the corner with cardboard shelves and brought me coffee. It’s strange to write here, but I’m starting to screen out the noise. I wonder if I can be more productive here?)

RL was our MC. We did a performance. I played the toy piano for a version of God Save the Queen, and a recitation of the pledge. It’s not the wording I remember – I honour my God, I serve my Queen and I salute the flag – but similar. It promises cheerful obedience to parents, church and state.

I then attempted to recite Prayer, by Judith Wright, which I had memorised, or so I thought. To preface this, I set the metronome to beat out a slow time, and opened the Lumio book. RL stood nearby, and was able to feed me the right words when I needed a prompt and people were unable to determine whether my memory lapses were staged or for real.

In hindsight it seems perfectly apposite to my inquiry that I should have lapsed in this way. Nerves got the better of me, even though I tried so hard to stay in my skin and feel my way though the poem and the meanings of the words.

Next was RL’s recitation, flawless. A poem. The Layers. The author was Stanley Kunitz. And then the singers entered. This was a moment. Six portly fellows in black shirts and trousers, with sequinned purple vests. It amazes me that the men ended up having more airtime over all, than we did, but there had been some kind of a misunderstanding, and they embarked upon five songs. One of them was borderline offensive, a ‘comic’ song about a man on his wedding night whose new bride prepares for bed by removing an eye, her teeth, her hair…a cork leg. I looked at the ground. Other numbers, sung barber shop-style, were tuneful and full of warmth. It was good to see older men express themselves in this way, but we could have done with less of their sexist banter in between. ‘Who’s single?’

Our final item was a group war cry, penned by RL. ‘We are the Boldie Oldies. We won’t do what we’re told.’ After which we milled and thronged. Some drank. Others did the survey. Some coloured in. It was convivial. And we were launched. And now it’s time for me to robe myself in my formal garb and see what I can make of things with a pen and a pencil. I have the urge to lock away my computer, and some of my treasures.

Here are today’s fears and questions. Will I get a parking ticket in the car park? Can I afford to pay $6.70 a day to park in the street? Can I afford coffees and lunches here for the next two months? Where are the additional pages I produced for the colouring book: the owl, the mandala? The title page? It’s one thirty. It’s time for lunch.
AFTER LUNCH

HH is constructing tall cardboard walls. A woman with an acquired brain injury and balance issues, bumps against our desks, demanding scissors, knitting lessons, and answers about everything. We are concerned that we haven’t had a briefing about how to manage this clientele around the issue of our stuff, our precious odds and ends. I would be very upset if things were broken, especially metronomes, and china cups.

I brought in a yoga mat, a pillow, a blanket and an eye mask, with a view to taking a nanna nap, but I can’t imagine ever feeling tranquil or private in this space. Perhaps that will change over time? Even so, it does feel good to sit here and write. To have somewhere to go. And look at all these words.

I flipped through the writing books, but didn’t dare make a mark.

Over lunch I wrote ‘lines.’ Insignificance is liberating. I wrote it out ten times in my best running writing, not lifting the pen through each word, then going back to dot and cross. Insignificance is liberating. It feels like an appropriate Thought For The Day. I haven’t dared put pencil to paper although I want to. I want to make some first marks before I call it a day.

I just remembered how we used to nap at our desks when we were small and at school. I have an irresistible urge to put my head down now.

DAY TWO: 15 August

It’s a Saturday and there’s a weakish bit of sun. Spring may just get here after all. The Happy River Café is jumping with the brunch and bicycle crowd. It’s great to have somewhere to go, and I get a good park for the car.

In the gallery, extra walls. Large cardboard constructions, of shelving. HH is cocooned. Well, not quite. She has a cyclorama of shelving curving gently behind her, to prescribe an arc. It’s not the cubby effect she’d wanted, and she’s disappointed, but our curator, has over-ruled her. BF says the monumental walls were interrupting the lines and the light. In my corner too, cardboard shelves, and a wall. I can live with the shelves, but the wall-like blockade at my back feels intimidating, and it takes away from the one long white wall I am hoping to fill, at some point, with text. It’s a matter for further discussion, but I am happy to sit with it awhile, sense how it feels in the space.

I robe up. This involves exchanging my plaid jacket for my official robes, and my Unfunded Excellence sash. I also have a pair of house slippers from the two-dollar shop. They’re furry inside and have fluoro peace symbols over them. Now I’ve slipped a spare pair of orthotics into them, they’re more comfortable to wear. I like the ritual of robing and unrobing to step across the threshold into the gallery space. I hang my jacket where the robes were, and leave my shoes beneath. I’m in the space.

HH is too. She’s at her desk doing the crossword. Nearby is our guest for today’s Show and Tell, setting up her technology. When I ask how it’s going, I’m told: Don’t ask. I witness more testy exchanges through the afternoon as staff members make the mistake of asking the same question. The woman is angry and rude. I want to pull her up on it, but I don’t. She borrows another computer and other odds and ends and somehow gets everything working. It’s an elaborate technical production within which we have a PowerPoint presentation, audio and video, and music, and it tells the story of her life as a member of the trans community, someone who only began to live out her gender queer identity in her seventh decade. It’s a fascinating tale, and the small audience is appreciative, though one man, later, tells me he’s here to hear about ageing, not LGBTQI issues. I argue that it is about ageing. About maturing into one’s identity. We have scones and tea and talk some more.

Over the course of the afternoon, people come and go. RL is with us by now and it feels good to have all three of us there being busy bees. There’s a sense of sustained industry, even though none of us is quite clear what she’s doing.
RL takes charcoal and scrawls on the walls. A quote from Iris Apfel\(^53\) delights us all. I have good conversations with people who call in. A young PhD student working on computer modelling about sugar gliders and extinction is fascinating, and I’m just starting to grill him about words like extinction and extant, when another fellow joins us, and the conversation finds a different path. It’s fascinating, though, and it reminds me that that word, EXTINCTION, was one of my early prompts. It’s charged with some frisson of energy and I want to unpack it etymologically and remind myself of what it really means\(^54\). As I write up these notes, it’s to my right, on the wall, on my butcher’s paper mindmap. Extinction – Kolbert (Golden Frog) is in fact what it says. I can’t remember who Kolbert is, or why I noted that frog. Might go back to that at some point.

At one point I look over at HH’s desk. She is off baking scones, but a father and daughter sit side by side in her place, colouring in. The father has chosen one of the anatomical images, the daughter is colouring in my waratah.

The dogs want their dinner. I need to head home.

Time just to record what I did. As I left last night I pinned the phrase *Insignificance is liberating* to my board. Today’s message: Thrift.

To work up to that I started work on my Child’s Garden of Verses Copy Book. My hands hurt now as I remember it. I held a pencil and printed out three stanzas, trying to stay in the allocated guidelines. My writing was tight and odd. As I wrote, other memories came through, so I opened a moleskin exercise book, which I have labelled Book One. There, in biro, but still printing, I wrote about doing the writing and the memories that were called up.

I have a feeling and a hope that this might be quite a transformative time.

\(^53\) Ninety-five year old New Yorker, designer and style-maven, Iris Apfel sports iconic round eyewear with great aplomb and continues to lecture as a visiting professor. She’s been featured in several inspiring documentaries including Ari Ben Cohen’s inspiring Advanced Style. When The Candidate grows up she wants to be like her, if only she can figure how to dress for old age. Lately she’s been experimenting with lairy trousers and unmissable shoes, in quest of a signature ‘look’. Oh to be one of the inspiring women profiled in the documentary series Fabulous Fashionistas, she thinks. Or you, Wanda! Wherever you are. Oh, to be you.

\(^54\) And get around to doing so in a late pass through this dissertation, when The Candidate remembers that she missed Hannie Rayson’s return to playwriting with her play, Extinction, having had both a season and a tour in 2016. Rayson, then, too is resuscitated, recuperated and a LBAP again. Hooray. As for the etymological matter, the dictionary offers this: from Latin *extinctionem/extinctionem* (nominative *extinctio/extinctio*) ‘extinction, annihilation,’ noun of action from past participle stem of *extinguere/extinguere* meaning ‘to quench, wipe out’. Originally of fires, lights; figurative use, the wiping out of a material thing (a debt, a person, a family, etc.) from early 17th Century of species, as used by Darwin?) The wiping out of a material thing. Its erasure? The connection with *quench* interests The Candidate but she cannot explain why. Is it merely that irresistibly queer ‘que’ that kicks it off?
DAY THREE: Sunday 16 August

I can only manage an hour in the space. I go in wearing the black clothes I’m to wear for our choir concert later today. The café is bustling, as usual. People are having picnics on the lawn. The gallery is quiet though. C is staffing the reception desk, directing groups and children to a birthday party in one of the rooms below. I put on my Unfunded Excellence sash and sit at my desk. I’m alone for an hour. No one approaches.

I put my headphones on and set the metronome going.

With my Choraline Tenor Part (Faure’s Requiem) on the iPod, I sing through my line. The metronome tocks along, out of time, but masking, I hope, my tuneless hum. I know I am out of tune when I sing with headphones on.

I am happy here. I imagine what it might be like to stand at a music stand and sing this. Without the muting and the masking. To stand there and sing through, and make an exhibition of myself singing through.  

At the end of the session, I write one word: Requiem. I leave it at my station.

In my sleep that night I think about wearing drag into the space. I think about turning up as Wanda Lusst and taking her painting with me, and sitting, staring into the painting, like Narcissus. I think about dressing as Buster Loose, and going in. The idea thrills me, and it’s less of a challenge to dress for him, than it is as Lusst. I think of taking my accordion in, my woodcarving. All my toys. I think of going there every day to play. I think I will miss it on my teaching days.

DAY FOUR: Monday 17 August

Today’s word: Chiasmus. I’m not certain what it means. Crossroads? Crossing. And yet I’ve pricked up my ears to it on more than one occasion.

I went in today at midday. I needed Monday morning for home duties and as a kind of de facto weekend. The gallery was quiet again. I set myself up and worked at the copybook for an hour; then grew tired of it. I sat reading for a while, from a theoretical book in which the above word appears.

DAY FIVE: Tuesday 18 August

The days blur. There are small children dancing with their olds. A woman called J visits with me, and comes back again later with a friend. She’s captivated by our upcycled robes. Later in the day she phones FCAC and asks for me. I take the phone call at reception. She asks if I will write out a certain poem for her. I say I will.

I mix up my afternoon, doing time at the copybook, and spending time on the first few pages of the Visitors Books. I don’t know what to make or do with these at all. The writing is boring accounts of day-by-day visits to our mother. I try to deconstruct the first few pages, isolating verbs from nouns, nouns from adjectives. I don’t know what I’m looking for. The pencil work hurts my hands after a while, so I go back and forth between these two activities.

I tell myself I must complete the Garden of Verses copybook this week, but it’s slower work than I thought. Also I’d expected it to stir more memories. It doesn’t.

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55 It would appear that The Candidate is entertaining a fantasy of coming to voice.
56 It would appear that The Candidate is entertaining more than one fantasy.
57 It would appear that The Candidate is entertaining.
DAY FIVE: Friday 21 August

I come in after lunching with MM, to find HH deep in conversation with a colleague. As they talk, she sketches the colleague’s hands. HH’s station is more colourful and more ‘activated’ than before. There are knitting wools, and toilet rolls and crafters’ tools of various kinds. The suggestion is of great activity, great productivity. On the floor are the three works she’s completed at her latest life-drawing class. These are to be replaced each week. Later another friend arrives, with his guitar. She draws his hand as it supports the guitar’s neck.

RL’s desk is much as it was. BF has supplied a funny filing unit, and we have plonked a virgin survey in each fold of it, ready to be dispensed.

I am trying out different things. Copying out texts given to me by RL, and also by one of the visitors to the gallery. It’s laborious, ruling up the pages, writing up the text. I don’t try to memorise anything, but there’s a sense that the act of writing things out would make this easier, if I did try.

The most pleasant things that happen are conversations. People come, sit, sometimes they disclose something. I had a long conversation with a young actor about art and ageing, about becoming a father, about Shakespeare and playwriting. Little gems and bon mots are entered in my Visitor’s book. I don’t know what to do with them yet. Each day I add a new word to the pile on my desk. It now includes *effacement*, and *scythe*.

As evening arrived my supervisors turned up, with guest writers from Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines, here as part of the WrICE program. They were as surprised to see me as I was them. I sat in on their poetry forum, and wished I could write like that.

I always wish I could write like that.

DAY SIX: Saturday 22nd August

Alone in the gallery until JM comes in to teach me to make quills from cockatoo feathers. She sets up a makeshift worktable using our cardboard stools and we get to work with knives and breadboards. It’s a simple two-step operation, a sharp angular cut, and a single incision to allow the quill its uptake of ink. I should be able to get some writing happening with these.

Conversation segues from living with a cockatoo, to the bafflement of the middle of a PhD. We talk about the need to refine the question, and JM trots me through her final submission, its various chapters, what they were and how they added up, in the end. I’m struck by her declaration of intent: I wanted to know what gave rise to new circus, she says. What do I want to know? How to continue my practice into my third age? Is that it? Is that enough?

Today I feel compelled to go back to Mum’s Visitors Books once again, to trawl through them for…. something. I am sure there’s something in there.

Word for the day: *Pomposity*.

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58 WrICE stands for Writers Immersion and Cultural Exchange and is a programme run out of RMIT University non/fictionLab by The Candidate’s Illustrious Supervisors, and through which over the past several years they have facilitated residencies, workshops and dialogues between writers from Australia and the Asia-Pacific. The publication *The Near and the Far* (Scribe, 2016) is just one of the fruits of this programme.
DAY SEVEN: Sunday 23 August

I don’t remember what I did. I know I came in. I was upset. News of the imminent euthanasia of a friend’s dog has me in the grip of a deep melancholy. I think about it all the time, and feel tearful too. Illness, death, shame, sorrow. It’s a soup of thick feeling. I worked over one of the Visitors Books, trying to extract simple sentences in which my mother did things, performed or completed specific actions. I made a list of these. I didn’t feel like interacting with people when they came in. I had to force myself to do it.

I don’t know why I’m doing this. I don’t have the emotional or intellectual propulsion. TTFO was transformed by my rage over the Miles Franklin shortlist. Where is the fuel to transform this?

HH asks me: And if you had three months to live? I have no idea. Not a clue. Drop everything. Go.

I think about dogs, about the short length of a fuse that is their lives. About their rights. About whether I am doing the right thing by ours. I think about the ferocity of my love for them. How easy it is to feel it for them; how hard it is so often to feel it for my humans.

I think about suffering. I think about how sick I am of measuring my own aches and pains.

I thought something would happen here. I thought by moving my head here something might happen, something might be freed up, loosened.

I hate my writing. The woe and the worrying. The inward awkwardness of it. The self-consciousness, the cumbersome prose and cliché. I want to write about something else.

On Sunday I copy out sections of an article in Mother Jones magazine by Aaron Reuben (2015) about a possibly theory that links dementia and pollution. It was suggested after the study of a group of dogs in the polluted city of Mexico. They showed signs of derangement, over time. I also re-read Stanley and Sophie, Kate Jenning’s 2008 memoir about life with her two border terriers. It’s written in tiny little bites, beads of disconnected story. Each chapter is a kind of a micro-essay. But I’m disappointed too. I thought there was more about Alzheimer’s in there. There’s not.

DAY EIGHT: Monday 24 August

My morose mood continues. I bring in all the death paraphernalia and ‘populate’ the cardboard shelves with it. It is unappealing. Later I think I need to make some kind of installation there, a wunderkammer.

Today I copy out text from a book called What’s A Dog For? (Homans 2012). I find that if I take certain words and turns of phrase I can lay them out on a page and they start to look like poetry. Some times I think I should prefer to write poetry. The short stubs of ideas and images have a certain appeal. I write about dogs for most of the day.

I like being here. As staff from FCAC pass by I sing out: ‘I’ll never leave. You won’t get rid of me.’ I come for a morning session, then go home to see the dogs and have cauliflower soup for lunch. Like a real person with a real job who is out in the world. It’s fascinating how the day shrinks. I’m efficient with my housework, my home duties. Supermarket late Sunday afternoon, washing machine on speedy short cycles, marinated fish in mirin and sesame oil ready to go. I only half make the bed. It’s painful, and an exercise in will to leave the house with the bed unmade. It makes me catch my breath to write about it.

A few more conversations in the space. They feel different here. Everything is transformed by the simple virtue of being ‘inside’ here. A cheap plastic pencil sharpener lodged in the lid of a vitamin jar becomes something to look at, something displayed. Art? Not-Art? I am fascinated by how people enter the space, especially if I am in here on my own.
They seem to move clockwise naturally, if they enter the gallery space at all. First they must decide whether or not to cross the threshold. They linger at the line between the polished concrete or reception, and the timber boards of the gallery. They loiter at the DIY lanyard post, unsure. If they cross the line, it’s to drift over HH’s way. Maybe it’s simply because there’s more stuff in there, things to look at, and a gallery is supposed to be for looking.

They go into her cubby. Usually her desk has evidence of recent activity, so perhaps that’s why if they settle at all, to colour in, it’s there that they settle. Mums and kids, and groups of friends. I watch a group of young adults work there, companionably, for about forty-five minutes this afternoon. They are colouring in as they chat.

When you enter a gallery space, you do so looking for things to look at. Even the most mundane object is invested, here. I remember mistaking an air-conditioning vent outlet for an Agnes Martin\textsuperscript{59} work in the MOMA in New York. So whatever I bring in here – a newspaper, a clutch of cockatoo feathers, an apple, a toy piano, is – becomes – that prized thing, a work of art.

\textbf{DAY NINE: Tuesday 25 August}

And I am a work of art too, when I sit here. I am a thing to behold. Something remarkable to be observed. And I am sad, so sad about this dead dog.

I am more than sad. At the moment, I feel heart broken. I am feeling the heartbreak that was TTFO, the heartbreak of my life when it’s like it is at the moment, the heartbreak of the decision to put a dog down, the heartbreak that comes with ageing. I feel like this is a very significant passage to be navigated, at fifty-seven and a half. It is the cusp of the third age. I find myself wondering if my life, as it is, is sustainable. Is this it? Is it enough?

As I write this, my cheeks flush and my body throws a sudden sweat. I am always expecting to be dying. I am always, always waiting to be felled by the next thing, the next cancer, a new body blow.

I don’t want to be here today. I don’t want to be seen. I don’t want to be on display. (A word whose origin is in the idea of unfolding).

\textbf{DAY ?: 1 September 2015}

I have lost the thread. And today I am typing blind. My glasses broke last night. I have not been documenting the days or the thoughts or the conversations or the transformations in the space.

So a quick re-cap. As I type this HH is crocheting with videotape. She is preparing for the arrival of her crochet crew, her 90-year-old mother and an older friend with mild dementia. I have been to the podiatrist this morning; I feel like my ageing body is giving me plenty of material to work with.

In the past week, I had a Skype session with GM, and a first visit with RB.

\textsuperscript{59} Another March baby, (born 22 March, 1912) the late, great Agnes, one of The Candidate’s favourite painters, lived a very long life and worked well into her elderhood. The Candidate takes solace in Agnes’s writings (see Glimcher 2012), and in her shimmering paintings, with their subtle colours, and in her seemingly inexhaustible interest in, and return to the same subject, lines and grids, lines and grids, in a lifelong bid to somehow portray emptiness that is not empty, to depict immanent space.
I have labelled the contents of my cardboard shelving variously ‘art’ and ‘not art.’ I have done this using the small visiting cards\(^{60}\).

RB is in this week. We’ve been having the best time, playing, riffing, following threads of ideas and chains of coincidences. Sewing cards, cabinets of curiosities, still lives, dead and decaying languages, the Mass\(^ {61}\).

We’ve had lots of visitors in the space. Eritrean women wrote on walls. Others. The space is changing. Singaporean students heard an Oodgeroo Noonuccal poem from RL, then they, too, wrote on the walls. My clean white walls! I spent much of yesterday going at them with Sugar Soap. And even though it’s only chalk there, it wouldn’t come off. So I’m working over the smudges of chalk colour, and that’s fine. I’m writing on the walls in chalk, and today, in Texta, on the cardboard. A palimpsest\(^ {62}\).

I want to account for my time with RB, but I can’t. My back’s too sore. Making a pact with myself to write for one Pomodoro\(^ {63}\), then call it a day.

RB came in on Monday for a couple of hours, and then returned twice more. As always, she is super prepared and has put heaps of thought into what I’ve been able to articulate thus far. She responds with offers. These instantly strike sparks, setting in motion new flares of thought and possibility. On Monday she brought alphabet beads and a delicate butter-coloured soup bowl with a chip in its rim. We put the beads in the bowl, and I covered them with my magnifying glass. This seemed to speak of something. Later we put beads into pillboxes, spelling MEMORY in one box and AMNESIA in another.

She brought books, too, including Medicine Man (2003), published by the British Museum Press, about the Forgotten Museum of collector, Henry Wellcome. She brought books about light, and we each brought in our wellworn and beloved copies of Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space to revisit Chapter Three, Drawers, Chests and Wardrobes (74-89)\(^ {64}\). RB sat in the window and read bits of it to me out loud.

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\(^{60}\) Visiting cards! Visitors Books. As The Candidate revisits this chapter in the final months before submission three of her young nieces are sitting vigil around the bedside of a dying Grandmother. And they only farewelled her husband, their Pa, last week. It feels intense, and cruel. We are all just passing through, are we not? Merely visitors, leaving little marks and scratches here and there to say: ‘X was here.’

\(^{61}\) It was RB who ‘fed’ this idea back to The Candidate like a good dramaturg should, when she picked up a fresh whiff of the liturgical. There has been this leaning in her writing for years. The play Salt should have been subtitled ‘A Kitchen Mass.’ Then there are pieces that don’t even try to disguise their leanings. ‘Sacrament’ – one of two micro-plays performed in Finucane and Smith’s Carnival of Mysteries (Melbourne International Arts Festival, 2010) is a case in point.

\(^{62}\) Again this ‘play’ around ideas of indelibility and erasure.

\(^{63}\) A time-keeping app on her computer, The Candidate likes the Pomodoro method of working in twenty-five minute bursts, with four-minute rest breaks in between. She also likes the Pomodoro’s resemblance to one of the plastic wind-up kitchen timers she used in the Smorgon gallery and later in Missa Pro Venerabilibus. A tomato as a timer. WTF!

\(^{64}\) Space. The poetics of space. Drawers. Shelves.
We played with an overhead projector, putting objects on it. Feathers and kitchen sieves and the beautiful glass inkwell she gave me on day one. It cleaned up beautifully, and on the glass plate, with a feather in it, it looks like a Margaret Preston⁶⁵ etching.

I wrote on the wall, in chalk, practising my cursive writing. The words look beautiful up there. Somehow something led us towards Latin, and the Latin Mass, which we took apart for a structure. I feel like we’re edging closer to something. JM let me bring in one of her prized possessions from home, a fabulous little compartmented suitcase – we think it’s probably an antique doctor’s bag – and we talked about putting lighting inside, illuminating the drawers or the contents of the drawers. We talked about ways of reminding oneself to do things, and RB brought in a wonderful list she’d compiled with her family. It was almost a script in itself, being a series of instructions one could follow.

I’ve been thinking since about putting kitchen timers on. One for each minute of the performance. And engaging audience members somehow. So for instance when this timer goes off at the six-minute mark I need to be up to this bit in the performance or I need to eat some blueberries, as they’re good for the mind. So that the piece is peppered with aides memoire, and also with health tips, ways of staving off dementia? And all of it somehow composed in the moment with Readings from my mother’s Visitor’s Book, epistles – I thought for a moment of a stash of old letters I used to have, I hope I threw them out – and other key texts and actions. Like a Mass. So that Ware With A Translucent Body is a series of different episodes that would normally compose the Mass, but that these are somehow detachable, reversible, able to be mixed at random or in the moment. We talked about my piece Sacrament and I dug it out again and read it, and sent it on to RB.

I wrote the word numinous. I don’t know what it means⁶⁶. When I find out, it gets me thinking about some coveted items in JM’s studio.⁶⁷.

In the larger space, the others come and go. RL recites for individuals and for large groups, and her repertoire expands. HH’s is a mess of creativity and play, the colouring-in remains popular and there’s always some crocheted videotape on the shelves. Plans for the forum are coming together.

DAY ? Tuesday 8 September 2015

The time goes fast. I joke that I will chain myself to a pylon at the end of this; I will NOT leave.

Recap. On the weekend, Saturday afternoon, we had BH in the space. He is in his 80s, a lifelong educator and activist, and he has recently taken to writing and self-publishing poetry, including works of unpunctuated memoir. He spoke, read a little, to an appreciative but embarrassingly small audience. We are thwarted in our hopes of drawing a crowd here via the usual channels. It’s frustrating and we feel bad about it. Still the audience gives him a good hearing, and there are scones and cake to compensate afterwards.

JM helps me bring a small filing cabinet into the room. We pull it out from the wall, so it floats in the space, inviting people to walk around it, to open its drawers. There’s nothing in most of them, bar the

⁶⁵ Leading Australian modernist, Preston was a printmaker and painter who died aged 88. Although she used a range of subjects in her work, it is her botanical paintings that never fail to delight The Candidate.

⁶⁶ Having a strong religious or spiritual quality, indicating or suggesting the presence of the divine.

⁶⁷ The Candidate may finally get to revisit/re-purpose The Stations of the Cross. Her partner has had a set (minus one) in her studio for years. Props from a film she worked on. The Candidate has long had designs on them and they have often talked about what they might do to them. Jesus goes to the Podiatrist?
pencil marks left by the carpenter who made them, except in one drawer, in which I’ve stowed the Book of Fears. This started as a private enterprise, but since I gave a reading from it to the others, it seems to have expanded to become a collective record. I like this.

On Sunday I take the day off to attend a rehearsal of Carmina Burana⁶⁸. There is something delightful about this musical mix of sacredness and profanity.

Monday is great. RB is here again in the afternoon. My wall is slowly filling with words, each of them written in one flowing movement in my improving modified cursive script. RB loves certain letters and at one point observes that many of my words are composed by the letters from the end of the alphabet. There are words to do with the body, and with the mind. There are biggish, conceptual kinds of words, like senescence. And there are words that might be substituted, mistaken one for another – sieve, salve, stave, strive.

We don’t know what they’re there for.

We talk about crumbs and flakes. We talk about actions of unravelling, or of fraying. Behind the scenes I’m collecting kitchen timers and JM finds a horde of them in a two-dollar shop in Mentone. We talk about slipping light inside the drawers of the filing cabinet, and we ask what would happen if it was made of cardboard, bespoke, by HH’s son. We wonder about putting constellations of pinpricks into things, into desks and filing cabinets, and letting light through.

HH crochets a feather boa from videotape. RL performs with a white shroud, then leaves it propped, cascading from a plinth in the window area. It looks like a discarded cocoon. Later we are all here, working away, RL with her friend, S, a choreographer, I believe, and me with RB. It’s a little hive of industry and it feels great, even though there are regular interruptions and distractions. RL passes through in her helmet, with her feather duster rampant, reciting from her ever-expanding repertoire of freshly memorised poems. She has been learning something new every few days, but confesses that she needs to keep reciting them regularly to keep them fresh. I suggest to her that she has the makings of a bizarre ‘song cycle’ of sorts, if she is able to get to the point where she can recite them all together.

My piece? Essayesque dismemoir. I’m still digging. Today as I scrubbed Vietnamese text off the wall, I wondered if one of the playable actions I need to consider is erasure, not inscription. I want to revisit my art/not–art wall.

I need to bring in sandpaper or a tiny plane, to get the drawers of the cabinet sliding smoothly.

I need to finish working my way through the books RB brought in.

We need to play with the idea of memory games.

I need to figure out where the writing sits in this and what it is⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ The Candidate is a lapsed member of MUCS (Melbourne University Choral Society), one of a handful of women in the Tenor section. They were preparing for a performance of Carl Orff’s Carmina Burana. It would be her last gig with the choir for a while, for a range of reasons, of no bearing here. But she loves to sing. She misses it.
And what it is for? And the why of it? What’s driving it? What I am trying to essay? Is that a tautology? What I am essaying to try?
MEDITATION ON FORGETTING AS FAILURE: A LIST:

To no longer care about the past, the future. Remembering all the birthdays.

To no longer care about keeping up appearances.

To no longer care about how many standard drinks.

To no longer care about being a good parent.

To no longer care about caring.

To no longer care about attending the community forum on life after the coal mine.

To no longer care about the pain in your feet.

To no longer care about the slights and the slurs, the petty insults of the mundane.

To no longer care about money. About sex. About being a good person.

To no longer care about death.

To no longer care about remembering. About remembering to remember.

To no longer care about who is getting on, who is getting ahead, who is asked. Who is invited. Who is next. Who is now. Who is not.

To no longer care about sitting in the swill of it.

To no longer care about the dishwasher, about stacking the dishwasher, about emptying the dishwasher, about flushing out and de-liming the dishwasher.

To no longer care about whether it must be de-limed or de-scaled. To no longer care about dishes.

To no longer care about childhood.

---

70 As withering. As dessication.
71 Another List. But not the other list. Simply an example of a kind of writing The Candidate embarked on in the gallery space, as she worked with the Visitors Books she had written in, and ‘conversed’ with her sisters through, as they attended their Incredible Disappearing Mother.
To no longer care about loss.

To no longer care about crying. To cry.

To no longer care about the errors. The bad spelling, the bad grammar, the dangling participles.

To no longer be the smart one. The smarty pants, the sickly smart one, the one with answers, the brainy kid.

To no longer care about being awkward.

To no longer care about being bowed.

To no longer care about the limp, the spine, the fat legs, the pain in the feet.

To no longer care about the food groups. To no longer care about grains and fats and butters and oils and berries and almonds. And fish and tofu. To no longer care about leafy greens. To no longer care about meat-free. To no longer care about the calves in the cattle trucks and the hens in the battery farms. To no longer care about the litres of water in each steak. To no longer care about the car and the emissions, and the greenhouse gases and the hole in the ozone layer.\textsuperscript{72}

To no longer care about privilege.

To no longer care about crime.

To no longer care about the weather.

To no longer care about the temperature of the sea.

To no longer care about the neighbours’ build, their encroachment, the overlooking. Their monstrous house overshadowing your garden. Their ugly windows overlooking your bathtub.

\textsuperscript{72} This piece is not one of the creative artifacts. However it did – it does? – inform the creation of a separate book called A Book of Fears. This is a small exercise book The Candidate began work on in the gallery and in which were listed her daily fears as they arose. These were later added to when she began recording the fears of her collaborating artists.

About colours and what to wear when. About whether blue and green can still be seen without a colour in between.

About how you like your coffee.

About your calcium intake, your vitamin D levels. About sitting or standing desks.

About logos.

To no longer care about finishing. About citations.

To no longer care about making.

To no longer care about making a fool of yourself in public.

To no longer care about flying, about falling, about heights, about standing close to the edges.

To no longer care about big dogs off lead and certain breeds of dogs, namely Dobermanns and Huskis.

To no longer care about feeding store bought wild bird mix to wild birds.

To no longer care about your small dog barking in the night and waking the neighbours.

To no longer care about the neighbours.

To no longer care about when the words will be ready.

To no longer care about remembering your mother.

To no longer care about monitoring your father.

Those books however – The visitors books, and A Book of Fears, as well as two commercial publications – How to Age, by Anne Karpf, and The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying, by Marie Kondo - are used later as sacred texts and the source of gospel-like Readings in presentations of *essayesque dismemoir* from Ware With A Translucent Body.
To no longer care about music.

To no longer care for the children.


To no longer care about check ups.

To no longer care about veins.

To no longer care about blood tests.

To no longer care about rhyming.

To no longer care about being short-listed.

To no longer care about feedback.

To no longer care about the sisterhood.

To no longer care about working.

To no longer care about paying your way.

To no longer care about the sins and the omissions.

To no longer care about authenticity.

To no longer care about contributing.

To no longer care if its Abbott or Turnbull, Brandis, or Pyne. Or whatshisname. To no longer care about knowing their names. Putting names to their faces.

To no longer care about writing to them about caring.

To no longer care about caring.
Δ ACTIVITY PAGE: A LIST – FEARS? FAILINGS? FORGETTINGS?

Nothing precipitates a (mid-)life crisis more readily than regret. Go for it! (Then, maybe, a walk?)
Pin the parts and display!
**NAP TIME: MEMORY BOOST BOTANICUM**

Reading aloud has a demonstrated capacity to boost your health and improve your memory. So does napping. **READ ALOUD this ABECEDARIUM in your best Latin, and learn a few botanical names for vines and creepers**\(^4\) as you slowly close your peepers:

*Akebia quinata, Allamanda cathartica, Antigonon leptopus, Beaumontia grandiflora, Berberidopsis corallina, Billardiera longiflora, Bougainvillea cultivars, Campsis radicans, Cardiospermum halicacabum, Cissus antarctica, Cissus hypoglaucia, Clematis afoliate, Clematis glycinoides, Distictis buccinatoria, Dregae sinesis, Eccremocarpus scaber, Ficus pumila, Gloriosa superba, Hardenberga comptoniana, Hibbertia scandens, Hoya australis, Ipomoea palmate, Jasminum beesianum, Kennedia coccinea, Kennedia rubicunda, Lapageria rosea, Littonia modesta, Metrosideros carmineus, Pandorea jasminooides, Pandorea pandorana, Passiflora cinnebarina, Rodochiton atrosanguineum, Sollya heterophylla, Thunbergia alata, Vitus amurensis, Wisteria floribunda*

**RELAX. REPEAT.**

*Akebia quinata, Allamanda cathartica, Antigonon leptopus, Beaumontia grandiflora, Berberidopsis corallina, Billardiera longiflora, Bougainvillea cultivars, Campsis radicans, Cardiospermum halicacabum, Cissus antarctica, Cissus hypoglaucia, Clematis afoliate, Clematis glycinoides, Distictis buccinatoria, Dregae sinesis, Eccremocarpus scaber, Ficus pumila, Gloriosa superba, Hardenberga comptoniana, Hibbertia scandens, Hoya australis, Ipomoea palmate, Jasminum beesianum, Kennedia coccinea, Kennedia rubicunda, Lapageria rosea, Littonia modesta, Metrosideros carmineus, Pandorea jasminooides, Pandorea pandorana, Passiflora cinnebarina, Rodochiton atrosanguineum, Sollya heterophylla, Thunbergia alata, Vitus amurensis, Wisteria floribunda*

**REST UNTIL REFRESHED. RESUME.**

---

4 Climbing plants are adaptors par excellence. They find the means to modify or engineer some part of their structure in order to access more favourable conditions. They are models of efficiency and collaboration in their symbioses, devising endless new means to call on other species for a kind of botanical ‘leg up’, and making the most of their own means of attachment and adhesion, using an array of tools, be they stems, thorns, tendrils, rootlets and adhesive pads. The Candidate would direct the curious to research the extraordinary adaptive behaviours of *Pseudopergularia*. (The Candidate would also like someone to make the observation that it would seem she did not do biology in high school [or anything].)
THIRD DISQUISITION OF DOCENT(S):

Buster sleeps, abandoned, in a poncho built for two. He wears Wanda’s wig.
Wanda is nowhere to be seen. From somewhere, a soft ticking. More than one.
FX:

A symphony of ticks and tocks

LOOSE:

Akebia quinata, Allamanda cathartica, Antigonon leptopus,
Beaumontia

grandiflora,

Berberidopsis

corrallina,

Billardiera longiflora, Boquillia trifoliolata… Boquillia
trifoliolata… (WAKING) Boquillia trifolioliolioliolo…
VOICE:

(OFFPAGE, ECHO) Folioliolioliolio…..

LOOSE:

Olioliololioliolio….

VOICE:

(OFFPAGE, ECHO) Liolioliolioliolioliolio…..

LOOSE:

Ioioioioioioioioioioioioioioio

VOICE:

(OFFPAGE, ECHO) iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

LOOSE:

oooooooooooooooooooo

VOICE:

(OFFPAGE, ECHO) iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

LOOSE:

ooooooooooooooooooooo

VOICE:

(OFFPAGE, ECHO) iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

LOOSE:

Oh. What siren song is this? Are we done? Dusted? Is our
Disquisition defunct? Wanda? Am I you? In my dream, I
was quite…. Translated. Methought I was – there is no man
can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had….75

Buster Loose brings his hands to his head to find:
LOOSE:

Wiggery! Waggery! Wanda!

FX:
Pages being fed into a shredding machine
	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  	  
75

	  
	  

Is it necessary to record that this is appropriated from Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act 4, Scene 1? The line, as well you know, is Bottom’s.

213	  


LOOSE: What is that? What is happening? Enough. Enough! I have findings enough.

FX: Shredding machine.

LOOSE: Dot to dot. Dot points. Docent debriefs on a debrief of a debrief on a residency as a way to heel… I’m sorry, that was a misprint – I’ll try that again, to hell. I’m sorry. I’ll try that again, to heel. No! He, he, he… Here! Remaindered. Residing. As method. 1. The ritualized crossing of an actual threshold between art and not-art. 2. The ritualized crossing between dead art and living art. 3. The garbing in the garb, being (noun) clothing of a distinctive or special kind. She is garbed in a double-headed poncho. 4. The idea of a gallery as a hallowed space. (Honoured, holy, consecrated to.) 5. A sense of crossing over a further threshold from being Herself to being A Wri(gh)ter. 6. The fact that the window always offers better art in the form of a view, and how that draws people in to the space, and the fascinating dance they do as they make their way around, awaiting an invitation to engage. Our need to engage, to have artists in our midst. 7. The sense of a community arts centre as an active, humming hub. A place of industry. 8. The sense of concern with the aesthetics of experience. Visual display, words as matter, and the satisfactions of leaving her site arrayed in a pleasing, even beautiful and inviting way. 9. HAVING SOMEWHERE TO GO. WHERE SHE IS SUPPOSED TO WORK. (PAUSE) I’m sorry. I’m not meaning to shout. 10. The impact of this. Legitimacy. Visibility. Setting to one side the excuses and the distractions, the procrastination, the shame. 11. Meeting new people. Respite care? A refuge from the terrible loneliness of being a writer, with all that may bring. The hazards of that loneliness and what it can do to you. To the body, to the mind. (MORE)
LOOSE: To her. To you. Especially as you age. 12. Stepping away from the computer and the technology even for a time – abandoning, yes, all our devices…

Buster Loose peels moustache, beard, and wig off. They fall to the floor.

LOOSE: Yes! Returning to the pen, to the pencil. To the simple pleasures of the word, and of lettering. 13. The transgressive act of writing, of mark-making, of defacing walls. 14. The pleasure of interacting with other artists, collaborations and cross-pollinations, and the quality of conversations you will have. The fact of TIME. I’m sorry. I did not mean to raise my voice. The fact of time. What was difficult about it? 15. Feeling exposed, raw, bereft. Ageing in public places. 16. The imposter syndrome that so often accompanies the daring it takes to call oneself a wri(gh)ter. But it’s not a one-way thing, is it? One’s presence in the building makes its mark. You’re like one of those visiting dogs in an aged care facility. People want to pat you. She brings a playfulness and a warmth to the place. She is not just a dog. She is a goldfish, soothing. People come to look at her. And this leads those people to enter an altered state, too, as they too are enfolded into to a kind of creative contagion that occurs between artists and visitors, congregants and witnesses as they reside with each other over time. As they sit, and remain sitting. Over time. Is this the nub of it, the findings, the argument? That creativity, given space and time, is catching! For, finally in her performance of these tiny acts she finds it. Resistance. Acts of creative defiance committed inside that space as an older woman become empowering for all. And she comes through the whole thing and out the other side with a performance. It’s a piece of work she can show all by herself and it is something that looks as if it may well be essaysque dis...
Shredded paper falls from above.

Paper falls and falls, like snow, or rain.

Shredded paper falls. It covers Buster Loose.

It falls and falls. It falls and falls. It blankets the space.

It continues to fall until it covers everything.
SPRING
This too.
Interesting word, transformations that took place in the gallery as we came and went. We found that people did love the colouring in holding chalk and writing on the order to do some productive work. This challenged me to consider how I practise my practice, and I feel that that, too, was a quite a searching one. And that was also made available in the space. So even if we weren't there with that we would have fulfilled our mission. In I think it's a Glen Murcutt designed building and series of out buildings and if we've then VAT and V
themselves. Men are all humanity. (At the sister school across the way my mother, his future wife attends SGHS. Say no more.)

And embroidered across the top of the school crest, in gold thread, the word PREFECT and some other word that I

The blazer is maroon, picked out with blue piping. It is a

defeat.

capacity to deliver me three thousand words in duplicate behind his left shoulder. He looks a little portly, even though he is standing in front of the camera. He

reviewed funding to the Australian Council for the Arts. Sincerely,

the 1970s model he intends to introduce makes a major... 'Excellence', however it is decreed, does not arrive fully formed. It is the fruit of trial and error, tendacity, risk taking, and, above all, the capacity to deliver me three thousand words in duplicate behind his left shoulder. He looks a little portly, even though he is standing in front of the camera. He

reviewed funding to the Australian Council for the Arts. Sincerely,

in the space. A few imitations are worth a thousand words. I

...and the work that I do it again.

and Honey, a book of essays by Mary Ruefle. And so I

Well, that's all very well, there's the performer and there's the visual artist and it's fine for them, they've got stuff to

The impact of performance. The whole point of being a public

for the breadth and diversity of Australian artists' work across most art forms and genres of our creative ecosystem. The critical challenge is to do justice to the tastes and appetites of contemporary audiences here in Australia and overseas. The model he intends to introduce makes a major

-essayesque dismemoir (which is so different from SHOULD) in this public sphere.

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-essayesque dismemoir (which is so different from SHOULD) in this public sphere.

On a stage that feels like a kind of unending rehearsal. I am still in the middle of this performance. I have not finished it yet. It

...and Honey, a book of essays by Mary Ruefle. And so I

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On a stage that feels like a kind of unending rehearsal. I am still in the middle of this performance. I have not finished it yet. It

...and Honey, a book of essays by Mary Ruefle. And so I
examiners of Perdita, in an extract from Speech and Drama. I was in love with plays. I was in love with performanc...
of the blood, the time when I grow old."

Art is about appreciation. It's about surprising ourselves some of the time and to simply exist, to continue, to endure, the rest of the time. I am grateful for that. Art is also about the upmarket mechanism, but an organism is, potentially, a finite thing, with a spark of what we call 'life' in it. And you can see tragedy. So I ask you, I urge you to think deeply about this. I ask you to take this away with you, and to ask difficult questions.

The short supply. It's a critic and minister, that he may have arrived at through agony on the part of the peers and the assessors who have to decide how to distribute the tiny little sum of money that the government gave them. And they were asked to write the next generation of playwrights. And it was as much the same for the writing of the next generation of filmmakers.

I think that my principles, but of course I said 'yes' to it. It was a wonderful appointment as director of the Sydney Theatre Company. And that was a wonderful thing. I was there for three years. I don't know how well you can see the wording here, but what I am wearing for you is a sash that says 'Unfunded Excellence.' (Laughter.) And I think that's where I was hoping to get to in the course of my address today. Because I find that I was wrong with it. It was marvellous. For you are, my friend, in the category of unfunded excellence. Take comfort from that.

They commissioned new work. They took a chance on new writers that nobody had ever heard of, and they said, at least, 'You're going to be interesting! We're going to give you a chance to show what you can do. And as a result, what happened to them? One by one, little awkward people like I was, will come to you, and you have the power to light small flames in them and feed them and watch them burn. And you have the power to take a little time to get to know them, and to see what they have to offer, and to take that little time to make sure that they produce something wonderful.

We should be hearing from Vietnamese –

And I remember that being a wonderful time. I think it's wonderful. And I believe when I die, I believe I will die with the hope that I've given a little light to some student, or some young person, or some writer, or some filmmaker, and that I've given them the hope in their life to do something wonderful. I think that's the best thing that I can do, and I've been trying to do that, and I think I've been successful. And I hope you take that away with you.
I feel like that big old seal. The Butterfly House is to be my sanctuary, a place where I can be myself without judgment. It is a place where I can be free from the constraints of the outside world. It is a place where I can be alone with my thoughts and feelings. It is a place where I can be with nature and be inspired by the beauty of the butterflies. It is a place where I can be with myself and be free to be who I am. It is a place where I can be with my writing and be free to write as I please. It is a place where I can be with my art and be free to create as I please. It is a place where I can be with my senses and be free to experience as I please. It is a place where I can be with my heart and be free to love as I please. It is a place where I can be with my soul and be free to be who I am.
CONCLUSION
Visitors should note that while the body of this essay appears here almost as it will in the TEXT Special Issue on The Essay, its footnotes have been 'doctored' for the purposes of (a) examination and (b) to avoid repetition.
The most memorable essays are formally labile and so stretch our sense of what essays might be. […] The elasticity of personae itself is part of the essay’s queerness (Lazar 2013,16, emphasis added).

This creative work sits within the broad field of creative nonfiction, enlarging our understanding of the essay to ask, how might an essay ‘queer’ itself on the page? It builds upon earlier work on the essayesque dismemoir presented at the 2015 NonFictioNow Conference. PLEASE SUPPLY OWN TITLE: ____________________ is part of a suite of such ‘essayesque’ offerings composed on themes of ageing in arts practice. This particular text grew from a failure to deliver an orthodox scholarly paper that had been accepted for a conference. This creative work does more than transgress genre. It offers a playful riposte to Robert Manne’s contention that “no essay could be jointly authored” (2014, ix). To do so, it inscribes a polyvocal performance whereby the writer and her two alter egos (docents-meet-drag ‘queen’ and ‘king’ respectively) ‘essay’ a queer space of interaction between them that is also open to and accommodating of the reader. The work is whimsical, playful and mischievous, inviting ‘audience’ participation, while at the same time offering an apologia for its failure to adhere to the strictures of the scholarly essay.
An interactive essay, for performance on the page:

Co-authored by B. Loose\(^{96}\) and W. Lusst\(^{97}\) in the absence of The Candidate

Dear conference convenor, examiner and/or (double-blind) referee:

Thank you for completing this interactive document entitled:______________________________ (PLEASE SUPPLY OWN TITLE) in place of a conclusion to a paper that was to have been entitled: (Es)say what? queering the performance essay. In the absence\(^{98}\) of The Candidate, I/we/I (PLEASE CIRCLE AS APPROPRIATE) have taken it upon MYSELF/OURSELVES/MY OTHER SELF (PLEASE\(^{99}\) CIRCLE AS APPROPRIATE) to broach the breach, as it were, and offer this __________________ by way of ____________________.

When she (?????) submitted said abstract\(^{100}\) to you in ______________ of this last year it was in the hope that in the months that followed I/we/they – [see above] (TC, BL, WL\(^{101}\)) would have at least one of the epiphanies needed to draw\(^{102}\) together ____________________

\(^{96}\) Buster Loose, Visiting Fellow, is an affiliate of the Academy of Applied Facial Hair. He finds it strange to be spoken of in the third person, down here, and wonders just who is wearing the moustache at this very mo’?

\(^{97}\) Ms Lusst is (Acting) Professor of Manicure at the University of The Third Age. She too is nonplussed to find herself referenced in this manner and is determined to claw her way back to centre stage page just as soon as she can figure out how.

\(^{98}\) I am not absent, merely elsewhere. Whoever I am at this moment. Am I The Candidate? Am I her Narrator? Am I one and both? Whoever we are, we are alongside. Beside, and below. Lurking in the margins. Where something other may be afoot(note.) NOTE: Other footnoters of note: the late Margaret Cameron (I Shudder to Think, 2016) with her little bell, ‘ting’! Xu Xi, (Text Special Issue 18) and Jenny Bouilly whose work The Body: An Essay consists of blank space and 157 footnotes.

\(^{99}\) I wish they would stop saying ‘please.’ They have said it three times already in the one paragraph and it’s getting on my nerves.

\(^{100}\) Abstract. Exactly. Ungraspable. Air. Unlike the concrete spatial poetry I have worked with, by which I mean the clay that is The Play.

\(^{101}\) TC = The Candidate, BL = Buster Loose, WL = Wanda Lusst. They could at least have the manners to introduce themselves, since they have ‘taken it upon themselves/myself/my other self to breach the broach’.

\(^{102}\) Say ‘drag’ here. Drag would be funnier.
some thinking about the making of the doing and the writing re the thinking re the making and the doing; about the quest to append, as per Ross Gibson’s parlance in his essay The Known World, for ‘explicit oration’ to implicit know-how’. (But in future please apply your own referencing system by footnote).  

CORRECTION/AMENDMENT: Footnotes are forbidden for reasons undisclosed. This may need an endnote (BL). Please supply your own (WL). At the end (BL).

It seemed like a reasonable expectation at that time, with her/our/their etc midpoint candidature review complete and an artistic residency ahead and two made-up words, essaysque dismemoir, on repeat, in head.

(Es)say what? queering the performance essay.

The Candidate was pleased with submission, and happier still when you came back with an invitation to proceed in which you wrote something kind that has since been mislaid/erased/eaten by a small brown dog.

PLEASE WRITE HERE WHAT YOU WROTE BACK THEN:

________________________________________

103 Love a good oration.

104 No room! No room!

105 Are they really going to persist with this for the duration?

106 Patently not.

107 I remain pleased with my title. It seems to contain a wink to the reader. More than this, I enjoy the sibilance of that opening ‘essssssssssssss’.

108 Can a footnote have a footnote? Let’s find out. I should also probably say what a performance essay is here. I’ll come back to it. If I remember.

109 Happy? Was I happy? Happiness is not an emotion I associate with my candidature. Anxious, besieged, ashamed, aggrieved. But happy?
Esssssssssay what: queering the performansssssse esssssssssay

(BL: — Please don’t do that.

WL: — Are they following? Are they keeping up?

BL: — Is this a play? Am I in a play? I did not consent to appear in a play.)

WL: As a title, it makes me think about consonants – about fricatives, plosives and labio-dentals – things we learned of in adolescence in an extra-curricular Speech and Drama program run by a certain flame-haired, Chanel-suited Mrs L, Teacher of Elocution, and prescribed for ____ as an antidote to shyness.

BL: Why does it look like a playscript? And what is this line doing here and what is it for?

Under her tutelage, ____ memorised poems and passages of prose, for recitation, aloud. Let us intone one together. You may echo each line, where indicated.

*Let love etc. <Poem removed due to copyright restrictions>* (REPEAT)

______________________________________________________

<Poem removed due to copyright restrictions>, (REPEAT)

______________________________________________________

<Poem removed due to copyright restrictions> (REPEAT)

______________________________________________________

<Poem removed due to copyright restrictions> ... 110

______________________________________________________

110 Stop. No. How dare they? Sacrilege. This is not a community sing-a-long in a dementia unit, this is heartfelt prayer, and invocation. And I did not memorise that poem, not in my childhood. But is it the memory of earlier memorisations, then, that prompts new bids at fresh committals now? The work is ‘Prayer,’ by Judith Wright; it has been a mantra throughout The Candidature, recited, uttered – how I love that word – at every turn.
WL: Wright!

BL: Right!

WL: The poet’s name is __________________

BL: Right! Right! You’re bloody well …

(PLEASE SING A VERSE\textsuperscript{111} of SUPERTRAMP’S 1974 SONG \textit{BLOODY WELL RIGHT}, HERE. WE WILL START YOU OFF)

ALL: Right, right, you’re bloody well right …

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Reciting, singing, sounding such consonance together as we do now, makes us think in turn about our own voice(s), its/their timbre as we age, about the idea of ‘voice’ on the page and voice as prayerful utterance, about ideas of ‘coming to voice’ as a queered and feminist and ageing activist act, and these thoughts point\textsuperscript{112}, naturally enough, towards Adriana Cavarero’s 2005 treatise on ‘\textit{Women Who Sing}’ in her book: For More Than One Voice. \textit{Please research and insert its subtitle and other publication details here}\textsuperscript{113}.

\textsuperscript{111} Stop! Do not sing more than x\% without legal advice. See http://apraamcos.com.au to apply for clearance and pay appropriate royalties!

\textsuperscript{112} Is it David Halperin, quoted by Annemarie Jagose (\textit{Queer Theory: An Introduction}, 1997), about whom Jagose observes: “For Halperin, as for Butler, queer is a way of pointing ahead without knowing for certain what to point at”?\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{113} And now, an emoticon. In a letter of apology to a conference convenor and/or double-blind referee.
It also leads us to consider an exaggerated sibilance one of our friends likes to affect, and this draws our thoughts to the letter, S, and all that it’s good for, in magicking….

Is *magicking* a word? Please find out and elaborate etymologically HERE:

____________________________________________________________________

... many where there was only one. *Apple. Apples. Dog. Dogs.*

‘S’ is for severalities. See how it falls softly on the ear, like snow.114

*Que sais-je?* Asks ____________________________________________

Then, and this was a turning point, dear Conference Convenor and/or (double-blind) Referee, that letter ‘S’ with all its potential for flourishes and curlicues –

*What is a curlicue? Is it the right word?* PLEASE CHECK AND CIRCLE YES/NO

- led our Candidate to bitter memories of learning to write, as a little child; to the physical impossibility of clean inscription, to her futile efforts to control first a pencil and later a pen, until that Dread Day on which A Terrible Event115 occurred at the hands of her mother.116

**PLEASE ELABORATE YOUR OWN TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD INCIDENT HERE:**

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

114 Michel de Montaigne. Obviously. But what do I know of snow, what do I know of anything?

115 I have tried and failed, repeatedly to write about this experience. It is a formative childhood wounding to which I always return; that I *essay, endlessly,* to essay. But is not to essay to fail? Is not failure a given, even in setting out to *essay?*

116
And there, we have said it. Writing is agony and torment. And there we freeze. And there we fall silent.\textsuperscript{117} Listen. ________________\textsuperscript{118}

Readers, she could not write this paper alone. She could not even essay it. Not without you. Them. You. We cannot write it with our voice, nor by Dictaphone, not with a pen, nor with a pencil, nor even here at the keyboard.

\textsuperscript{117} I have been unable to write any form of prose with grace or fluency or confidence since childhood.

\textsuperscript{118} The sound of silence.
This page intentionally left blank. It’s symbolic.
For all of these reasons and more, I/we/I will not be submitting a paper entitled
*(Es)say what? queering the performance essay*, in time for double-blind peer review
or presentation at this last year’s conference. We regret any inconvenience she may
have caused you in failing to do so.

PLEASE COMPLAIN ABOUT SAID INCONVENIENCE IN THE SPACE PROVIDED:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

It is a shame too, that The Candidate is was unable to dig into the title, for we like
the queerish space inside those parentheses (__________) , the hint of a voice there,
sassy, – *say what?* – if uttered with a rising inflection and truckloads of ‘tude.

All of this could have been avoided, perhaps, if only she had gone with the dog memoir.

*Say what?*

The dog memoir is a sub-form of the pet memoir, which is a sub-form of the larger
grouping that is the animal memoir, and memoir is the umbrella over them all.

---

120 It may be possible to essay one’s failure, using queered and provocative methods. Failure may
even be a queer art, if J ‘Jack’ Halberstam is to be believed. See *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2011.

121 Oh, please. ‘Tude? ‘TUDE?

122 Often I find myself thinking that the PhD proposal I should have presented, and still be working on
today, would have seen me contribute to, expanding, becoming expert upon, finding the gap in,
possibly even queering, the gap in the genre of the dog memoir. You may think I am joking here but I
am not. Might it perhaps be the subject of my post-doge!!! If it’s good enough for Donna Haraway
(2016), whose dog is both kin and co-labrador could it not be good (dog) enough for me?

123 I know for a fact that there is at least one PhD out there dedicated to memoir writing on the horse.
MAKE A LIST OF THREE EXAMPLES OF ANIMAL-THEMED MEMOIR
HERE:

1. 

2. 

3.

This would have been a queer(ed) and subversive dog memoir, in which I/she/we would have written, most likely in prose, of the travails of the past year(s) since the day when The Candidate decided to introduce a new pup into a formerly stable, one-dog household.

It would have documented A Honeymoon Phase\textsuperscript{124}, in which said older dog, an amiably scruffy Border Terrier\textsuperscript{125}, seemed to come to accept, even delight in The Antics of the aforementioned new dog, \textsuperscript{126} who is (Plot Point) her own grandniece.

It would have charted a clear narrative course, beginning with reasoning behind the expansion of the canine component of our queer little family, towards A Serendipitous Procurement and A First Meeting, via the Trials and Triumphs of those first six months, through a Cold Shoulder Phase, towards That Happy Day when the old girl issued to the pup A Clear Invitation: ‘\textit{Let the games begin!’}

It would have gone on through a brief plateau period where Nothing Much Happened and we/they/we all got on with our/their/our lives, towards That Terrible Morning when The First Fight erupted under the dining room table. And on, through The Wars, and the complex and costly interactions with The Experts – behavioural therapists, veterinarians and dog whisperers – towards The Awkward Detente as it stands today.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{124} Capitalisations here denote possible Chapter Titles.

\textsuperscript{125} Salty

\textsuperscript{126} Loretta

\textsuperscript{127} Reader, I would have had story in spades, hilarious and touching anecdotes from day one, with new instalments arising constantly, such as yesterday when the small dog came inside reeking of death and we had to bathe her at midnight. We remain unable to locate the source of the odour with which she had so thoroughly anointed herself.
This dog memoir would have been a creative artefact of course, and beside it, as exegesis dissertation, The Candidate should have examined and engaged critically with the spate of dog memoirs of recent times, including a personal favourite, *Stanley and Sophie*, by Australian writer, Kate Jennings (2008). The Candidate would have favoured this text not only for the perspicacity of Jennings’ prose, but for the scorching insights into grief and loss that are the subtext of a memoir that is not really about dogs at all but about her life after the death of her beloved husband; a husband who had Alzheimer’s Disease.\(^{128}\)

Like my/our mother.

Not to mention that Jennings’ dogs, like mine/ours, are Border Terriers.\(^{129}\)

A Border Terrier is a thing. PLEASE RESEARCH\(^{130}\) AND DRAW A PICTURE OF A BORDER TERRIER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED:

But this is not the substance of our inquiry. And this is not *essaysque dismemoir*. And this is not an essay. A paper. Or is it?\(^{131}\)

---

\(^{128}\) Like my/our mother.

\(^{129}\) Or, as I like to call them, Border(line Personality) Terriers. FAIL.

\(^{130}\) Google it.

\(^{131}\) When I drafted my abstract for you in three careful paragraphs, I felt that I was mapping out my paper. The ex-playwright in me scoffed at the naivety of the assemblage. Beginning, middle, end. *Say what?* Surely there must be a more inventive approach in postdramatic times, something of which Paul Castagno might write. Something slant, allegorical, fluid, part of the “meta-theatrical wave” (2013, 5)? I had to have a stern talk with myself. It was all very well to bring this fascination with form to the idea of the play, but this was not a play, it was a paper.

Reader, we do not know what a paper is. We intend to find out. But not in time to write this paper. We intend to find out by learning to write. Be very clear, though, that when we say this, we are meaning to learn, again, to write, as in to inscribe, as in to form by hand the letters that compose our alphabet. We plan to go back to The Very Beginning, to, the sticks and the circles that preceded a is for apple, b is for bicycle, c is for cat, d is for dog, to the terror of the blank page. We are going to take up our 2B grey lead and begin again. We are going to do all of this, so as to attempt an undoing.

You may wish to take up a pencil and do so yourself, here. Why not write out all the letters of the alphabet, by hand, just for old times’ sake, or one of those old ditties like:

*a quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.*

GO ON. DO IT HERE. YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO:

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

*Essayesque dismemoir.*

132 Is it possible to type phonetic script in Word? Perhaps using Symbols? It would seem not.

133 We will. We must.

134 The bats and balls?

135 FAIL. Fox. The word is fox. The point is to use every letter in the alphabet.

136 Fun with fonts.
Let us expand. Or contract. Let us step to the side. Last year we embark(ed) upon a project of making artefact(s), called Ware With A Translucent Body. We did this at ____________, in the public space of the ____________ Gallery. We resided there; you could find us on display most days of the week, for the best part of three months from August to October. My collaborators and I joke(d) that we were making an exhibition of ourselves, and that’s exactly what we did.

Ware With A Translucent Body is a series of performance essays—I like the words ‘suite’ and ‘nest’—(Please suggest other possible synonyms OVERLEAF):

_______________________________________

of creative works (we have elsewhere called them play/writes) that ______ will be the centrepiece of a PhD in the area of creative writing, an investigation that lodges at the intersection of the play and the essay. It doesn’t exist yet, and we have only a vague sense of what it is, beyond a rather lovely title, with a good serving of sibilance in that word, ‘translucent.’ In that idea.

Translucence.

Trans-loose-sense.137

It may be easier to say what it is not.

Ware With A Translucent Body is not a play.

Ware With A Translucent Body is not a work of performance art.138

POSE A QUESTION LIKE: Is it possible to say something of what it may be?139

_______________________________________

Ware With A Translucent Body may be a suite of propositions. It may be a set of prompts or gestures that might give rise to performance and, where its edges are

137 Trans lose cents?

138 Ware With A Translucent Body is not a dog memoir?

139 Thank you for asking.
porous enough, to participatory engagement. *Ware*. Inside this word we find ideas of multiplicity, and the storing of items of value. Dinnerware, silverware, warehoused. As in: *In this work I seek to display my wares.*

PLEASE ASK US TO SAY SOMETHING OF WHAT IT MAY BE ABOUT?

It may be about ageing and about the scrambled mind. It may be about a mother, her dementia, and her decline. It may be about visiting her in sad nursing homes, about three sisters and how they wrote of this to each other in cheap Spirex ringbound notebooks, one blue, one green, and about our memories, true or false, of that time, and of before that time. It may be about the ailings and the failings of age. It may be about fears of going down the same road. It may be about their handwriting, three sisters, their hands, and look! a last scrap of a mother’s handwriting, there, so poignant, on the front of that Visitor’s Book, one final note to self: ‘Look up Peg and Anne.’

A dog memoir would be so much nicer. It could have a funny name. *Tails from the Border or Love At First Bite*. And a sub-title. Most dog memoirs have sub-titles – an assertion one could examine at great length in an accompanying *exegesis* dissertation.

---

140 My cares. My wear and tear.

141 New science tells us there are only false memories, flawed memories. Forgeries, forgettings and fabrications.

142 There is no font sad enough, broken enough, to do it justice. Fonts are no fun. Please REMIND me to insert a photograph of her spidery handwriting in the space provided.

143 Nicer? Such a weakling of a word.
But The Candidate is not working in the realm of the dog memoir. It is too late for that and there is no going back.\footnote{144}

(Es)say what? queering the performance essay.\footnote{145}

When that abstract was accepted, it seemed there was no going back. We counselled her that she would find out in the doing, and thus she set out to do.\footnote{146} We saw how she might go on to introduce our own contribution, a variation on that theme\footnote{147}, and conclude by focusing on the creative work we hoped to make that would exemplify… Blah, blah, blah. We cannot write that paper.

Make a list of five suitable titles for a dog memoir here:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

\footnote{144}{Or is there?}

\footnote{145}{Today, said small dog is at day care and I have become a middle-aged woman who puts her dog into day care. The old girl sleeps beside me, in the office, while I stab at this keyboard and tell myself: Sit! Stay!}

\footnote{146}{Swallowing my pride, and setting aside an invigorating encounter with Caryl Churchill’s recent work, Love and Information – a play built out of 117 unrelated fragments – I decided to cleave to the hoary old three-act structure as it was built into the brief. This should give me a clear road map. The beginning would be contextual, and would show how a reformed playwright had a light bulb moment when stumbling across Hardheads and Woolly Thinking by Noëlle Janaczewska in a Special Issue of Text. It would expand on Noëlle’s coinage and her expansive definition of the idea of the protean form that is performance essay and it would describe how I went about seeking out other expressions of that ilk, and found them, here in Australia, in theatre-based work by Maude Duvey, Nicola Gunn, and Margie Fischer, and beyond, in the work of Lin Hixson, Matthew Goulish and their erstwhile collaborators in the Goat Island Project, and of others like Anne Carson, Ira Brand, and Mary Ruefle.}

\footnote{147}{I call it essayesque dismemoir.}
A dog memoir is, typically, a work of transformation. Dog memoirs show how dogs transform their owner’s lives, generally for the better. At this stage, our dog story has yet to reveal how such deliverance will arrive. We are in a state of suspense. 148

Lessons from Tara.

Until Tuesday.

A Big Little Life.

You Had Me At Woof.

The Dog Who Came To Stay.

These are all successful contributions to the genre. We are not aware of existing scholarship on the dog memoir, but of course we haven’t looked, because The Candidate is not researching the dog memoir. 149

INSERT WEIRDEST, WHACKIEST DOG FACT HERE:

WL: She loved this job and for a long while after her contract ended, she knew an abundance of things no one else knew. 150

BL: About dogs. 151

148 Unless of course it is to be a queer tale in which one owner’s life is transformed for the worse?

149 I wish I was/were researching the dog memoir. I should be doing the dog memoir. Everything points to this. Even my backstory. Some years ago, as a writer-for-hire, I scored a great freelance job and for six months I was a researcher on a television show called Dogwoman, a comedy-drama series conceived by one of Australia’s favourite comic talents. In this series, Magda Szubanski played a woman who solved crimes by relying on her prodigious knowledge of dogs and their behaviours. The researcher’s job (mine) was to supply to the writers all manner of curious and lesser-known dog facts and dog details, medical, physiological, temperamental, and breed-specific. I spoke with dog experts and dog nuts from all over the place and for a while I was the ‘go-to’ person for all your doggy issues.

150 I have no idea how Wanda was able to make that observation, but yes, she seems to have accessed the above footnote. (Is nothing sacred? Have I no space to be Myself?) About dogs. Example: Did you know that three dogs survived the sinking of the Titanic? All were lap dogs from First Class cabins.

151 I was a dog bore, a dog whisperer, a para-veterinarian.
Now we’ve forgotten all she knew, and have no secrets to impart as far as the curbing of savage beasts…\footnote{FAIL. This is a common misquotation. Unless? \textit{Is the essay a savage beast?} Discuss.}

Instead, let us make you an overture.

As she sat down to write this, in the middle of the year, she was adrift. To her left, a pile of papers, all the readings, her notes, a papery embankment of others’ ideas, relevant yet still to be somehow distilled, to be somehow synthesised. Some phase of the process has had yet to occur; a chemical or alchemical business. Until that happens, she was simply surrounded.\footnote{I am snowed in.} Articles about the essay, its forms, its evolution. Articles about thinking and writing about the feminine, and about queering this and queering that. Articles about dementia in life and in art. Lists.

Notes and jottings about the performance essay, the lyric essay, the segmented essay, the hybrid essay, the multimodal essay. Articles on the crot, the collage. Notes from lectures about practice-based and practice-led research. Books, anthologies of personal essays, books about ageing and agency. Books about hoarding and bamboo. About climbing plants. About the human voice.\footnote{Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh! I look at these and know they are needed. And yet, that’s not it. That’s not it.}

\textbf{HERE IS SPACE FOR YOU TO INSERT A GOOD QUOTE FROM ONE OF THE ABOVE SOURCES YOU MIGHT HAVE LIKED HER TO USE:}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
The word *overture* comes from late Middle English and is connected to the idea of *aperture*. Aperture. An opening, a hole or a gap.

Let me make you an *overture* that may serve as an *aperture*, if an *aperture* might be an opening, a way in. Looking at the word, one’s schoolgirl French somewhere in the backblocks of one’s brain, or stored somewhere in the cells of one’s left knee or wherever memories reside, one gets a whiff of another word, but a cedilla is needed to soften it, to give it sibilance.

Aperçu.

*Aperçu.*

*A-per-çu!*

One looks to the dictionary and there it is, cedilla and all: *a comment or brief reference which makes an illumination or entertaining point.*

Today, as I/we/one sit/s down to embark on something that is supposed to fit the description I/we/one penned in my/our/one’s abstract, I/we/one have/has nothing. I/we/one have/has no way in. I/we/one sit/s outside the shell of a new work, or I/we/one shuffle/s around it, and tap/s at it with my/our/one’s knuckles, trying to find a weakness or a fissure somewhere, some frailty in its form that might admit me/us/one. SSSSSSSSSSSOUNDING it and re-ssssssssounding it. So as to tell you about something that does not yet exist. Yet.

---

155 At last! Yes, this is it. This is the elegance of a unity in trinity we have been missing.

156 *W.L.: Gesundheit!*

157 At this moment in time one could be happily immersed in the writing of a dog memoir. One has all the raw materials. One is living it, each day, with two fractious dogs under the same roof. One has a thriller of a story to tell. The hopes, the fears, the fights, the interventions; the day-to-day joys and the terrible disappointments. When one was doing one’s last academic project, there was something like ‘the dog memoir’ in one’s sights for a very long time. It was a metaphor and it would present itself to one as a possibility, but it was so crude, so obvious, such a clunker in its OBVIOUSNESS that one felt one’s cheeks flush at the very thought. One would sneer at it, and it would slink away. This went on for months, until, eventually, with nothing else to work with, one’s tears and prayers exhausted, one had no choice. It was the equivalent of ‘the dog memoir’ or it was nothing. What was it? Can you guess? WRITE YOUR SUGGESTION FOR THE TERRIBLE METAPHOR HERE________________ (P.S. In the end, I capitulated. I took the thing, the terrible feeble metaphor, an image so blindingly obvious, and I ran with it. And the work opened to me, the world of the work yielded, and I was in.)
Essayesque dismemoir! Fetch!

Please complete this paper with a neat closing paragraph here:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Thanks for your participation in this interactive essay. Don’t forget to insert that footnote\textsuperscript{158}!

Have a great 😊
PART TWO
W/ROTE

- a paracademic bouquet -
I can’t go on, I’ll go on...

W(H)ITHER THE WARATAH? WHYS & WHEREFORES

As I enter, so as to essay, a third decade of creative practice to whom do I turn for wisdom, counsel and courage in dark times? Who guides and mentors those of us, we Australian women playwrights, who emerged as forces to be reckoned with in the final decades of the twentieth century (Chesterman & Baxter 1995), who were, over time, pronounced established (Arrow 2002), and yet who now find ourselves extraneous if not quite extinct (AWOL 2011). At a time of creative life crises and within a new world order characterised by failures of nerve and value in the ecology of the arts and art-making (Pledger 2013) where are our elders? To whom do we look for sagesse?

British playwright, Caryl Churchill, now in her late 70s and as prolific and pertinent as ever, is a faint beacon of light and of hope, albeit across hemispheres, miles and seas. Britain’s Sir David Hare, America’s Edward Albee – until his recent demise, at the age of 88 - and here at home our David Williamson have all been elevated to the status of éminences grises. But where are our women? Dorothy Hewett is dead. Another long serving Australian playwright, Julia Britton, died in November 2012, at the age of 98. Oriel Gray, joint winner with Ray Lawler, of the Playwrights Advisory Board Award for Best Play of 1955, may have become one such grey-haired eminence, had both she and said play endured. Oriel, though, is long gone and her play The Torrents all but forgotten, overshadowed by The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, until somewhat resurrected by Australian playwright, Merrilee Moss, through (and within) her own textual homage, Oriel, which had a premiere season at Melbourne’s La Mama theatre 7-18 September, 2016.
Alison Lyssa and Jenny Kemp sought sanctuary within the academy, while local playwright Patricia Cornelius hones her craft in the independent theatre scene. Highly awarded over decades of practice, she remains largely invisible on ‘the mainstage’, where according to statistics recently released by the Australian Writers Guild in a current edition of The National Voice, conditions continue to favour male playwrights (2017). Yet Cornelius perseveres from the fringe, even as anecdotal evidence sees other mid-career artists abandon established playwriting careers in Australia for the screen (Katharine Thomson), for detours into prose (Hannie Rayson), for the not-for-profit sector (Andrea Lemon) or for New Zealand (Alma de Groen). These women are all, for the most part, disparu depuis longtemps, missing in action as it were, consigned and/or resigned perhaps to the double-cloaking invisibility conferred by their gender and their advancing age.

What alternatives are there? Is ‘eldering’ in one’s creative practice possible for women like me? If so, where? How?

This doctoral inquiry began, in 2013, with these simple questions. To address these, it had at first to take us some distance out of the way, but always with the intent that we might come back a short distance correctly. Like Jerry, in Albee’s classic play, The Zoo Story, I had a queer and audacious plan at work, one that could only be enacted via trans-disciplinary meanderings and discursive elaborations. My purpose was to build, using words, a series of interdependent nested structures, creative and exegetical, first cast and hyphenated — and with a nod towards the poet Dylan Thomas — as greening-houses, hothouse spaces of time and light, within which botanical experimentation towards elusive w/rites of elder-flowering might be conducted, illuminated and observed.
I came to this research as a professional playwright in mid-career crisis. As a carpenter’s daughter I had always claimed playwright, rather than writer as my job descriptor, prizing the weighty and archaic wright for its etymology, its roots in the old English wryhta, related to work, and, as I later discovered, to repair. I viewed myself as a maker and a builder, and aligned myself with those who proclaim the work of writing as more craft than art. For the first twenty-five years of my writing life I had a sustained and sustainable career, working through the customary phases of a typical crafts-person’s life course that began by way of an accidental apprenticeship, and delivered me into the consolidation stage of the journeyman by way of a succession of commissions and professional productions. Three decades on, I should, by rights, were I wood-worker and not word-worker, have been entering into the third age of my craftsmanship, the phase of mastery. Instead, with many other women of my peer group, established playwrights in mid-career, I found myself loitering at the gates and skulking in the margins.

Apprentice is a gender-neutral word. Journeyman and master are not. Whether writing is my vocation, or simply my job, must I accept a truncated career path and an early retirement? Do I become redundant, twice-over, first as woman, then as playwright, whether I like it or not? Is ageing a factor in the exclusion of women like myself from longevity in our practice, and if so, how might we resist? Where is the language to speak of the experience of women-as-artists across the life course, and into advancing age? Where is the research that illuminates the experience of eldering into elderhood for Australian women playwrights and our sister artists and artisans in other fields of practice? Where are the stories of ageing women in the arts?
As mentioned in the preface, it was an MA research project conducted out of QUT that first gave me scope to investigate, through practice, the singular experience of the female artist, in that instance as a *late bloomer* (Murray 2011). Practice-based research (see Schön 1991; Carter 2004; Haseman 2006; Barrett & Bolt 2007; Duxbury & Grierson 2008; Grierson & Brierley 2009; Smith & Dean 2009; Biggs & Karlsson, 2010; Borgdorff 2012) invited me to apply my tool kit to the business of making art as a means of inquiry into the creative life, both temporal and narratable as I engaged in the exploration of new voices, new forms, and sought out means to remain vital and creatively charged. In the process, *hybridity* became my watchword, and my gestures as a practitioner became *to crossover, to bend* and where necessary, *to intrude* and *to interrupt*. I began to work intuitively and poly-vocally, in multiple and mutable forms, towards outcomes that no longer strove, as they once might have, towards *coherence*. (The italics are mine. The hyphens too.) According to theatre academic and theorist Paul C. Castagno, this placed me within a “new poetics” of the theatre, amongst practitioners of a language-based “new playwriting”, and alongside those who work across multiple voices and sources so as to break with established conventions and lead audiences into *terra incognita* (2012, 13).

This pleased me. I would much rather write *into* the unknown (even if, in so doing, I wrote myself *out* of the landscape of the theatre industry as I once knew it, or as it knew me). Similarly, as researcher, I would rather be lost than found. Therefore, in seeking to situate my practice within communities and contexts, I no longer find feminism to be the lone star to which I look for location and co-ordinates within fields of discourse. Indeed, were this to be the case, to which of many feminisms would I turn (Donovan 2012)? We have speculative feminism (Haraway 2016), posthuman feminism (Braidotti 2013), ecofeminism, even xenofeminism, described
as a “politics for alienation” by online collective Laboria Cuboniks at their website, and offering, in Rosi Braidotti’s words, at a lecture she gave on 9 December 2016 at the Victorian College of the Arts, “a technomaterialist, anti-naturalist and gender abolitionist sort of feminism” (my notes).

Instead, with many other researchers - and although I still claim Feminist as one of many badges I like to sport – I have grown to regard the certainties of a woman-centred approach to research and method as being too simplistic, too redolent of faith in a binary gender system, too much in line with positivist, universalist worldviews and in findings as ‘truths’. Further as a white woman of middle-class background residing in an Anglo-centric culture, I am wary of this position as locating me within circles of power, legitimacy and privilege I have no wish to employ. So it was that instead I sought out for myself, in the name of ongoing vigilance, and a language of ‘oppositional consciousness’ (Sandoval, 2000) beyond feminism with which to tackle the problems of my research, the stance, as posited by Judith Halberstam in Female Masculinity, of ‘queer’ researcher as bricoleuse (1998, 13). Queered research methods, including bricolage, have their roots in the humanities and social sciences, and their many branches remain grafted to and intertwined with feminism, with philosophy, with postmodernism, and with gay and lesbian studies. Arising from late twentieth century scholarship, notably postmodernism and poststructuralism, they set out to overturn fixed notions of author, object, and subject and to counter claims for “a universal human condition and the linear tale of a progressive human history as artificial, improbable and unduly homogenising of the human experience” (Browne 2010, 4).

Halberstam’s appropriation, after Claude Lévi-Strauss, posits the bricoleuse – she who indulges in bricolage – as one who adopts a kind of ‘hands on, do it
yourself” approach to the business of research. My purpose in cleaving to this method is to resist and evade categorisation, but more than this, to inhabit and to sustain a politicised and an agile positioning beyond, beside, over and under orthodox methods and conventional disciplines. The mantle of bricoleuse licenses me to free range, to collect, to re-fuse and to queer. Sometimes scavenger, sometimes raider, I may act from a de-centred or, in queered parlance, an ex-centric place so as to work with a notion of identity not as something formed and fixed, but rather, as “a process with multiple sites for becoming and being” (Butler 1993, 21). Queer methods set out to ‘make strange’, but, even more important, I propose, to keep strange. Queer methods celebrate uncertainties, run riot with questions, and are shot through with “messy and unstable subjectivities”(3). Further, as Halberstam contends, a queer methodology may employ:

…different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence (13).

Queer research, then, may be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that underscores the instability of taken-for-granite meanings and resultant dynamics of power. Inconclusive and defiantly ill defined; these queered methodologies and methods offer the practice-based researcher the possibility of both artifact and research as acts of resistance, acts of strange-keeping.
So it is, then, that I find myself grateful for Judith Butler’s rendition of *queer* as a category that is ever in the flux of ‘becoming’, always venturing to avoid homogenization, naturalisation and authentication. Butler proposes instead that queer must:

…remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes (1993, 228).

Thus, the *queering of research* is both an act of resistance and an invitation to anti-oppressive and emancipatory acts (Brown & Strega 2005). For someone of my background and experience this opportunity for culture jamming and activism-by-research, especially when viewed from the margins of mid-career and mid-life crisis, is particularly inviting. I am not alone in this, as recent contributions by scholar-writers of other forms demonstrate (Campbell 2013; Eades 2015). Queer methods revitalise, and may even transform, presenting alternative, critical, anti-oppressive means for a maturing artist working both within and beside the academy as well as for an outrider, whether by choice or default, at the boundaries of the industry.

But let us go further. In substituting *queering* for *queer* I stand with those who resist calls for a “uniformity of queer” (herising 2005, 144, their lower case and preferred pronoun) and work against impulses to look for commonality, where experience tells me there is very likely none. Working with these instabilities and inhabiting the “chaotic place of unknowing” (Somerville 2008) I intend that as a queerelous-practitioner-hyphen-paracademic-hyphen-researcher I may remain vital and move ex-centrically through inter-cross-trans-cultural spaces, as I continue to
wrest and to wring my own methodology and meaning out of, beyond and beside varied and un/disciplinary models as they come to hand.

So, situating myself in rapidly changing times, in the now proclaimed postnormal world (Sardar 2010), I have taken the opportunity of this doctoral candidature to break fresh ground for my work. Taking the image forth, I am like a vine, working with stealth, sending the vital ‘green fuse’ of practice back into my personal past, tending it, there and here in the present, while also ushering it forward into gaps and crevices, inside and outside industry and the academy, locating through these multiple means, new know-ledges upon which to attach rootlets, and issue fresh tendrils of possibility. This imagery and lexicon of inflorescence and the idea of the flowering vine – be it blooming, blossoming, into fruition and beyond ripeness, into senescence and even into rot – has been central to this PhD inquiry that asks (and seeks to express) how one might remain artistically alive in a state of ongoingness into advancing age? Within what kinds of climates, counter-climates and conditions might elder-flowering occur?

At the same time, this study always had as its twin intention a bid to contribute to current academic debate in creative writing (Hetherington 2010; Watkins and Krauth 2016) by queering some of the gestures that comprise the creative and critical artefacts of the PhD-by-project, and by making provocative and performative propositions within the ‘genre’ of the doctoral candidacy itself. These intentions crystallised towards the middle phase of my research journey firstly around the everyday business of the conduct of my candidacy, later, through genre-bending possibilities encountered through surveys of work of contemporary women essayists (Strayed & Moser, 2014) and in critical writings on the contemporary essay (Singer & Walker 2013), and finally and most forcefully of all, after an encounter
with a more recent work by Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* in which the author declares:

I believe in low theory in popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the antimonumental, the micro, the irrelevant; *I believe in making a difference by thinking little thoughts and sharing them widely*. I seek to provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse; I am chasing small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies” (21, my italics).

This maverick manifesto, *alongside* passing encounters with the work of process philosophers and SenseLab founders Brian Massumi and Erin Manning (2014) and writings by subversive intellectuals and “fugitive knowers” like Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, who, in Halberstam’s words “refuse, resist and renege on the demands of ‘rigor’, ‘excellence’ and ‘productivity’” (2011, 8) came to inflect my many methods. It further emboldened my use of playful, improvisational and intuitive approaches to seminar presentations and milestones, as well as my quest for queerly innovative, if invariably flawed ways of reporting upon and of ‘w/riting up’ my work.

Herein then, a primer *upon* the practice of the *wright*, *beside* an initiation into the mysterious *w/rites* of *elder-flowering* and all this *within* an exemplar of the contribution to creative nonfiction that is *essaysque dismemoir*. Bamboozled? Simply turn the page.
BAMBOOZLED: AGEING IN PUBLIC PLACES

This study is timely. The world’s population, it is agreed, is ageing, and “ever more people are living into old age, often very old age.” (Segal 2014, 2). Demographers and statisticians report that the global population of elders is set to treble again in the next fifty years. Already there are some 600 million on the planet, three times more than there were only fifty years ago.

The flow-on effect is reaching every sector of society, including industry, art and culture. One may look to the film industry for a recent rash of stories of old age, including works such as Michael Haneke’s unflinching Amour (2012) or the gently comedic The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2012) and its sequel The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2015), both directed by John Madden, for evidence of this expanding interest. Western theatre has its classics on the subject, in works like Samuel Beckett’s Krapp’s Last Tape and Shakespeare’s King Lear and some extraordinary contemporary theatrical productions by companies like Ireland’s Pan Pan have also sought to shine a light in this direction but local, current and contemporary works about advancing age are few and far between. The late Don Reid’s simple and heart-warming comedies, Codgers (2006) and its pigeon-paired piece Biddies (2012) offer predictable his-and-hers triumph-over-decay narratives, in contrast to Patricia Cornelius’ ferocious Do Not Go Gentle (2010) or to works such as playwright Alan Seymour’s collaborations with palliative care expert and ‘deathtalker’ Molly Carlile, Four Funerals In One Day (2009) and The Empty Chair (2012), on subjects like grief, widowhood, and dementia, these last presented as issue-focusing ‘healthplays’ within burgeoning arts-and-health and gerontology frameworks.
My inquiry began with a wide-ranging survey of ideas of time and ‘the times’ (Sardar 2010; Montuori 2011) as well as of current thinking about the life course (Hockey & James 2003; Stuart-Hamilton 2011), against which to examine and seek out definitions of ‘old age’ and of elderhood, as ‘ageing’, its semantics and its meanings are ever changing. With this came possibilities of seeding queered alternatives to timeworn binary narratives of triumph versus decay (Gullette 2004; Woodward 2006). For as activist scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette states: “Whatever happens in the body, and even if nothing happens in the body, aging is a narrative” (2011, 5) before going further, to declare: “It’s hard work becoming knowledgeable about how we are being aged by culture and history.” (6)

Gullette, and other American commentators and essayists, (Mairs 1994; Rich & Macdonald 1991; Applewhite 2016) have been prominent voices on the matter. But it was celebrated feminist writers and philosophers who broke the first ground with key works on women and ageing by Simone de Beauvoir (1972), Betty Friedan (1993) and Germaine Greer (1991) all providing early signposts to ageing and ageism as the next frontier of the feminist cause.

More recent studies scoped out new turf (Calasanti, Slevin & King 2006), with a change in emphasis from woman as ‘ageing’ to woman as ‘old’, while others offer contemporary approaches to the new field of narrative and literary gerontology (Zeilig 2011). Studies of the artist in old age are harder to find, yet do exist, albeit as highly gendered, in creativity studies (Edel 1978) and literary studies (Wallace 2011) whilst elsewhere the feminist scholar Joanna Frueh has turned her attention to the erotics of ageing in her rich performance-based and critical work (1994). Contributions by Australian cultural commentators like sociologist and educator Patricia Edgar (2013) and feminist philosopher, Lynne Segal (2014) are a welcome
addition to the landscape, as was Ceridwen Dovey’s exhaustive and far-ranging survey piece, published in The New Yorker on 1 October 2015, under the heading *What Old Age Is Really Like*. Also in the public domain we find self-help handbooks like *How To Age* (Karpf 2014), new developmental theories like Lars Tornstam’s notion of gerotranscendence (2005), luminous and enduring novels (Sarton 1992), insightful essays (Garner 2015) and spiritual guidance towards growing old artfully and gracefully in texts and workbooks such as those by Sister Joan Chittister (2008) and *The Artist’s Way for Retirement*, by the prolific Julia Cameron (2016). Further renditions of ageing in arts practice are to be found in memoirs, biographies and autobiographies of artists themselves, although here again, the female playwright is an elusive voice, particularly in Australia, with Dorothy Hewett’s *Wildcard* (1990) to date a rare exception.

All of the above represents a brisk turn about the grounds to demonstrate that my research terrain has been and remains complex, trans-disciplinary and wide-ranging, with excursions into fields of creativity studies (Czikszentmihalyi 1997, Bohm 2012), narratology (Cavarero 2000) creative nonfiction (Miller & Paola, 2012; Lopate 2013), gerontology (Brown 2006; Woodward 2002, 2006), botany and ecology (Gianolo 2015; Kolbert 2014; Kimmerer 2003), queer studies (Ahmed, 2006; Hall and Jagose, eds, 2012) and with the odd sideways glance into an expanding sphere of research on the coalition of arts-and-health (Matarasso 2015, 2016).

But it is also performative autoethnography (Adams, Ellis & Bochner 2010) meets feminist autoethnography (Visweswaran 1994) meets queer ethnography (Adams and Holman Jones 2011) focused in my own creative practice, using a writing-as-thinking process (Richardson and Adams St. Pierre, 2005) of rumination.
and conceptualisation most usefully enabled by what Tim Ingold names “the practice and theory of walking” (2011, 38) and via the symbiosis that is praxis, or as others frame it, “a ‘double articulation’ …whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory” (Bolt 2007, 29). I spent much of my candidature with scant notion of how this would unfold, trusting only that practice-based research being, as Henk Borgdorff reminds us “not hypothesis-led, but discovery-led” (2012, 56), invites me to inhabit, to occupy and endure over a sustained period the same state of blind incipience, characterised by an uncomfortable mix of anxiety and reverie, I experienced as a playwright. This is familiar turf, and on the strength of close to three decades of professional practice I myself am mostly at ease with a praxis that demands I distil a tonnage of flowers towards the making of mere drops of fragrant oil.

This praxis has been a queer, sometimes dormant, other times vigorous thing, having many parts, vine-like, all of which I viewed as exegetical acts performed to different purposes, but united by a spirit of defiance and resistance. Over time I have become cognisant that together they also function as a kind of a case study, in that they speak directly to a rite-of-passage (see Turner, 1969, after van Gennep, 1909). Informed by this new insight, and inspired by Ellen Dissanayake’s proposition that art and art-making is necessary human behaviour, the fruit of biologically-endowed needs to ‘make special’, so as to embody and to disperse “socially shared significances” (1988: 200), I chose to formalise and elevate the meaning of each of these passages through acts of what Dissanayake calls artification.

I cast these acts first as play/writes, and over time, simply as w/rites. As will become apparent in due course, they speak variously to phases of separation
(valedictory, swansong), liminality (residency, installation) and incorporation (exhibition, performance) as I metamorphose towards elderhood. Each is an experiment in dialogic performance (Conquergood 2013, after Bakhtin, 1981) affording embodied exploration of an aspect or phase of elder-flowering, performed in discrete, but interconnected greening-houses, all of which cultivate or display different forms of and approaches to inflorescence.

Within the broader ecology of the arts and arts practice, these ministrations and cultivations, exhibitions and curations give queered expression to multiple subjectivities of some of my many selves as a maturing female artist.
PASSIONS FLOWER: ABANDON AND EXCESS AS METHOD

To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.

- Samuel Beckett, 1961

The above quote, attributed to the Irish writer, was uttered in an interview in 1961 between the great man himself and an American academic named Tom Driver. I display it here, not just for the prescience of its observation about the challenges facing the contemporary artist, but also with designs to extend Beckett’s idea into the academy of the twenty-first century by a write of re-vision-by-hyphenation. To find a form that accommodates the mess – or vice versa – that is the task of the artist-researcher now.

To accommodate mess demands adaptation, which is of course a key concept in biology, denoting means whereby an organism is able to modify its structure or alter its component parts, so as to be more likely to survive and multiply. Adaptation is a dynamic mechanism, enhancing fitness to thrive. Adaptiveness, this capacity to adapt, is essential when one inhabits an ever-changing environment. “Methodologies can adapt and in fields such as the creative arts, are often responsive and reflexive,” writes Craig Batty in his introduction to our recently published, team-authored paper, Methodologically-Speaking (2017). Batty continues: “In some instances, the contribution to knowledge is the methodology: a way of working that is based on the incubation of and reflection on a project/practice.”
This project models an adaptive methodology, through a practice characterised by excess and abandon. As such, it is a mess. At times it is also a mass, sometimes a miss, even at times a muss, which my dictionary tells me is a state of disorder or untidiness. Indeed it is mussed up, for it is I who have done the mussing, a verb that abandons me to actively put things into disorder; to make messy, to rumple things (often followed by up). ‘Muss’ is a word possibly formed by the blending of ‘mess’ with ‘fuss’. I am happy to have made both, for as Donna Haraway (2016) reminds us on the challenges of ‘Staying with The Trouble’:

The very strength of women who make a fuss is not to represent the True, rather to be witnesses for the possibility of other ways of doing what would perhaps be ‘better’. The fuss is not the heroic statement of a grand cause… It instead affirms the need to resist the stifling impotence created by the ‘no possibility to do otherwise, whether we want it or not,’ which now reigns everywhere. (Location 2675, Chapter 7.)

I’ll muss then, gladly, and go further, muddling (another Harawayism, and grappling with, in my Bogostian way, all the vowels, all the consonance, so as to pronounce this work not just mess, mass, miss, and muss, but also moss (from the notion of bog and mire) for its capacity to grow almost anywhere, upon almost anything, without being parasitic, and mossy for its vegetativity, its lushness and fecundity, without, in most cases, needing to go through the usual cycles of fertilization (arts funding, death by interminable development), and because some, in fact, many more mosses (or is the plural of moss already moss?) can survive
prolonged desiccation, returning to life within a few hours, given sufficient rehydration. This is a work of lushness, in the botanical sense; of abandon, unruliness and excess. Of what has been titled ‘restless art’ (Matarasso 2016) for ‘a restless age.’ (Castagno 2012, 2)

Many. Most. More. Many. Most. More. I have long been aware of the profligacy and promiscuity of this project, and should acknowledge that I was advised several times along the way to ‘rein it in.’ Ultimately this proved impossible. (One should have known, given the posturing extravagance of the libretto with the very long title – TTFO for short – that this is, more and more, one’s way.) Indeed, I am now prepared to propose that this very moreness, spilling from the abandon and excess of my work, constitutes rein-proofing, and is therefore not only its defining characteristic, but also a contribution to the knowledge ecology and to matters of methodology, enlarging our thinking about play and its place in the academy. So here let us unravel, untangle what we can, and if we are unable to retrace all the steps, then let us at least endeavour to uncover the trellis upon which the work has (over)grown.

The word ‘trellis’ itself is as useful as any other starting point, for its etymological roots lead me back once again to Latin where it is composed through the fusion of the number three (tri-) and the word for thread. A trellis, then, is woven with three threads. At the commencement of this study I believed I had three distinct threads, readymade skeins of investigation I thought might scaffold the project, while allowing me to grow myself over them by inhabiting guises familiar to me from my playwriting past as I sought vocational guidance for my future. I identified these threads as acts of archivism, activism, and of architecture. All three would use writing – most likely as inventory, case study and new performance text – as well as
employing poetics or writing-about-writing as lenses of reflection and inquiry. All three would be to do with time, with lived experience, and in response to imperatives towards acts of retrospectivity, presence and prospectivity I found myself experiencing as an artist-in-mid-career and advancing age.

I also declared my wish to extend those impulses to curate, to culture-jam, and to construct to the ‘genre’ of the creative practice dissertation by composing towards submission a spatial and temporal work housing these movements. Indeed, one of the few constants of this research has become seeking out such works – rare blooms, radical exegeses and dissertations that push the boundaries of what is recognisable and welcome in this context. Such was my excitement over a leap of academic boundaries that saw two American dissertations, one a graphic novel and the other a rap album, go viral via social media that I include links to each in my reference list. I am wary of robbing these newfound natives of their brilliance by describing them in my leaden prose, but suffice to say that I am grateful to the mavericks who breed these rogue species and applaud their derring-do. For, as one such daredevil and early-adopter, Steven Goddard observes, it is through these kinds of expressions that we may find: “Moreover, a third creative space opens. By interchanging and integrating the practice with the exegesis, it may be possible to generate a combined and reflexive research praxis.” (2007, 113)

At its most fundamental, then, this research project became a quest for means to seek out and to inhabit or occupy ‘third’ or ‘other’ creative spaces, within and without, as sites of continuing practice. It was always my hope that it would be experimental and playful, and both textually and experientially performable, but more than this, that it would create a porous and mutable space, accommodating of
personal and professional growth and extension-by-accretion through live and real
time engagement and play with others. You can’t take the play out of the playwright.

Happily, play and the academy are not strangers. Here in Australia, within my
field of creative practice research, a raft of scholars and researchers have examined
play as a discipline-specific mechanism (van Loon 2014), as the engine of all
research (Opie 2007); as an invigorating approach to considerations of structure
(Rendle-Short 2014) and even as a vital force within the intimate space of the
candidate-supervisor relationship (Berry & Batty 2016). This is hardly surprising.
Thomas Henricks contends that “play is the laboratory of the possible” (2006, 1)
wherein new knowledges may arise. Or, is play less laboratory and more, as Miguel
Sicart would have it, “like language – a way of being in the world, of making sense
of it. It takes place in a context as a balance between creation and destruction,
between adherence to a structure and the pleasures of destruction” (2014, 18).
Perhaps it is both?

“A degree of play creates the potential for the emergence of the new, not in
frontal assault against structure but at the edges and in its pores,” declare Erin
Manning & Brian Massumi (2014, 99). Australian researchers Estelle Barrett and
Barbara Bolt have also led the field in demonstrating that practice-led research is a
“new species” of discipline that draws on “emergent methodologies that have the
potential to extend the frontiers of research” (2009, 1). They are aligned with
Manning and Massumi in their proposition that arts practice may be viewed as ‘the
production of knowledge or philosophy in action’ (Barrett 2009, 1, emphasis added).
That is, knowledge is made on the fly, by the seat of the artist-researcher’s pants as
thinking and making coalesce in the act.
In The Queer Art of Failure, Judith signposts the words ‘serious’ and ‘rigorous’ as red flags, arguing that they are:

[c]ode words for disciplinary correctness in the academic world; they signal a form of training and learning that confirms what is already known according to approved methods of knowing, but they do not allow for visionary insights of flight or fancy (6, emphasis added).

Flight and fancy. Abandon and excess. These pairings are all but synonymous, I suggest, affording an alternative and adaptive methodology through a praxis of overturning. And overturning is much more likely to happen to ideas in the rough-and-tumble of play. A degree of risk is called for, as well as the capacity to use academic space in imaginative and undisciplined – safely unsafe - ways. Play is invigorating, if bruising work.

To embolden myself in my endeavour I also sought other examples of playfully abandoned and excessive gestures in the academy of recent times, the work of what Harney and Moten – who themselves incite theft and subversion in the undercommons – have called “fugitive knowers” (as cited in Halberstam 2011, 8). Some other instances found include an experiment in the form of a declaration through her weblog, Feminist Killjoys, of her refusal to cite white male authors in a forthcoming work of scholarship by Sara Ahmed (2016) regarding her now published Living A Feminist Life (2017); collective direct action via multiple authorship (eleven women writers on the one paper) in the name of a feminist practice of slow scholarship (Alison Mountz et al, 2015); a professor of Women’s
Studies and Humanities, Professor Margaret D. Stetz, from the University of Delaware, who apparently wears Playboy bunny ears when giving lectures (described in Spivack’s Worn Stories, 2014) and the amalgam of high and low theory Halberstam herself models for us in referencing both SpongeBob SquarePants and Samuel Beckett in the one slim volume that:

…runs the risk of not being taken seriously. Yet this is my goal. Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production around which I would like to map a few detours (6).

Abandon and excess ensure such detours. More than anything, they enable one, as an ageing artist, to move forward, unencumbered by anything, including seriousness, that might impede one’s elder-flowering. In the course of this research I came to prize both as time-saving, life-(pro)-longing methods, twin ‘floutation’ aids bearing me forward.

Abandonment, abandon, and abandoning are interesting words, offering paradoxical readings of both relinquishment and an almost spiritual force of ecstatic devotion. The source of the word takes us to feudal law, and a notion of operating outside some kind of proclamation or ‘ban.’ In this study the idea afforded me licence to operate alongside the conventions of orthodox scholarship in my paracademic way but it also offered me in its more common usage, the option of
giving up, at whim, one path for another. It delighted me that the examples of this word in usage that my dictionary app offers are ‘to abandon a research project’ and ‘to abandon hopes for a stage career.’ Each, from time to time, I did.

   To practice with abandon, then, rein-proofed my work, becoming a method accommodating changes of mind and of heart, of ebbs and flows in vim and vigour, and one that allowed me to reframe and repurpose pieces of writing that had otherwise brought deep weariness or led to dead ends, or for numerous other reasons were not pursued. With abandon, I found a new agility. I could mock, disport, re-fuse, flaunt my failures and my vulnerabilities, let new passions flower and move me on. There was no need to stop, to look back, to revisit, to master, to clean up after or to improve myself. I did not need to erase my mistakes or hide my traces. At my age, who has the time? Happily, abandon comes with built in momentum. As Siún Hanrahan puts it:

   Once I choose where to start and which direction to go, the activity of making/meaning generates its own momentum and its processes offer a shield from overwhelming responsibility, from lack of warrant or foundation from the meanings emergent from my choices. In all of our meaning-making activities…we create structures to protect our meanings and meaning-making activities from paralysing doubt (2006, 146).

   Likewise, in excess, with its inbuilt meanings of both extravagance and outrage, I found myself emboldened. As an ageing woman, who could ask for more?
Excess, with its Latin roots in notions of departure, of going beyond bounds of reason or subject or good taste, of going beyond what is expected or acceptable, and of embracing outrage and outrageousness as one’s raison d’être changed my modus operandi. I could mix my metaphors, and my methods, and have far too many of both. I could neologise, liberally, pun-fully: Elder-flowering. Sleep-working. Pranks-giving. Drag-netting. Vow-breaking. Yay-saying. Jest-setting. Cross-dressing. (As in getting dressed while cross.) I could think parenthetically, indulge my interest in archaisms and obsolete words, and raid my rootstock of foreign languages, living and dead. I could work with what I coined a newfound züberance. In excess, I found I could write freely, with multiple voices and minimal attachment; I could even repeat myself. I could view my work (as Wayne Koestenbaum does his own diary), as “a lifelong experiment in accretion – a scroll, remote from audience, coherence or plan.” (2013, 132) I was free to roll one project into another, to toy with many things at the same time, to embrace superfluity, say ‘yes’ to any and all opportunities for collaboration and co-creation that came my way, and always with the growing conviction that, as Keith Johnstone contends: “Those who say ‘Yes’ are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say ‘No’ are rewarded by the safety they attain’. (1981, 92) Or, as my co-panellists Mattie Sempert, Stayci Taylor and I conclude (with apologies to Bryce Courtenay) a draft of a forthcoming co-authored paper in which we set about to reimagine the conference panel as a ‘playpen’: “One must never underestimate the power of un-.” (2017, in press)

At the same time, searching and re-searching, things get worn away. Texts break down – words become porous, brittle matter – sounds, letters – dissolving into their component graphic marks, as circles, lines and sticks. Through this mess, then, through the sprawl of the hoard, through its un-tidiness, its un-ruliness, its un-
disciplinarity, I endeavour to expose and display something live in process, to perform thinking, on the stage that is the page, to catch a glimpse of it – albeit fleeting – in the act, even as it wilts, fades, and ultimately decays.

In a recent issue of TEXT, Watkins and Krauth (2016) asked, ‘Is creative writing the discipline in the box seat for exploring and exploiting new, flexible and dynamic knowledge forms?’ This research, it is my hope, answers with a resounding ‘Yes.’ It has taken up Julian Meyrick’s call for ‘descriptive sensitivity’ (Meyrick 2011) whilst seeking to build upon others’ scholarship on approaches to exegesis and dissertation (Krauth 2011, Rendle-Short 2010) through exposure of the ‘nerves’ and ‘mechanisms’ of an endangered practitioner’s progress. In so doing it displays an innovative approach to writing as research whereby an excess of public acts, personal archives and private interactions surrounding the making of new work become a ‘theatre’ of abandon in and of themselves.
FLORIBUNDA GLORIOSA: ESSAYESQUE DISMEMOIR

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sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur.

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Everything dies, even languages. Threads, too, decay. Even so, while I still have a pulse, an impulse to thread and to stitch remains. It is this that has delivered me to the central discovery of this inquiry, the formal contribution that is essaysque dismemoir.

In its play-full-ness, this decadent form brings me almost full circle. What began with a repudiation of playwriting, enacted through a public swansong and symbolically rendered in this thesis in my many attempts to smash the word playwright to a pulp, proved to be impossible. Like a weed, my innate drive to play/write simply sprang up in other places. Under cover of creative nonfiction, in the ruins of my designs on memoir and the essay, that desire, recuperated, has endured, sprouted, grafted, and re-grown.

Essaysque dismemoir is a botanical hybrid, a kind of floribunda gloriosa, flower and fruit of what Paul Castagno pronounces a “crossover poetics” that
“bundles disparate theatrical aesthetics into novel formations.” (6) This spectacular hybrid ‘bundles’ aspects of new playwriting, with tropes of creative nonfiction and rites-of-passage. It is best imagined through metaphor, perhaps, in picturing the interbreeding of the waratah with the bamboo, and the grafting of the resulting waraboo to the passionflower. The result – let’s call it *passiflora warabambootah* – is something gregarious, flexible, only occasionally showy, yet all the while vigorous in its quest for growth.

In the final folio of this dissertation, you will encounter specimens of this form in works for both soloist and ensemble. It is important to understand that these should not be read as scripts, or as finished texts for reproducible performances, but rather as templates, or even place-holders, like the Latin filler text displayed at the head of this chapter, used commonly in publishing and in graphic design to map out form before content has even been produced. The purpose of this display of my ‘wares’ is to introduce *essaysque dismemoir* as an approach to playful co-creation that is flexible, and adaptable, modular, dialogic and poly-vocal, and responsive to current circumstances.

This dissertation, too, operates as a kind of a template for *essaysque dismemoir*. It too is hybrid, porous and spacious. It was supposed to have been completed in the final days of 2016, but vine-like and rampant, it would not be contained. It shot through into yet another new year and now I find myself struggling to deliver it through the first months of a new world order. Perhaps this is why it has little faith in facts, or in ‘truths’, in words or in numbers, in statistics or in polls. Instead it sets out to ‘perform’ its thinking on the page for you as it strives to exemplify its unique research paradigm. Dare I contend it to be *post-thought*?
Essaysque dismemoir, then, speaks to instabilities and imbalances and to contemporary precarity, ransacking the playroom for new possibilities, and proposing \textit{writes of elder-flowering} amongst other “arts for living on a damaged planet” (Haraway 2016, Ch 3, Location 1703). Here, perhaps, space may be re-claimed and new connections made? Essaysque dismemoir challenges the cult of the ‘selfie’ and the individualist exceptionalism of the conventional, chronology-bound memoir, proposing instead a method for collective inscription in, and upon, time and place, and for exhibiting the liveness(es) and mis-remembrances of many, not one.

To do this, essaysque dismemoir employs a method of composition that is equal parts parodic and rhapsodic. Ross Gibson describes the latter (in relation to Bob Dylan’s ‘delving’ compositional mode) as “deriving from the two ancient Greek words \textit{rhaptein} and \textit{oide} denoting a sewn-together ode” (2014, 8). Gibson elaborates: “Extant elements get meshed and altered in the reiteration and recombination such that a startling new sonic fabric – stronger and more stimulant than the sum of its old parts – unfurls between the performer and the audience.” In essaysque dismemoir, rhapsody’s rude twin, parody also appears. Each is the other’s queer kin, and counterpart. Where rhapsody stitches things together \textit{into} odes, parody parks the ridiculous up \textit{alongside} them. Thankfully, like rhapsody, parody has solid academic form (see Bakhtin 1981, Butler 1993, and Hutcheon, 2006) as well as an entire Special Issue of Text devoted to Art as Parodic Practice (2015), whose editors remind us in their Introduction, that: ‘In fact, whether it takes the form of allusion, quotation, or downright appropriation, parody has its own very special parameters. As such, it looks backward and forward.’

It is in this capacity to look backward and forward in the same moment that I also locate essaysque dismemoir’s ritual function, which in my work to date is built
on the bones of the Catholic Mass. There has not been space to delve into this strand of the work in this dissertation, but it is something I feel I may well return to, particularly should I ever achieve sufficient stature in my elder-hood. I have long been aware of the legacy of a Catholic childhood on my work as a playwright and theatre maker. In the past this was sensed as a kind of shameful smudge of ash on my forehead, a faint whiff of frankincense in the air. However in the course of two residencies at Footscray Community Arts Centre I worked with this more consciously and deliberately, deconstructing the Mass and its structural architecture and starting to consider the meanings of the individual internal components as speech acts – offerings, declarations, confessions, absolutions, benedictions – capable of being received not just in word, but in deed. I also came to appreciate the modularity of the Mass, and its capacity to be customised for different occasions and purposes, or to sanction significant life transitions marking unions and separations, leave-takings and returns.

*Essayesque dismemoir* employs similar modular means to make and to do. Its malleability is derived from its driving energetic principles of porosity and accretion. Porous things are full of holes, and this work is characterised as much by what is missing, as by what is present or complete. *Essayesque dismemoir*, as we shall see, is all about making openings and holding space. Indeed when I was first drafting this document – for university progress reports and candidature milestones – I was struck by how many times I typed the word ‘space’ into the text, and at one point even made a move to count them. In my mind now the making, taking and holding of space is one of the key contributions of this work. And what is all this space-travel for? It is in quest of little cracks and tiny crevices between things, for it is in these spaces that I feel that I, and others like me, may yet cling to life. Accordingly, we
wedge, we prise, we hold apart edges and hope that we, and others near us, may squeeze in to these spaces, and continue to inhabit them, at least for a while.

Another key characteristic of essayesque dismemoir lies in the principle and dynamics of accretion. By this measure, a work will never be complete, which may explain some of the other difficulties I have experienced in trying to bring this to a close. It is always growing and changing, attracting and gathering. There are always unfurlings, new tendrils, roots and leaves. The notion of prepositional-thinking that has been enlarged upon elsewhere, stakes up this green fuse and unfolding force. It is means whereby that which is lodged alongside, between and around, and under the words you read here, is where its meaning resides. In so many ways I am calling on my playwriting past here, knowing the capacity of assemblies of congregants and witnesses to give audience, in the original meaning of that idea, to that which can only be heard, because it is only to be found, sub-textually, para-textually, trans-textually. The entire assemblage herein is built on playwriting’s first principle, show, don’t tell.

This is all to the good, as I have little that is new to tell but so much to show. In fact, through essayesque dismemoir, I contend, I have devised a new way to show you what it is that I do not know. The catch is that to do so requires your participation. At a time when contemporary events seem unbelievable, impossible, absurd, essayesque dismemoir captures the dis of our cognitive dissonance, offering an experience of agency and activity when we would remain passive at our peril. It speaks to the dis in disrespect, and shouts out to the dis of disobedience. It harnesses this dis to its dismay, its disgust, its disbelief, and to perform its disinclination, its contrariness, its oppositional consciousness and its resistance. Essayesque dismemoir affords a means for collective thought, and goes further, to once more echo Donna
Haraway, in her quest for both “compositionist practices” (1021) and for “attentive practices of thought, love, rage and care.” (Chapter 2, Loc 1299).

In abandoning you here then, at the door of the warehouse, I propose that if there is any over-riding principle in play in what follows, it is simply its ‘-esqueness’. I ask the reader to distinguish between Brian Massumi’s use of this term in 2014 in his book What Animals Teach Us About Politics, and my own usage herein. In his book, focusing on animal play, Massumi employs the suffix to allude to the metacommunicational strategies of animals, and to styles of playful gesture through which they relay to one another, for instance, invitations to engage in the ‘combatesque’ as opposed to actual combat (9-10). My use of –esqueness zooms in on that central ‘que’ as a codeword for queer. When I declare my work ‘essaysque’ I do so to cue you not just to its essay-like-ness, but to its essay-queer-ness, where to queerly essay, it seems to me, is one of the few rational gestures for our times.

Working ‘-esquely’, thinking ‘-esquely’, acting with –esqueness, allows for the maintenance of a gap, an ironic distance, and speaks to an alongsideness and a determinition not to be co-opted into the mainstream. Working ‘-esquely’ allows me to carve my own path, in this case, beside the essay, around the memoir, adjacent to the academy, and to transfer the tools I used as a playwright – the creation of ‘characters’, the construction of scenes, the use of dialogue and of image – to this new practice as a way of exposing any ‘meaningfulness’ herein.

The outcome of all of this for me as a practitioner has been a tentative return ‘to voice’ and to my vocation. In the delivery of these experimental works under the title, Ware With A Translucent Body, that ‘voice’ finds ‘form’ in queered and collective dismemoirs that draw together fragments of personal data, unreliable history, and incomplete inventory while at the same holding space for improvisation
and for the voices, memories and ‘stories’ of others from the floor. These gestures of polyvocal prospectivity are conceived as queered and feminist acts, informed by Adriana Cavarero’s thesis of “the narratable self” as an act of restoration and of care, and in response to acts of erasure committed upon women by Western philosophy. For it is only through such acts of narration, that, as Cavarero proposes:

...a shared contextual, and relational space is created by some women who exhibit *who* they are to one another… Put another way, there is the privileging of the word as a vehicle of a desire for identity that only the narrated form seems to render tangible (2000, 59).

*Essayesque dismemoir* then becomes one such ‘attentive practice’ of thinking and making as salvage. Through the w/rites that underscore the artifacts to follow, Ware With A Translucent Body, I shall perform for you here on the page, my safe passage through the difficult life transition from midlife to elderhood, and from writer to wright. At the same time, through this queering of practice I mean to hold space for the experiences of other women artists in later life, so as to embolden not only myself, but others, to remain in motion, even in the ruins, resisting and refusing stagnation, as we age.
PART THREE
WROUGHT
She was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.

Kate Chopin, ‘The Awakening’, 1899
WARE WITH A TRANSLUCENT BODY

– a triptych for performance –
1

Swansong!!! The Musical!!!  
An Oratorio for Late Bloomers

2

Litanies for the Forgetful  
A Rhapsody of Re-membrance

3

Missa Pro Venerabilibus  
A Mass for the Ageing
Swansong!!! The Musical!!!

- An Oratorio for Late Bloomers -
Swansong!!! The Musical!!!

Swansong!!! The Musical!!! was my creative focus through 2013. (A rough draft had appeared in my MA as the coda to Things That Fall Over, the work under examination, but was a placeholder for something to be properly worked later.) In phase one of this PhD research process a complete draft of the text was produced, the score was composed, and the work underwent funded creative development. A first public showing was given on Saturday, 14 September, 2013 at 3.30pm at the Bluestone Church in Footscray.

The ensemble was led by Lisa Maza as The Weaver, and featured Margret RoadKnight as Verity, supported by Tracy Bourne, Sue Breedon and Caroline Lee as The Eternal Verities. The role of The Child was sung by Rosie Bray. The chorus and orchestra consisted of the Quire and Musical Con-Sorts from Things That Fall Over, led from the keyboard by composer Peta Williams. Musical Direction was by Jo Trevathan, and the work was co-directed by Robin Laurie and Peta Murray. Costumes were by Alice Prowse, Scenic Design by Jane Murphy, and Lighting by Rachel Burke.

A second public performance, and the official world premiere of the work, was given by the same company on Monday, 16 December, 2013, at 7pm in the First Site Gallery, at RMIT University. This was funded by the City of Melbourne.

A third public performance was given on Saturday, 1 March, 2014, at 9pm, in the amphitheatre at Footscray Community Arts Centre, as a coda to a presentation of Things That Fall Over. The main soloists were as above, but on this occasion The Eternal Verities were played by Tracy Bourne, Caroline Lee and Wilhelmina Stracke, and the pianist was Sue Robinson.

A rough archival audio mix of Swansong!!! The Musical!!! from that performance was made by sound technician Bek Varcoe and was supplied to examiners. For copyright reasons it cannot be more widely distributed.
Telopea speciosissima, the waratah. Photo © Peta Murray 2013
ENSEMBLE

THE WEAVER: a storyteller

THE CHILD: a young girl

THE SWAN OF VERITY: a swan-woman

THE ETERNAL VERITIES: a ‘girl group’ styled trio

THE SWANSINGERS: a women’s community chorus

MUSICAL CONSORTS

KEYBOARD

STRING TRIO: violin, viola, cello

ELECTRIC BASS

PERCUSSION

UKULELES
THE WEAVER: A Child came to a fork in the road, and there on the ground was a beautiful Swan, its long neck, twisted, its head thrown back. And there was blood there, on its swan’s-down breast. The Child saw the road was hard and stony, no place for a wounded creature to lie. So The Child resolved to move that Swan to a softer place.

THE CHILD: Art thou weary, art thou languid,

Art thou sore distressed?

THE WEAVER: With care The Child lifted up the huge bird. She felt the great bones of its powerful wings. The bird gave off a terrible stench, yet The Child bore her to the edge of a lake.

THE CHILD: “Come with me,” saith One,

“And coming, be at rest.”

THE WEAVER: Gently, oh, so gently, The Child laid The Swan on a bed of reeds beside lapping water. Then, not knowing why, not knowing why, The Child sang to The Swan:
THE CHILD: If I ask Thou to receive me

Wilt thou say me ‘Nay’?

THE WEAVER: In reply came a hiss and The Child felt a presence.

THE CHILD: Not till Earth and not till Heaven

Pass away.

THE WEAVER: Yet there was no one there. The Child was moved and wept bitter tears. And again, so as to soothe them both, The Child stroked the fine neck of The Swan. Now The Child heard a voice.

VERITY: (HIDDEN) “Oh, if you come in search of truth…

THE WEAVER: Who speaks, said The Child?

VERITY: (HIDDEN) … you must pass door by door, through mystery.”
THE WEAVER:  It cannot be you who speaks. It cannot be you who speaks, said The Child. For swans are always mute. Unless you are dying? For only at death may swans sing. For only at death may swans sing.

VERITY:  (HIDDEN) This is untruthful. This is a lie. We swans sing in life too. In anger. In sorrow. In gladness. Hear us… Hear us. Hear us!

THE WEAVER:  At this, and without knowing why, The Child set a hand upon the bird’s head. And suddenly, heard a beautiful song....

SWANS CALL: HIDDEN WOMEN’S CHORUS

Old ones in young bodies; we sing to you.

Young ones in old bodies; we sing to you too.

THE WEAVER:  The Child looked up, to find that the injured swan had disappeared. A Swan Woman, Verity, stood in her place.
As if summoned, a ghostly eminence appears.

It is Verity, a Swan.

THE WEAVER: From far away, came a slow beating of wings.

Now the Swan of Verity was joined by another.

Verity is joined by the first of a magnificent bee-hived trio, The Eternal Verities.

THE WEAVER: And she by two more.

More Eternal Verities materialize, a “girl group” incarnate. They sing.

ON VERITY: VERITY & THE ETERNAL VERITIES

VERITY: I am. I am Verity.

VERITIES: We, the Eternal Verities.

VERITY: Never, never was I not

VERITIES: Nor shall we cease to be.
VERITY: All, truly, all is life.
VERITIES: Life is not born, nor dies.
VERITY: Life is indivisible.
VERITIES: Yet life in all things lies.

VERITY: Earth lives in my body.
VERITIES: Fire lives in my breath.
VERITY: Water, air, the stuff of stars.
VERITIES: And love, dissolving death.

VERITY: We serve. We learn. We teach. We seek.
VERITIES: We strive to understand.
VERITY: Truth sings through our bodies.
VERITIES: Truth sings through our hands.

VERITY: I am. I am Verity.
VERITIES: We, the Eternal Verities.
VERITY: Never, never was I not.
VERITIES: Nor shall we cease to be.
THE WEAVER: Now came many more swans, but as each touched down on the lake, she turned in her shape. And suddenly the water was full of laughing women, who frolicked and sang for sheer joy of it.

*The Quire manifests from amongst the crowd. All become swans.*

**THE FIRST SWANSONG: WOMEN’S CHORUS**

Old ones in young bodies; we sing to you. Hear our swan song.

Young ones in old bodies; we sing to you too. Hear our swan song.

You will find us in this world and in the other too,

And in the thin places in between...

In the crossings, at the edges, never far from view

Swim we soulful singing swans unseen

THE WEAVER: Emboldened, The Child moved closer, to stand with one foot on dry land, the other in water. The Child was full of questions, so the Swan-women shared all they knew.
SECOND SWANSONG: VERITY, VERITIES, CHORUS

VERITY:  Verify! Verify!

VERITIES:  Veritable verification

VERITY:  Verify! Verify!

VERITIES:  Veracity won’t take a vacation.

CHORUS:  Poured into each vessel for a short time.
          Verily varied,
          Cast away the cup, and still it shines on,
          Shines on…
          Truth is everywhere and truth is always. (Verify!)
          In bird and beast, in flower and stone.
          Close your eyes and step into heart’s hallway. (Verify!)
          Here is where your soul makes a home.
VERITY: Till your dying day! Till that day!

VERITIES: Seek that which will feed your very self

VERITY: Till your dying day! Till that day!

VERITIES: Soul food is our common wealth.

VERITY: Be true to yourself!

ALL: Be true to yourself… (REPEATED)

THE WEAVER: As Verity and the Swans sang on, The Child was filled with courage, and a heart full of fire and feeling. Yet, what to do with this? How to make it into something true?

SONGS OF THE SOUL: VERITY & THE VERITIES

Ask nature to teach you. Look for the marks of the wise ones.

Make your own marks. Get your hands dirty.

Push and pummel to make meaning of life.

Grasp and grapple after something new.

Hold ideas to the light in search of grace, guidance and goodness.

We are all the same. Know with your flat hand the meat of your body.
The same circling rivers, the same air, in and out.

Sense the same jellies within you and me, poems of the bones,

And songs of the marrow, you know. And you know…

And you know that you know…

These are not songs of body. They are songs of the soul.

They are poems of the soul, songs of the soul…

Sing it, sing it loud, sisters etc.

THE WEAVER:   Hearing the Swans’ song The Child left the dry land
   and joined them in the inky water. Now The Child
   sang:

A SONG OF SOMETIMES: THE CHILD

Sometimes I am man, and sometimes woman.

Sometime yet I may be swan.

Always I am a fire in the hearts of all beings.

We come to earth to learn. Each body is our school.

Some stay minutes. Others months. Some attain great age.

Even so, how little is learned. Perhaps everything returns?
Perhaps, as a swan moults and is grounded for a time, before taking flight once more,

Perhaps as I outgrow old clothes and put on new,

So, the dweller in one body, having quit that frame, may enter another?

If so, let me now be swan.

THE WEAVER: At this, there was the throb of great wings beating.
One by one the women lifted themselves from the lake and into the air in swanlike form, though not a single feather wet with water.

THE CHILD: Oh, to go with you. Oh to go with you….

REST NOW: VERITY & THE VERITIES:

VERITY: Rest now. It is not your time.
So much to seek and to learn.
Artists are teachers, books are too.
Listen. Read. Discern.
VERITY: Mind grows dull in worlds of things.

VERITIES: The endless passing show.

VERITY: Hollow men, and spectacles

VERITIES: See them come and go.

VERITY: Rest now. It is not your time.

This world is yet your pearl

Mystery and wonder are your school

Marvel, muse and dwell.

VERITY: Mind grows bright in music’s light

VERITIES: Literature and art

VERITY: Lofty homes for minds and flesh

VERITIES: Truth through hand and heart.

VERITY: Beetroot to yourself.

THE CHILD: What did you say?

VERITIES: Beetroot to yourself.
VERITY: And so, Child, here our lesson ends.

Each life may light one spark

Use whatever lies at hand

To leave a maker’s mark.

THE WEAVER: So The Child swam to the bank, to find the injured Swan lying in the reed bed as before. Now, The Child brought a hand to rest on the bird’s breast. And The Swan's heartbeat travelled into the palm of the hand and on, up the arm, and into the Child’s heart.

Whereupon came a great pulse and the thrum of great wings in flight. For The Swan herself was dead. And upon the ground where the injured Swan had been lay a single feather. Taking up that feather and holding it firm, in the soft mud, beside the lake become ink, The Child began ….

THE CHILD: What? Began what?

THE WEAVER: There is no more. Here Swansong!!! The Musical!!! ends.
THE CHILD: Then I shall finish it. Listen. (RECIT) Taking up that feather and holding it firm, in the soft mud, beside the lake become ink, The Child began …to write!

DO THE WORK: ENSEMBLE FINALE

Do the work, complete it while you can, sisters.
The path of time circles starry spaces, wide.
Do the work. Glory in the work, sisters.
Raise your voice, be ukulele-fied!
Sing out sisters. Shape it, shape it, shape it, sisters.
Things fall over. Things will always fall.
Do the work, glory in it, sisters.
Raise your voice for song is free-for-all…

Sing out sisters. Shape it, shape it, shape it.
Verily! Beetroot to yourself.
Hold up the truth, brace, it, brace, brace it.
Verily! Beetroot to yourself.
Things fall over. Things will always fall.

Those that need to fall? Give them a push!

This then is your trust and sacred duty

Verily! Beetroot to yourself!

Hear, Child, in the name of truth and love.

In the name of truth and love.

The company mingles with the audience distributing small tins of beetroot.

The End
Litanies for the Forgetful

A Rhapsody of Re-membrance

as

a work of *essaysque dismemoir* for solo performer and audience
In 2015 I returned to FCAC as an artist-in-residence alongside two other older women artists, Heather Horrocks and Robin Laurie, under the umbrella of the Arts Centre’s Creatively Ageing Program. This was an opportunity to ‘reside’ in my practice whilst also occupying public space; to be visible, vocal and available to visitors to the gallery and, as a researcher, to unfold my concept of *essaysque dismemoir* as a publicly performative gesture in a creative development process alongside my collaborating artists and with the participation of designer/dramaturg Rachel Burke.

The embOLDen residency was conducted over a six-week period, and saw us installed on rotation in the gallery often together and sometimes alone. Weekend events were scheduled to which the general public was invited – these included workshops, demonstrations, Death Cafes, Show and Tells, and a community Forum. The embOLDen project was subsequently shortlisted for a VicHealth award in 2016.

The first public performance of Litanies for the Forgetful, a work of *essaysque dismemoir*, was given in the Roslyn Smorgon Gallery of the Footscray Community Arts Centre on Saturday 26 September, 2015, at 2pm as part of an all day forum on Creatively Ageing. It was presented within a group performance given by Heather Horrocks, Robin Laurie and Peta Murray. A rough archival recording was supplied to examiners. For copyright reasons it cannot be more widely distributed, and it is not available for public viewing.

A second performance of Litanies for the Forgetful was given in the Roslyn Smorgon Gallery of the Footscray Community Arts Centre on Saturday 3 October, 2015, at 12pm. This was an in-house presentation given for staff, family and friends.

A third performance was given as part of a panel on Performing The Essay, presented at NonFictioNow, Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff, Arizona, on Thursday 29 October, 2015, at 4pm.
Phyllostachys edulis, bamboo ‘Moso’. Photo © Peta Murray 2015
Your table is set for display purposes, and your suitcase packed with artefacts.

In chalk, on one face of the suitcase, you have written the words: *essaysque dismemoir* in your best modified cursive handwriting.

You wear houndstooth trousers and an unremarkable shirt.

You take the floor. You have to hand your suitcase, a Visitor’s Book and your composition book with instructions in a childlike hand.

You acknowledge The Assembled.

You display the words *essaysque dismemoir*.

**SAY:** What is there to say about *essaysque dismemoir* that has not already been said?

You produce chalk. You underscore as you intone:

**SAY:** *Essaysque dismemoir* is not to be *written*, but *wrung*.

It is to be *wrested*, not *wrought*.

You open the case. You glove your hands.

**SAY:** *Essaysque dismemoir* riffs and rifles, trips and trifles.

From the suitcase case, you remove, wind up, distribute kitchen timers.

**SAY:** *Essaysque dismemoir* is, if not the last word, then at least the very latest. It arrives at the eleventh hour, out of the detritus of memory, through the sieve of sleep. *Essaysque dismemoir* is a minor contribution towards a poetics of dementia, in the form of a coinage.

(MORE)
SAY: New minted. *Essaysque dismemoir* has fresh breath. And a thing for lists.

You remove from the suitcase an anatomically correct model of a human foot. You display it.

Now, deliver a Litany of Ailments as an IMPROVISED LIST, inserting your correct age to the day and the hour, and elaborating as you wish.

IMPROV: My name is Peta Murray. I am exactly __________ years, days old etc. As I stand before you at this moment my AILMENTS include:

1. *Lower leg bi-lateral lymphoedema*
2. *Plantar fasciitis*
3. *Scoliosis – this is a curvature of the spine*
4. *Dupuytren’s Contracture etc.*

Continue until you have itemized all your ailments. Now, remove a spray of plastic flowers.

SAY: These plastic flowers belonged to my grandmother, Connie. She kept her marbles, but like me, she had no end of trouble with her pins. Connie died of old age at 86.

You take out Pears Soap.

SAY: The smell of Pear’s soap will always take me to her.
You smell the soap. You receive the memory. You pass the soap among The Assembled.

You remove an ornament. Display it.

SAY: This lead ornament is a three-legged bulldog. It belonged to my grandfather, Harry. Harry lived a long life, he laughed easily, he played the piano every day till he died of a stroke. To my knowledge he never owned any kind of a pet.

Deliver a Litany of Dead Pets in improvised ELABORATION of this LIST:

IMPROV: Pets I have owned:

1. *Gus, the white boxer*
2. *Ralph the black and white cat.*
3. *Lucy and Popsicle, who taught me about death.*
4. *Taxi – the grey cat. This was a funny joke. You stand in the street, you call your cat. Taxi! Taxi! I have since wanted to name animals Thief! And Nurse!*
5. *Olive, a stray, lost to another in a bitter break-up.*
6. *Zada, the failed guide dog, sweetest spirit of them all etc.*

Continue until you have itemized all your animals.

SAY: *Essayesque dismemoir* is what is left after the sorting. It is what remains after all the words that might have been chosen have been rejected. The word ‘essayesque’ is well-distributed in the literature. *Dismemoir* is all my own. Or so I thought. Google a word. (MORE)
SAY: Someone else has thought of it, before you have. Perhaps it is misspelled? Let the ‘I’ be a ‘Y’. Let DIS memoir be DYSMEMOIR.

Now you disport your fancy trousers.

SAY: My mother, in her prime, wore pants like these. She called them ‘slacks.’ Her name was Hilary. Hilary lost her marbles. At the age of 60 she began to disappear. She died aged 77. She did not know who she was. But even to the end she could hold a tune; call up the words to almost any song.


You open and read at random from The Book of Fears.

When it feels right to do so, you stop.

You put on a sash that reads Student of the Year, 1974.

SAY: Essaysque dismemoir is the work of an erstwhile playwright who comes late to nonfiction. Who cannot craft an essay. Who will not write a memoir. Yet who has her own inner dramaturg and a thing for form.

LITANIES: Things I wrote as a child:

1. *an autobiography*
2. *a play in the style of Samuel Beckett*
3. *excruciatingly bad poetry.*

(CONTINUES OVER)
Things purported to be written by me, that were not:

1. *My school compositions, written by my mother*
2. *A poem that won a prize, written by my mother*
3. *A purple gingham nightdress, started in sewing class. Completed by my mother.*
4. *A timber sculpture of a teardrop, started in art class. Completed, by my father, using carpentry tools he stored in the largest of the nest of matching suitcases they bought to take the trip that was meant to save their marriage but did not.*

**LITANY:** Words on butcher’s paper by my desk at home:

1. *Senescence.*
2. *Putrefaction*
4. *And A List entitled: Top Ten Deathbed Regrets.*
5. *And a phrase: There will be enough time.*

**SAY:** A READING: From journals my sisters and I kept over the final years of the life of our Incredible Vanishing Mother.

Read an entry at random from Hilary’s Visitor’s Book, Volume One or Two.

**SAY:** *Essayesque* dismemoir is de-composition. It’s a text that’s having a tantrum. It is in the vein of a monologue. It resembles a play. (MORE)
Say: Yet. But. Yet the thing about it is that it may only be performed by the writer herself. It can never be given away or shed, it will always cling to her, it may even grow over her. These are just words now, any old words, bring out your words.

Intone: *Mead, requiem, porosity…*

Say: These are some words I love to say. Words I hope I don’t live to forget. Please join me. *Avalanche, balustrade…..*

*The Assembled is invited to intone their favourite words here. You echo them.*

Say: Yes. Yes. *Essayske dismemoir* wants you to write it with me. Wants you to write it for me. Wants to hang up its pencil. Believes its pencil was never really its pencil. Believes it was just an arm and a hand that held a pencil through which others might write themselves. Wonders if it could only write while its mother was alive? Wonders if it wrote her? Rotor?

You fix a hurdy-gurdy to a solid surface. You apply a false moustache.

Say: Hush now, hush now. *Essayske dismemoir* has forgotten what it set out to be. Forgot, even before it set out. Bores itself senseless with these stubs of memory. Would like to take an angle grinder to these sentences, burr them down to the pulp. Memories, worn down, just the stumps of them left to trip over.
Wind the hurdy-gurdy. Music.

SAY: Please join me for the community singing.

ALL SING: You Are My Sunshine, my only sunshine….

The End
Missa Pro Venerabilibus

A Mass for the Ageing

as

a Work of *essayesque dismemoir* for

Three Elders, Guest Servers, and an

Assembly of Congregants and Witnesses
Missa Pro Venerabilibus

In 2016 I returned to Footscray Community Arts Centre to make the final work in the triptych, again alongside Robin Laurie and Heather Horrocks as collaborating artists. The ensemble was expanded further with the involvement of two mature artists, (specialists in lighting and visual design) and in turn with participation from three younger women artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, two of whom I had been mentoring through FCAC’s Emerging Cultural Leaders Program.

This work was built on a lengthy planning and preparation period, before a two-week creative development ‘sprint’ held at FCAC. It culminated in three public presentations over the course of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. The project again sat under the umbrella of FCAC’s Creatively Ageing Program and consolidated my research towards a new approach to creative nonfiction on the notion of ‘elder-flowering’. Over 70 people attended the performance, participating as congregants and witnesses. The youngest attendee was about six years old. The oldest attendees were in their eighties. The project was reviewed positively online, and I also received unsolicited feedback via email through FCAC’s reception. See Appendix D for extracts.

The first public performance of Missa Pro Venerabilibus was given on Friday, 16 September, 2016 in the Performance Space at Footscray Community Arts Centre at 6.30pm. A second public performance was given on Saturday 17 September, 2016, at 12pm and a third public performance was given on Saturday, 17 September at 6.30pm.

All three performances were presented as part of Melbourne Fringe Festival, with the support of RMIT’s non/fictionLab, and featured Robin Laurie as The Eldest, Heather Horrocks as The Elder and Peta Murray as the Youngest. The Servers were Alia Gabres, Soma Garner and Gabriela Georges.

The design team was Rachel Burke and Jane Murphy.

A rough archival recording was supplied to examiners. For copyright reasons it cannot be more widely distributed, and it is not available for public viewing.
Allemanda cathartica, 'Cherry Ripe'. Photo © Peta Murray 2016
ENSEMBLE:

Three Elders, their participation to be determined by their age as The Eldest, The Elder, The Youngest

Three Guest Servers

Perhaps A Guest Lector

Congregants and Witnesses
PRE-SERVICE

IN THE SACRISTY

The ELDEST & the ELDER prepare and robe up. They have staffs and a recently extinguished Thurible. They wear blacks and their copes, but no beards. They have lanyards round their necks and mobile phones in secret pockets.

They need Big Print MISSALS if not pre-set in the space. Whoever is to read the GOSPEL & GIVE THE SERMON at this performance will need to have planted her documents for her show and tell in the space, or else in her MISSAL.

IN THE SPACE

The Space has been smoked and scented with frankinscence. Small signs are propped warning: ‘PLEASE’ KEEP OFF THE GRASS!

Sacred Music plays. First, O TUA SUAVASSISIMA VIRGA (11.23), then O ECCLESIA, MY BELOVED (7.31) – Hildegard von Bingen

Bowls and props are pre-set. There is water in three thermos flasks.

The YOUNGEST, wearing her cassock and UNFUNDED EXCELLENCE sash waits in the Space, checking the faulty organ and policing The Verge. Black pants & top, ugly black orthopaedic sandals, purple waist band from TTFO, RMIT and coffin lanyards, mobile phone.
THE YOUNGEST has copies of the PROGRAM/MISSAL, MELODICA etc.

IN THE SANCTUARY

As congregants arrive they gather in the sanctuary of the foyer where tickets are checked/collected.

Three Servers are in the Sanctuary to welcome them. They wear damask tablecloth cassocks over street clothes. Each has a hand-bell, which she will use, and keep close throughout the service.

There are three Stations in the Sanctuary, each attended by a Server, who invites congregants to engage in ritual practices at each.

SANCTUARY STATION 1: A BOOK OF FEARS

A Book of Fears stands on a lectern or a plinth, with candles nearby and the Suffragist flag as a backdrop. There is a pen to hand. One of the Servers attends, and invites people to inscribe their fears about ageing to the book, in between lines already written.
SANCTUARY STATION 2: THE SHELL GAME

In a shell-shaped bowl are equal numbers of MARBLES, LETTERS and RIBBONS. One of the Servers attends this.

Each congregant is required to choose one of these tokens.

They are not to be given any information about what each signifies. It is a lottery. Like life.

They take their token with them into THE SPACE.

We need to retrieve these tokens at the end of the service, or else when the congregants divide into three equal sized groups for the MINOR RITES.

SANCTUARY STATION 3: THE FONT OF OIL WISDOM

At the threshold to the corridor into The Space is a font of aromatic oil. It is a base of almond oil (neutral, massage-safe) scented with Eucalyptus Oil.

One of the Servers attends this station, checking that people have their tokens and asking them: Where does it hurt?

Congregants are invited to anoint themselves with oil to ease their pains.
ADMITTANCE TO THE SPACE

At an agreed signal from the Youngest, the Servers ring their bells and the congregation passes the font, crosses the threshold from the SANCTUARY and is admitted to THE SPACE.

The YOUNGEST greets them, welcomes them to today’s service, distributes the missal/hymnal. Invites them to explore the side chapels or to take a pew.

Once inside, all are free to move around the border along the verge of the space, to look at the INSTALLATIONS. But they must keep off the grass!

Servers and The Youngest insist they stay on The Verge!! From here they may visit the two side chapels below.

SIDE CHAPEL A: STATIONS OF THE VERY CROSS

This is a site of reflection and meditation on the Individual Challenges each of us shall face in a body in decline. RITES here are expressive of COMPLAINT, GRATITUDE or FORBEARANCE.

There is a small table with writing materials available here. Later the opportunity will be provided for individuals to write about a complaint or malady, or to express gratitude for a medical miracle or intervention.

Later, during the Minor Rites, this wall becomes a shrine, as bouquets of flowers, and gifts of fruits and magazines are placed here.
SIDE CHAPEL B: THE DETRITUS OF OUR DAYS

This is the reliquary wall, where observances are encouraged. Here are displayed Broken Things, Rare Remnants, Unfinished Business – The Leftovers of our Little Lives.

On illuminated ‘ledges’ sacred objects are on show, along with sprigs of rosemary. Each has a personal meaning or a story that attaches it to one of the Elders. Congregants may LOOK, but not touch. MINOR RITES to be conducted here later are expressive of MEMORY.

Later some will partake in a communal ritual, focused on this wall.

It can be played three ways, as follows:

I REMEMBER – One of us removes an object and a sprig of rosemary holds it, and makes a statement that begins: I remember… Rosemary is passed from hand to hand or distributed. All share a memory. When everyone has said what she wants to say, the ritual is finished.

I FORGET – as above. One of us removes an object and a sprig of rosemary from the wall, holds it and makes a statement that begins: I forget when/how/why…. The rosemary is passed from hand to hand. Or as each person contributes a new ‘I Forget’, they take a sprig. When everyone has said what she wants to say, the ritual is finished.

For now, the congregants simply browse, before being directed (more bells?) by the YOUNGEST and the SERVERS to take seats in pews or on chairs along the rear wall.
The YOUNGEST speaks to, settles and addresses the audience about the opening HUM. She then cues the ELDER with a blast from her MELODICA.
PART 1: INTRODUCTORY RITES:

Cardboard stools are aligned in pew-like rows at the rear of The Space as are sensible chairs against the rear wall for those who don’t do cardboard.

Rites of Hummable Song:

THE YOUNGEST prepares to begin the Mass by going to the Organ, or its equivalent (CASIO keyboard? Melodica?). She turns a LIGHT BOX on, so as to display a HUMN number.

When ready to begin, she invites the congregation to STAND, for the Entrance Procession. All are encouraged to WHISTLE OR HUM the first “verse” just to catch the tune. As the ORGAN is defective, she uses the MELODICA to sound the first note which is an A natural.

VERSE 1: Hum the tune only. Then, together, hum or sing:

*Oh hum, our help in ages past,*  
*I’ve lost my mobile phone,*  
*Please shelter me from every blast,*  
*Until it comes back home.*
Oh hum, I love your grand design
That makes my eyesight fade
Just when my face is folding up
And whiskers fast invade.

Oh hum, you’re old and so am I
I’m deaf from ear to ear
Exhort your people to speak up
In voices round and clear.

Entrance Procession & Sanctification of The Space:

The YOUNGEST remains at the organ as the opening hum continues. The ELDEST and The ELDER enter the space, and process to the altar.

(SERVERS ensure door is quickly closed once they are admitted. No latecomers may be admitted until after PRAYER.)

The ELDERS wear dark copes, one carries a staff, the other a thurible to swing. Much pomp and circumstance. They dosey-do across the grass.
As the hum continues, The Eldest and The Elder sanctify the altar with incense.

The Thurible is propped safely on the lawn mower, and the staff is stowed away. The ELDERS take their places at the PULPIT.

The YOUNGEST turns the lightbox off and changes the Hum Number for later.

The ELDER addresses the congregants.

ELDER: (SPEAKS) Welcome. Before we continue we wish to declare and acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurrundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation (_______or other First Nations peoples). We offer respect to the Elders of these traditional lands and through them, to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and to any other elders here today. (CONTINUES) Please be seated.

All sit.

ELDER: We are here to make a Missa.
Elders: Yay! Verily! Yay!

At her Missal, The Elder chants in plainsong:

Elder: (chanting) Missa Pro Venerabilibus is a Communal Rite-of-Passage in the form of a Secular Mass for the Ageing, in Celebration of the Vulnerable and the Venerable.

It venerates the Mysteries of the Life Course, the Woes and Wonders of Senescence and the Fears, Failings and Flourishings that attend Advancing Age.

We invite your Engagement as Congregants and Witnesses in this Immersive Experience. But only if you want to.

Expect Sermons, Homilies, Processions, and perhaps even some Community Singing. If we can remember The Words.

Yay, Verily Yay.
ELDERS:  (ECHO) Yay, Verily, Yay!

ELDEST:  Please stand for Prayer, by Judith Wright.

Everyone stands.

The Three adopt a triangle shape at apex and edges of the green.

<Poem removed due to copyright restrictions>

ELDEST:

________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
ELDER:

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

YOUNGEST:

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________

ALL THREE TOGETHER:

_________________________________

_________________________________

_________________________________
YOUNGEST:

___________________________________

___________________________________

ELDERS: ____________________________

YOUNGEST: _________________

ELDERS: _________________

YOUNGEST: _________________

ELDERS: _________________

YOUNGEST: _________________

ELDERS: _________________

YOUNGEST: _________________
ELDERS: ________________

YOUNGEST: ________________

ELDERS: ________________

YOUNGEST: ________________

ELDERS: ________________

All turn, making one slow Sufi-esque circle on the spot.

ELDEST: Please be seated.

All sit.

The YOUNGEST retreats to the ORGAN STOOL.
ELDEST: We are about to witness the sacred and mysterious Rite of Elder-Flowering. Dear Friends, for the Mass to continue we need your assent, with a double ‘ss’. Are you ready to give your Communal Assent to the witnessing of a Great Mystery? Readiness is all. Are you ready?

Silence? Waiting?

ELDEST: What is your response?

The congregation remains silent, or perhaps says ‘Yes’.

If no reply is forthcoming, the ELDEST confers with The ELDER, before repeating a version of the same in quest of affirmation from the congregants.

ELDEST: And there remains one other thing. Yay Verily Yay is the very ground of this Communal rite. When we say ‘Yay Verily Yay’, you also go ‘Yay Verily Yay’. Let us practice.
Rites of Communal Assent:

The ELDERS teach everyone a ritual warm-up gesture expressive of Yay Verily Yay.

All practice and repeat as directed by the ELDEST.

‘Yay Verily Yay’ x 2, call and response. Congregation repeats, then all attempt in unison.

All: Yay, Verily Yay.

As this rite continues, the THREE SERVERS bring in three tables and set them in position on the grass. They enter in a line and process along the VERGE in formation.

The tables have two silver bowls, plates and whisks, for the next rites.

Having placed these, the Servers retreat to collect Thermos Flasks and small White Hand Towels.
**ELDEST: Observe the Rites of Purification:**

The Elders move to tables at the end of each green path. The ELDEST is Pulpit-side. The ELDER is Centre. The YOUNGEST near her music stool.

Servers return in formation, each with a thermos of Warm Water and a small towel. Each pours small amount of water into each of the two bowls, and remains, ready to assist her designated Elder.

**ELDEST:**

Ah Water! You bring freshness to the earth; you wash us and give us life. We thank you, water, and accept your cleansing gifts. May you renew the living spring of life within us and protect us in spirit and flesh, that we may be free to dance and sing and make loud noises and behave inappropriately and wear clashing colours in public places as we celebrate our longevity and express any ambivalences about our endurance in these, our Latter Years.

**All:**

Yay, verily, yay!

Each Elder washes her hands in the large bowl. A towel is passed. Each dries her hands. Servers retreat with thermoses.
Each ELDER now reveals her sacred MOBILE PHONE. Holds it on high for the congregants to adore. Then drops it in the water and washes it well.

Each ELDER dries her phone and pops it away.

**ELDEST:** And now, The Blessing of the Water

ELDERS take up the small bowls.

**ELDER:** May this water cleanse us of our regrets, our worries and our doubts, re-hydrate our hopefulness and give us fresh heart through the rites we celebrate today.

All: Yay, verily, Yay!

The Elders hand their small bowls to the Servers.

The Servers moves through the space sprinkling congregants with water. They dip tea balls and whisks in bowls and flick droplets over the people.
ELDERS clear bowls away onto the grass below the table. ELDERS overturn small silver platters to create a stand-cum-soundboard.

The YOUNGEST goes to the PROPS TABLE by most direct route, returning with a silver tray. On this tray are numerous kitchen timers.

ELDEST: **We now keep Rites of Borrowed Time**

ELDEST: As we celebrate these mysteries today, let us count our blessings, in the true awareness that we are all, Friends, Living on Borrowed Time.

The YOUNGEST delivers kitchen timers.

ELDERS set four kitchen timers each and display them, in clusters on their upturned silver platters.

One final Kitchen timer is set to go off in one minute (approx.) with a back-up timer at the tech table in custody of the SOUND OPERATOR.
NOTE: For the rest of the performance, whenever a timer goes off, all stop what they are doing and proclaim: Yay! Verily! Yay!

ELDEST: Friends, let us pause for a Great Silence in which we may call to mind the seconds and the milli-seconds, the minutes, the hours…. For like Sands through the Hourglass, so are The Days of Our Lives.

ALL PAUSE, seated, for a period of silent reflection in which all we hear is the ticking of the collected timers.

When, at last, one TIMER sounds – wait for it! - we go instantly into:

ELDEST: Tempus Fugit.

ELDER: Time Flies.

ALL: Yay, Verily, Yay

ELDEST: Vita Brevis.
ELDER: Life is short.

ALL: Yay, Verily, Yay

ELDEST: Carpe Diem.

ELDER: Time Flies.

YOUNGEST: Let me seize the day!

Now, ceremony is abandoned as The YOUNGEST seizes the moment to deal with the problem of the defective organ or other deficiencies in the music department. (IMPROV). Directing from the ORGAN, she declares that measures must be taken to ensure the safe completion of the service. This is the bit where fate decides how the congregation is to be separated into groups so as to partake in the MINOR RITES. The pre-show Shell Game means that we will have equal numbers of MARBLES, LETTERS & RIBBONS.

The YOUNGEST gets a show of hands as to who is who, congratulating the congregants for not losing their marbles. Each group is now given into the care of an elder.
MARBLES are directed to go to the RELIQUARY with the ELDEST.

LETTERS go the STATIONS of the VERY CROSS with the ELDER.

RIBBONS will enter The Space with the YOUNGEST.

The congregants are told to take all personal items with them and to wait to be directed for safe traffic along and across the verge. Elders lead their people away. Processional movement across the VERGE, with due deference and traffic management.

A Musical Interlude: Intro to a Requiem, (by Victoria) plays softly (6:52) as:

The Space is Re-Set.

Once all congregants are on their feet, the Servers re-set any props as needed. All used props – but not the timers - are put on the grass. We are making a missa!
Servers then move twenty-eight stools forward, out of pew-shaped lines, and into the gaps between and beside the paths in groups of seven. Some stools remain in pews at the back. Chairs remain along the rear wall. We are now ‘in’ a church and ready for the next stage.

The Servers then separate. Two Servers prepare The Book of Fears.

**Meanwhile, in the Chapels, Elders conduct Minor Rites:**

MARBLES GROUP goes to the DETRITUS of OUR DAYS and do a ritual with ROSEMARY sprigs, while sharing statements of memory and story that begin I Remember…. And/or I Forget

RIBBONS GROUP goes to the STATIONS of the VERY CROSS to make offerings and observances. Some are given grapes, flowers, magazines to place at the shrine. All are encouraged to write down their Complaints, discuss their ailments, pray for miracle cures etc.

LETTERS GROUP crosses the VERGE into The Space and learn EVENTIDE. They are given the starting note, and have a quick but quiet sing. They may attempt parts if they wish and are asked to look for the Sufi-esque swirl and listen for four bars of organ music as a cue at the end of the service.
They are left to practice by the Youngest who must go back into The Space to get ready for the Liturgical Rites.

**CROSSING OF THRESHOLD INTO THE GREAT SPACE**

The YOUNGEST returns to the Organ area to change her footwear with great show. Warning: Partial nudity. Removal of stockings and sandals will expose her bare feet. Socks and sparkly shoes go on. She may also change the HUM number now and ensure that her MISSAL is transferred to the PULPIT area.

When all is ready, and Minor Rites complete, ELDERS and Servers invite people to reseat themselves either inside the Space, as Congregants, or outside the Space, as Witnesses. The Choir is seated too. From this point on there is a clear distinction between those inside and those outside The Space.

Two SERVERS remain on the Verge with A Book of Fears.
PART 2: LITURGY OF THE WORDS

ELDEST: A Rite of Resumption:

The ELDEST then moves, with the ELDER to the PULPIT.

ELDEST: Now comes the time to engage in the sacred rites of transition and transformation where the youngest of us begins a new seasonal growth spurt in her life. She will pass from late middle age into the budding and bursting of Elder Blossoming and the frothing of full Florality. But first like the ever-turning seasons of growth and decay, we must say certain words in a certain order.

ELDEST: Let us give our First Reading:

ELDER: A reading from A Book of Fears

Two Servers carry in A Book of Fears and place it upon the lectern.
The ELDEST dons white gloves.

The ELDER lifts the lectern and removes the LUMIO Book Lamp. She holds it to provide extra light by which The ELDEST may read.

The ELDEST reads a section at random from A BOOK OF FEARS. She stops reading when she feels like it.

ELDEST: Here endeth a reading from the Book of Fears, fears that we know to be never-ending.

ELDEST: **A Homily on Fear and Hair**

ELDEST: So let us be of stout heart. Let us be valiant, fierce of chin and firm of Upper Lip. And should we find ourselves a-quake or a-quiver, let us remember to tell ourselves to do something with our hair. Knowing we will always scrape through by a whisker. Remembering too the symbolism of hair, in its thinning, in its sprouting, in its shortness or its length, in its appearance in unwelcome places, in its greyness. Or not. Knowing that, as with our hair, we may always fake it till we make it.
ELDER: The Rite of Fake It Till You Make It! Let us apply the Beards of Bravado, as ye apply the Moustache of Might.

THE YOUNGEST collects crocheted beards, then crosses and stands in front of ELDERS.

THE YOUNGEST bows to the ELDERS before presenting, and assisting each ELDER to put on her Beard of Bravado.

Servers pass among the congregants offering the bowl of Moustaches. Other servers show how to peel backing tape off and apply the moustaches.

Congregants and Servers take a moustache and put it on. Witnesses need not.

The YOUNGEST bows, retreats and applies her own moustache.

ELDEST: Please stand for a Rite of Use it or Lose it.

All stand. Elders take positions at the apex of the grass triangle.
MUSIC: Moving On Up (5:31) – M People

Big Group Dance OFF! Elders dance with CONGREGANTS up and down the grass. Sound Operator decides when all have had enough. As the music fades all, breathless, are asked to sit again.

ELDEST: You may be seated.

ELDEST: Homily on Fitness to Witness

The exhausted ELDER must rouse herself to deliver the homily.

ELDER: Use it or lose it. This we hold to be true. And yet how many of us have the fitness to witness, truly, our marvellous decline, our senescence, our decay? Cell death, shrinkage, the fall, the fade? Can you face it? Do you see? Let us ask ourselves, daily: Am I fit? Am I fit for old age? Then, answer our selves, sagely, kindly: Use it, or lose it. And thus may we counsel ourselves: keep moving, keep learning, keep venturing, even though we are a thing that falls over, knowing that even as we crumble there is a still wisdom deep in our bones. (MORE)
ELDER: Reminding our selves to resist Doctor Google, to use medications only as directed and if pain persists to turn to reputable sources - poets, painters, art! Then, only, as a last resort, to consult a trained medical professional or the self-help section of your local library.

Now the little padded tabernacle door of the pulpit is opened by The ELDEST to reveal a small self-help library. Texts may vary over time.

ELDER: A Reading by ______________________

A Server is called (without warning) to the pulpit to give the reading.

The Server picks a book (blind) at random from those offered.

SERVER: A Reading from _________ by ______________.

ELDERS settle in their chairs as the SERVER opens the book to any page and reads a paragraph or so, stopping when the reading feels complete.

SERVER: Here endeth the reading from:____________
ALL:       Yay, verily yay!

ELDEST:    Yes. It is time.

SERVER returns the book and leaves.

SERVERS prepare to distribute veils.

ELDEST:    We are at the brink, I think. But next are sacred rites of passage upon which most shudder to look. Thankfully, as women of a certain age, we three are all but invisible. But most of you are plainly seen.

SERVERS pass among the congregants, distributing net mantillas.

ELDEST:    And so we enjoin you to cover your heads, to lower your eyes, and to hide your faces with these Veils of Vanishing so that you may not look upon us as we make exhibitions of ourselves and conduct fearsome rites and frolics of Surrender in the Gardens of the Vegetative.
All cover their heads. The ELDERS address the YOUNGEST across the grass.

ELDEST: Have you removed your Ugly Sandals?

YOUNGEST: I have.

ELDER: Are you wearing your Sensible Shoes?

YOUNGEST: Yes.

ELDEST: Then let us begin.

The YOUNGEST joins the ELDERS at the altar. They take a triangle formation on the grass.

MUSIC: O Magnum Mysterium (6.41) – M. Laurisden

The THREE stand at altar at the apex of the grass.
The YOUNGEST faces upstage, the ELDERS downstage.

The YOUNGEST is stripped of her sash of UNFUNDED EXCELLENCE.

The ELDESTs take the sash to the altar and perform an elaborate FOLDING rite before stowing it at the foot of the altar.

The ELDEST brings the Oil of Valor in a chalice, as the ELDER goes to the pulpit tabernacle for the white shroud.

The YOUNGEST is anointed with the Oil of Valour. Forehead, chin, left and right armpit.

Now, the YOUNGEST is wrapped carefully, slowly in the white shroud like a cocoon. She turns slowly, clockwise, in place. Wings rampant. A PAUSE.

The YOUNGEST spirals, anti-clockwise, to be unwrapped from the shroud. She is now facing downstage.

The ELDEST puts the BLACK COPE on the YOUNGEST. It is clasped into place.
The YOUNGEST removes her spectacles. The ELDER offers a beard to the YOUNGEST. The YOUNGEST puts on the beard.

The three ELDERS turn towards the altar.

They drop and prostrate themselves on the grass.

Three SERVERS approach and cover them with ROSE PETALS.

The ELDERS rise.

The THREE pivot, Sufi-style, in their black copes, as the music fades away.

Here, The YOUNGEST announces her ELDERFLOWERING (IMPROV) and expresses her gratitude to the ELDEST and the ELDER.

Then they move as a triumvirate towards the Pulpit.

Two sit in the chairs. The Third, or a Guest – different at each performance – presents a Show and Tell of the work of her chosen Saint.
Whoever the Lector, she has 5 minutes to give both the Gospel and the Sermon.

**The Gospel: A (Surprise) Show and Tell & A Sermon**

LECTOR: Please stand for The Gospel According to ________? 

The Congregation is invited to stand.

The Lector announces her surprise reading.

She reads us an inspiring speech or shares/shows the work of one of her personal Saints.

LECTOR: That was the work of ____________. You may be seated.

The Lector now addresses the people – giving a sermon inspired by whatever she has shared.
**ELDEST:** And now, **Rites of Rest and Recreation**

Blueberries and a cordial bottle are produced from the tabernacle.

The **ELDEST** and **ELDER** move to tables for food preparation. The **Servers** are on hand to assist.

The **ELDERS** now face upstage to **ALTAR**. The **ELDEST** puts on safety gloves for food handling. Trays and jugs are delivered to the **ELDER** by the **servers**.

The **YOUNGEST** reads as the **ELDERS** get busy with rites of preparation.

The **ELDEST** prepares the berries. The **ELDER** pours the drinks.

**YOUNGEST:** Oh thank goodness for elderflower cordial to drink, fruit of the tree, now worked with human hands. Behold this tonic, healthful syrup, made of sugar, **Cotswold Spring Water**, infused with twenty percent real elderflower extract, citric acid, and with a small amount of sulphur dioxide as a preservative. Rich in bioflavonoids known for their antioxidant **(MORE)**
YOUNGEST: anticancer, anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties and abundant in flavonols! For elderflowers contain quercetin, isoquercitrin and anthocyanins, which research has suggested may protect us with their antiviral properties as well.

ALL: O Thank Goodness

Pouring of the goblets of the cordial and distribution commences as:

SOFT MUSIC plays. KYRIE from Victoria Requiem 3.14

YOUNGEST: And O Thank goodness for these blueberries to eat. Behold these jewels of fruit, world’s healthiest food! May they nourish us with their unique, antioxidants pterostilbene and resveratrol. May they dose us with vitamins K, C and manganese and boost our intake of fibre and copper. Above all, let them nourish our minds with their flavonoid anthocyanins, for research shows these may improve our memories, increase access to words and concepts and undo the forgetfulness of old age.
ALL: O Thank Goodness

Division of the blueberries into small bowls.

Distribution of berries and drink service by the two ELDERS.

At the same time SERVERS move along the aisles and give out lit candles from small muffin tins. When all is done, and ready:

**Eldest:** Please stand. Join us in Rites of Memorial Acclamation:

The THREE move to the Altar area and stand in formation.

**ELDER:** Let us proclaim the Mystery of Fate.

**ELDEST:** We none of us know what tomorrow will bring or when Death will call for us.
YOUNGEST: Then let us enjoy this day, this hour, and let us raise our voices in names of all that is good.

ELDEST: Fortified with berries, our memories are strong. Let us call out our favourite words. Words we don’t ever want to forget, even if we succumb to dementia. My favourite word is: __________

Each says a cherished word and all echo it.

YOUNGEST: __________

ELDER: __________

ELDEST: __________

YOUNGEST: __________

ELDER: __________
Elders, Congregants and Servers continue calling out their favourite words. Each word is echoed by the congregants and witnesses.

YOUNGEST: Any Last Words?

This rite continues till all fall silent.

ELDEST: And now, a Gaelic Blessing.

ELDEST: Let us now make a wild Great Noise together for after there is A Very Long Silence.

Candles glow as lights descend into blackness.

Rite of Tintinnabulus and Great Noise

In darkness, Servers ring bells furiously. Everyone joins in and makes an unholy racket. Servers pass their bells to CONGREGANTS to ring.
In darkness ELDERS reverse their COPES so that they show their bright colours.

The SERVERS approach and assist them as their headdresses are put on.

The THREE begin a slow Sufi-esque twirl as the lights come up.

They twirl slowly down the grass paths and back again.

MUSIC: EVENTIDE (Intro)

The music seems to pull the youngest off course, and her revolutions draw her towards the music stool. This is a cue for the Instant Choir to join her.

ELDEST: Rites of Revolution and Revelation and Renewal and Right Now!

The YOUNGEST illuminates the HUM number and produces a sieve with which to conduct her choir.

Through the 4 bar intro, ELDERS gather staff andthurible.
Choir and Youngest lead all in three verses of the HUM.

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Friend, with me abide;
Though other helpers fail and comforts flee,
This too shall pass with Time. Abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see——
I am on Borrowed Time. Abide with me.

I fear no foe, I’m of the Present Tense;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
Right Now is all I have. Abide with me.

Organ Music fades and continues softly under:
Dismissal:

ELDER: You have been part of Missa Pro Venerabilibus.

And now the Mass is ended.

All: Yay, Verily, Yay!

YOUNGEST: Please leave your candle, your mantilla and your token for our servers to collect.

ELDEST: Take with you the gift of peace, and come with us!!!

Servers and Elders distribute small boxes with tiny books inside them. These are embroidered with a one-word question: PEACE?

MUSIC: CAN YOU FEEL IT!! - The Jackson 5
Recessional:

The ELDEST and the ELDER lead a joyful processional dance of congregants within The Space and beyond, towards the Sanctuary.

The YOUNGEST brings up the rear, twirling and whirling along the verge in her colourful cope, now bearing a bunch of dead sticks.

The congregation disperses.

And lo, it is Finished!
BEYOND
BESIDE &
AFTER-WORDS
The force that through the green fuse
drives the flower drives my green age;
that blasts the roots of trees, is my
destroyer...

Dylan Thomas

'The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives The Flower' 1934
FINDINGS, FALTERINGS, FLOURISHINGS

This work began in quest of an alternative to the triumph-or-decay binary that is prevalent in much contemporary discourse about ageing. Through the conduct of the different w/rites hot-housed herein, the inflorescence of elder-flowering itself has been opened up, allowing us to observe some of its manifest intricacies and unique ephemeralities.

Botany is a science and I am no scientist. However as an amateur taxonomer I feel equipped to describe, classify and name these remarkable and till now, largely unreported phenomena. Most of these forms are readily discernible to the naked eye, though some of the more subtle adaptations are difficult to see and only with time-lapse photography may they be properly observed and fully appreciated.

Nevertheless we feel emboldened to display here for the first time by Elder-Floribunda, a dozen variations of elder-flowerings that may form and fade over time.

1. ELDER-FLOUTING

In Elder-flouting there is a refusal to play by what others regard as the rules of old age. The Elder-Flouter is scornful, or mocking, disdainful or contemptuous. She jeers and scoffs at suggestions that she might rein herself in, lower her voice, modify her behaviour, lifestyle or appearance in any way simply on grounds of her age. Etymologically the word grows around the old Dutch word ‘flout’ meaning ‘to toot one’s flute at’.
2. ELDER-FLAUNTING (also ELDER-FLIRTING)

In *elder-flaunting* there is a willingness to parade, to display oneself conspicuously, defiantly, and boldly. Etymologically the word is connected to ‘flaunt’, which is of obscure origin, but perhaps has Norwegian roots.

The *Elder-Flaunter* is flamboyant, and likes to dress up, show off, and be seen. The *Elder-Flaunter* and the *Elder-Flirter* are not always easy to tell apart. The *Elder-Flirter* is playful, and non-committal. She keeps her options open (and with them, her heart and mind) as she trifles and toys with others, and with ideas.

3. ELDER-FLOUNCING

In *elder-flouncing* one observes a capacity to shake off anything disagreeable, before it can take hold and lodge within the ageing corpus to cause cell damage. The *Elder-Flouncer* has a native insouciance, and is able to fling away from her self all things bothersome, or for which she no longer has a care.

Etymologically the word is connected to *flounce*, which has its roots in a Norwegian word meaning *to hurry*. Elder-flouncing, however, for best effect, need not be done at speed.

4. ELDER-FLOUNDERING (also -FLUTTERING, -FLITTING, or -FLAPPING)

In *elder-floundering* we observe an exquisite uncertainty on display. The *Elder-Flounderer* manifests doubt or weakness, embarrassment, indecision, perhaps even confusion. This may be uncomfortable for others to observe, so it is wise to
remember that *elder-floudering* is a useful adaptation for meeting later life turbulence. It alters time, suspending and slowing the decision-making process, while still keeping an open conduit, an active state of passage *on, along or through* which one may move from one state of becoming to another. Etymologically, *elder-floudering* sprouts from root words *flounce* and *flounder*.

The *Elder-flutterer* (also called *Elder-flitterer, and even Elder-flapper*) may appear to be growing off course. She moves excitedly and fitfully, and is difficult to train to hold any kind of symmetry or shape for long. She may be indecisive and unsure what to do with herself. Such manifestations are a kind of arrhythmia occasioned by an inner discomfort with the passage of time. They will generally pass as acceptance of ageing arrives. This may be accelerated by exposure to *Elder-flexers* and *Elder-flowers* (see below.)

5. ELDER-FLAGGING (and ELDER-FLICKERING)

In *elder-flagging* we witness at close range the natural wilt occasioned by an ebbing life force. The *Elder-Flagger* may lose vigour, energy, and interest in things that once amused. There is beauty in this fade, if one is willing to tend it, to hold space for it, and to quietly observe. As a curiosity it should be noted that while is sometimes painful for others to watch, this florescence is not necessarily uncomfortable, or even unwelcome, for the *Elder-Flagger* herself, who finds an inner stillness and a freedom from striving she has long sought. Again the roots of the word are somewhat obscure, but etymologists suggest they may be a portmanteau of *flap*, and *fag*, the latter in its obsolete meaning of *to droop*. 
There is similar poignancy in field encounters with the *Elder-flickerer*. Her inner light wavers and she may seem to quiver, giving off only a brief, unsteady spark. She, too, approaches her expiry date. There may be efforts to recharge her, but any such renewal will be only temporary for she too is bound, in time, to flag.

6. ELDER-FLAKING

*Elder-flaking* renders a *droop* to a *drop*. It is typically accompanied by an altered state of consciousness. This may be induced where the *Elder-Flaker* is under the influence of some kind of substance, or else observed as a natural phenomenon that is the product of natural senescence and of accumulating exhaustion over a long life.

7. ELDER-FLAMING (also ELDER-FLARING)

*Elder-flaming* is remarkable to witness. It sees the *Elder-flamer* aglow, bright and shining, with passion, anger, joy or other flush of feeling. It is almost indistinguishable from *Elder-flaring*, in which again a blaze or burst of zeal, fervour, or even temper may occasion colour change. There is considerable dispute about which manifestation is most rare or more prized. Regardless, each is something to behold, or to experience. Both are forms of *elder-fluorescence*, whereby one emits and enlightens in ways that pass wisdom from one generation to another.

*Elder-fluorescence* of any kind carries with it imperatives to lead, to counsel, to pronounce, and to critique.
8. ELDER-FLANKING (and ELDER-FLOCKING)

_Elder-flanking_ is an inflorescence, in that it occurs in clusters and in clumps. _Elder-Flankers_ gather in groups where some brace others and the strong support the weak. _Elder-flanking_ requires a more dynamic engagement than _Elder-Flocking_, for which it may be mistaken in the wild. The latter is a more passive state in which the _Elder-flocker_ seeks out companionship of her own kind. _Elder-flocking_ is not always desirable or healthy, especially if it fosters narcissism, nostalgia, or denial, is prolonged, or at the exclusion of regular intergenerational engagement and exchange.

9. ELDER-FLINCHING

The _elder-flincher_ may never fully come into full florescence, due to a practice of drawing back or shrinking from anything dangerous, difficult or unpleasant. The _Elder-flincher's_ default habit of withdrawal, especially from painful experience, inhibits her growth so that while buds may form, they are unlikely to bloom.

10. ELDER-FLOPPING (also called ELDER-FLUNKING)

In _elder-flopping_ we see sudden surrender, or capitulation, but only after a last valiant tilt. The _Elder-Flopper_ (or _Elder-Flunker_) fails or yields, gives up, or backs out. These states can be accelerated by a healthy dose of realism, but they can also be seen as self-preservation mechanisms, and for these reasons, are not to be judged too harshly.
11. ELDER-FLOWING (and ELDER-FLEXING)

The Elder-flower (not to be confused with the Elder-flower) meanders, like a stream, proceeding continuously and smoothly, unimpeded in thought, word or deed. Elder-flowing is a transcendent manifestation, highly prized yet difficult to cultivate. It is calibrated in degrees of grace and ease. The Elder-Flexer is supple in later life, pliant, yet not compliant, but capable of bending to circumstance. Ever responsive to external stimuli and environmental change, both are covetable adaptations and may be vastly admired.

12. ELDER-FLOURISHING

The Elder-flourisher enjoys a showy late-life growth spurt. This too shall pass. For now the Elder-Flourisher displays an inspiring and enviable vigour. This is often occasioned as much by environmental conditions as by the subject herself. Certain Elder-flourishers are simply so well favoured in circumstance that they prosper and thrive. Some will be singled out for their excellence and enjoy wealth and fame. Where this is the case, be mindful that any luxuriant growth phase is temporary, that climate change is real and that each shall have her moment in the sun.
POST-SCRIPT: AN IN/CONCLUSION

(1 February 2017)

_In which I recover the WHY of this work_

This is not what I thought it would become, and the dissertation you have just read/skimmed/shredded does not resemble in any way the dissertation I composed, decomposed and recomposed so many times in my head. Nor does it have any clear end point or concluding argument. The work of this project cannot be pinned to a page or displayed in text or texts, no matter how florid. It can only be exhibited through liveness, and in the decay of that liveness, in the vanishing act that is performance.

This is a work of recovery, most notably of recovery of _voca_, of voice. In making the work I have experienced profound anxiety and other mental and physical health challenges. I had to say goodbye to _writing_ and embrace _wrighting_, while trying to _work_ out what the latter is through experiments and gestures with my body and my voice, with my eyes and with my hands. Perhaps this is why the last phase has been so protracted and painful? It has returned me – reduced me – to writing, to script and to inscription, with all the agony, shame and terror that brings.

I don’t want to be a writer anymore. I am post-script.

This doesn’t mean that I don’t want to make things, using words as my material. Wrighting _with, beside, between, under_ is an entirely different proposition. Even if one is wrighting _beside oneself_, it is different. It does not need to be done in tortuous isolation, or with these useless tools. Mark-making on pages seems close to pointless at this moment in time, especially while Trump signs one executive order after another, delivering his country, its citizens (and the rest of us?) into unholier and unholier circles.
of hell. Words, written words, seem useless when we are post-truth, and living in a world of alternative facts.

This morning, thinking about the word, the idea of the post-script, a most invigorating revelation: I dare. I double dare. Tell me that this is not a ‘meaningful’ contribution at this moment in time.

So the only way to complete is with this battle cry, front and centre.

I have made this work out of the mess of the process, of immersion, of residing in and of living this and doing this, being and becoming this for over three years. It is framed by theory. It is infused with tacit knowledge, and held together by all I have taken into my skin and my bones, into my nerves and my blood over years of practice as a playwright.

But it is a work of repudiation, and resistance. It is a work in which, at last, I say ‘no’. Not through my characters this time, but here now, in my own skin, with my own voice. No. I won’t. No, I shall not. Not because I could not, or I cannot, or because I don’t care, but because the very point of the exercise is to expose a new way, using new methods.

This, I dare to do. And in that active daring (that derring-do) a refusal to retreat into doing things a right way has been played out, headlong, with me as protagonist, and will continue to be played out until the bitter end, when I must put down the pen and step away from the screen, abandon this text and get on with doing what I do. Making things up. Making things within and beside and around.
This then is my swansong, and through it I retire myself, as a writer, to return, as is my right, a wright. To complete that transformation, one final w/rite of elder-flowering is foreseen.

In March 2017, a durational work, Last W/rites, will be performed at Footscray Community Arts Centre in conjunction with, and to bring to a formal close, the Women of the World Festival. (See: http://footscrayarts.com/event/wow-women-of-the-world-festival-melbourne/)

An exhibition of my photographs of fading flowers will form a backdrop to the writing and the wrighting of some after-after-words. This is to be a live art performance using specially fabricated materials for writing upon and for wrighting with. It will continue until any such materials run out. A wake will follow.

Finally a Requiem Mass will be celebrated, presided over by Elder-flowers Robin Laurie and Heather Horrocks, after which a copy of my dissertation and all after-after-words will be interred in the grounds or immured in the walls of Footscray Community Arts Centre, in some kind of a purpose-made time capsule or canister, where it may remain until it decomposes or else is discovered in years to come.

AFTER-AFTERWORD: Due to circumstances beyond The Candidate’s control the final w/rites described did not take place at FCAC in the WOW Festival as planned, and were therefore deferred, and conducted in the presence of the examiners at an oral examination held on 31 May, 2017, in the Radio Theatre in Building 9. A video recording of that event is archived with this documentation.
EPILOGUE: POPPIES

Papaver rhoeas – the common poppy, symbol of remembrance © Peta Murray 2013

Poppies have strange little suede buds, and when I bought this bunch, all but one of them was still firmly closed. I remember thinking: this is odd. This is an odd thing to buy, as a bunch of flowers. It was a bunch of stems and things that might become flowers. The florist snipped the ends of the stems with a pair of sharp shears, and I recall thinking that was odd too, because from my limited experience of poppies – and I was once a shop girl in a floristry business – I thought one was supposed to bruise the ends of the cut stems to extend the life.

Anyway, it’s a week on, and the stems are starting to droop, and only a mere handful, perhaps half a dozen of the buds have opened to reveal a bloom. I had to do the bins today, put the garbage out, and I contemplated throwing them out, but I felt
robbed. So I stood over them, and with my fingers, I tried to pop some of the poppy heads. The flowers are folded up inside the rough buds. They are waiting like miniature origami sheets to be unfolded, the colours bold, but these poor flowers are unbloomed, unseen, and the buds are dying before the flowers have their moment. And there was something in this, for me. Something about this. All this. Something about the desperate balance to keep the water up to the stems of the cut flowers and to do anything, anything, to let these flowers have their hour, even on the end of dead and dying stems. For of course, a cut flower is a dying thing, isn’t it? From the moment when the flower is cut? Is that why it’s so beautiful? Because it is dying before our eyes?

I couldn’t work it out. I couldn’t think it through. How this flower could unfurl and bloom still, bright and blousy, on the end of this limp stem. It made me sad. And now of course as I pass the blooms I released in this way, with the force of my fingers, they too are drooping, and the single petals coming away. And I don’t know why I need to write about these things, these old lady things, cut flowers and dying flowers. But I do.
PRAYER by Judith Wright

<Poem removed due to copyright restrictions>

FROM: Collected poems, 1942-1970. Angus and Robertson. (pp. 230-231)
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APPENDIX A: EVIDENCE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Notice of Approval
Date: 27 September 2013
Project number: CHEAN A 0000015647-07/13
Project title: Elderflowering: creative resistance and the theatre of endurance
Risk classification: Low Risk
Investigator: A/Professor David Carlin
Approved: From: 27 September 2013 To: 30 May 2015

I am pleased to advise that your application has been granted ethics approval by the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network as a sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Terms of approval:
1. Responsibilities of investigator

It is the responsibility of the above investigator/s to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by the CHEAN. Approval is only valid whilst the investigator/s holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments

Approval must be sought from the CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment please use the ‘Request for Amendment Form’ that is available on the RMIT website.

Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. Adverse events

You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)

The PICF and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PICF must contain a complaints clause including the project number.
5. Annual reports

Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. This form can be located online on the human research ethics web page on the RMIT website.

6. Final report

A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

7. Monitoring

Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. Retention and storage of data

The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title.

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.

Suzana Kovacevic
Research and Ethics Officer
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
Ph: 03 9925 2974
Email: suzana.kovacevic@rmit.edu.au
APPENDIX B: CONTENTS OF COMPLETE SUBMISSION

The Appropriate Durable Record of this project as a submission for examination consists of the following parts:

1. This dissertation
2. Documentation of texts of the triptych of creative works herein
3. An oral presentation to the Examiners, in the form of A Wake, supplied on video.

The Wake is to take place in the Radio Theatre Space at RMIT.

It will draw together material, visual and sonic artefacts of all three creative works in the project in a live-art based installation and performed event expressive of the notion of essayesque dismemoir.
APPENDIX C: NOTES ON TABLED TEXTS

The Lecture: Write/Rote/Wrought – Reflections on a Residency was given on 5 October, 2015 at RMIT University, to students in the undergraduate program, at the invitation of Dr Jessica Wilkinson.

The Dulcie Lenton Memorial Address was given on 12 June, 2016 in Sydney, at the Masonic Club. I am a former pupil of the late Dulcie Lenton and a lecture in her memory is given every two years. Previous speakers include Justice Michael Kirby, and artistic director of the Griffin Theatre Company, Lee Lewis.

The Lecture: Wanted, Dead or Alive was given to students of playwriting and screen writing at the Australian National University on 22 August 2016 as a guest of Dr Lucy Neave and Dr Rebecca Clode.

The Film Script from a Funding Application for TTFO (2013) was the basis for a promotional video used in a series of unsuccessful grant applications to a range of organisations including Arts Victoria and the Australia Council.

Journal extracts, the writing of a vocational memoir and the taking of inventories were ongoing writing projects over the life of this research project. Inventories taken included Inventory of My Dead; Inventory of My Thwarted Ambitions, Inventory of My Gardens, Inventory of My Pets, Inventory of My Mother’s Drinking Buddies, Inventory of My Surgeries, Inventory of My Dwellings, Inventory of My Heartbreaks, Inventory of My Abandoned Projects, Inventory of My Hobbies and Pastimes, Inventory of Musical Instruments I Gave as Gifts but should have Kept, and Inventory of Roads Not Taken.

Letter to A Minister for the Arts (2013) and Submission to a Senate Inquiry (2015) were personal responses to changes in the funding climate across the arts sector.

The Nine Asides from Anonymous Women Artists are extracted from transcripts of interviews conducted under Ethics Approval, and are used with permission.

The Case Studies were written analyses in response to ‘essayesque’ works created by Margaret Fischer, Maude Davey, and Nicola Gunn. Texts of each of these performances were secured in response to personal requests from me to these artists.
I was also able to see live performances of Maude’s work and Nicola’s work, and watch an archival video (made for private use only) of Margie’s piece.

The application to Varuna including Script of a Digitised Memoir (2014) secured me a place in a week long live-in workshop, part-funded by the Copyright Agency Limited, from 3-9 November 2014, under the tutelage of Siobhan McHugh.

The questionnaire on apparel (2014) came from a three-part ‘performance’ given at the CELAB/RMIT Symposium with David Carlin and Kate Rossmanith in which three textual offers were interwoven and performed as a plaited text or braided essay. The performance was not recorded or captured in any way. My contribution took the form of the questionnaire, which was inspired by a spare shirt I was carrying in my bag. It was a cast-off garment given to me by a friend. As I was worried about the hot weather that humid December day, I chose carry it with me in case I needed to change my clothing. This experience, combined with conversations with Julie-Anne Long (who the same afternoon showed me her copy of Women In Clothes), led to the making of a photographic inventory of the contents of my wardrobe, and to a range of texts that followed, including The Bamboo Shirt.

Lists like the Meditation on Forgetting, and others, were made at Footscray Community Arts Centre while I was an artist-in-residence as part of embOLDden. They constitute early experiments in working with the materiality of texts, particularly the two Visitors Books, and were inspired to some extent by first encounters with the ‘erasure’ work of poet and essayist, Mary Ruefle.

The final folio, SPRING, is composed from a range of broken and abandoned texts, false starts and failures of other kinds. The matter here come from drafts in various forms, including an abandoned submission for an anthology, journal entries, radio plays, writing done at Thesis Bootcamp and in response to set exercises at a weekend workshop on creative nonfiction conducted by the editorial team of ‘quarterly attack journal’ The Lifted Brow, from a blogpost about a stay on the Butterfly House, and from the text of my tilt at RMIT’s 2016 Three-minute Thesis competition, which saw me win the school heat and the college round, and on into the RMIT Final where I was unplaced.

It is not intended to be legible.
APPENDIX D: DATES AND LOCATIONS OF PERFORMANCES

A first public showing of *Swansong!!! The Musical!!!* was given on Saturday, 14 September, 2013 at 3.30pm at the Bluestone Church in Footscray.

A second public performance, and the official world premiere of the work, was given by the same company on Monday, 16 December, 2013, at 7pm in the First Site Gallery, at RMIT University. This was funded by the City of Melbourne.

A third public performance was given on Saturday, 1 March, 2014, at 9pm, in the amphitheatre at Footscray Community Arts Centre, as a coda to a presentation of *Things That Fall Over*.

The first public performance of *Litanies for the Forgetful*, was given in the Roslyn Smorgon Gallery of the Footscray Community Arts Centre on Saturday 26 September, 2015, at 2pm as part of an all day forum on Creatively Ageing.

A second performance of *Litanies for the Forgetful* was given in the Roslyn Smorgon Gallery of the Footscray Community Arts Centre on Saturday 3 October, 2015, at 12pm.

A third performance of *Litanies for the Forgetful* was given as part of a panel on Performing The Essay, presented at NonFictioNow, Northern Arizona University, in Flagstaff, Arizona, on Thursday 29 October, 2015, at 4pm.

The first public performance of *Missa Pro Venerabilibus* was given on Friday, 16 September, 2016 in the Performance Space at Footscray Community Arts Centre at 6.30pm.

A second public performance of *Missa Pro Venerabilibus* was given on Saturday 17 September, 2016, at 12pm.

A third public performance of *Missa Pro Venerabilibus* was given on Saturday, 17 September at 6.30pm.
APPENDIX E: EXTRACTS FROM FEEDBACK ON MPV

‘Missa Pro Venerabilibus is something altogether different, an immersive ritualised work of whacky theatrical whimsy celebrating ageing creatively without being annoyingly positive about the business of “elderflowering” itself.’ Reviewer Liza Dezfooli writing in Australian Stage on 19 September, 2016.

‘There is I believe a commonheld misconception that creativity is somehow confined to the young and youthful, as though only youth understands the whims of creativity; particularly in a world that rewards artists under a particular age or supports artists who are constantly emerging (and let's face it, if you haven't emerged by now, there's a good chance you've probably drowned!). Missa Pro Venerabilibus revealed that creativity only gets better with age, as we come to realise the full breadth of our creative instrument and put it to its full use, and the vibrancy and vitality that was on display in this performance illustrates that creativity may in fact be wasted on the young; elderflowering is in fact the natural conclusion for artists and practitioners.’ Audience member.

‘I laughed. I played. I sang and screamed! I had so much fun! Having been brought up Catholic I thought how joyous and fun Mass could have been if these wonderful women were delivering the eulogy! It’s a great shame there were only three performances of this show as it brought so much delight to my night. I was sad for everyone who didn’t get the opportunity to see it.’ Audience member.

‘It was fantastic to be part of Missa Pro Venerabilibus. I loved having the opportunity to be connected to such an inspiring production with older women artists, as well as having the opportunity to participate in the performance as a Server with the next generation of creative women leaders. Amazing!’ Participant.

‘Great use of evocative ideas, the space, lighting and wellplotted (restrained) audience participation. The display of things augmented the emotional range of the work.’ Audience member.
‘I loved my encounter with Missa Pro Venerabilibus. Most people in contemporary Western societies have lost meaningful encounters with ritual to mark life transitions. Or if they do have rituals, many times they go unrecognised, unguided, and can be destructive rites of passage. In Missa Pro Venerabilibus the audience is led through a ritual that marks the rite of passage into ageing. It was done with a sense of humor, a trickster orientation, with tongue firmly planted in cheek. We got to choose a small object on entrance to the cathedral-like space that had been prepared for the ritual. This object was significant when we were split up to interact in different parts of the room. At one point we were seated with veils over our heads vocalising anything that came through our body. Various readings, dressings and un-dressings, marked the journey of the primary participant, passing from one state to the next, guided by two older women. It culminated in the wearing of a beautiful headdresses inspired by indigenous design but a contemporary art creation of its own. I would gladly go to this "church" on a weekly basis, but, alas, like all good rituals, it is a rare occurrence, only lingering in memory to teach us ongoing lessons.’ Audience Member

‘I was there at the Footscray Community Arts Centre one Saturday night in late September, but to say one “attended” the participatory rites that are Missa Pro Venerabilibus would be misrepresentative. I danced, sang, incanted, laughed, cried and witnessed, wore costumes, wrangled props and pondered my own creative ageing while Movin' On Up – a joyous and religious experience.’ Audience Member.

‘While there was a clear structure to the show, there was still space for an improvised playfulness that made each show a unique and enjoyable experience for me as a participant and witness.’ Participant.
APPENDIX F: AN ABECEDARIUM OF MANY METHODS

A

Audio-philing of interviews for transcription, and later of walks, is a form of sonic inscription, enhancing my capacity to ‘wright’. My principal tool for this method was a ZOOM H4N portable recording device. This was sometimes backed up with the Voice Memo and TW Recorder apps on my smartphone.

B

Bearding is in play for its *doubly double entendre*. In the course of most performances I applied a false moustache or other kind of facial hair typically associated with the adult male, and later invited congregants and witnesses to do the same. This is a parodic device designed to enhance my sense or at the very least my appearance of authority, but is also performative play on the verb form, *to beard*, meaning to oppose boldly, or defy, as in *bearding the lion’s den*.

C

X-dressing (see X, below); case-studying was also conducted as a nod to ‘proper’ qualitative research methods, as were the initial interviews conducted with members of my artistic peer group, under ethics approval.

D

Drag-netting as a method arrived through drag kinging and queening, while in disguise as the docents, as well as through the ritual practices of ‘garbing’ be they through the wearing of the sash of Unfunded Excellence, or through robing oneself in more elaborate costume such as those worn for embOLDen and in MPV. In each case these garments were constructed from, or at least built upon items of clothing of my own, so that I always experienced them as being an addition to my ‘self’, a kind of apparel-based accretion affording new apprehensions.
E

Etymological ‘extraction’ is a daily practice. I have always loved words, and took this opportunity to indulge myself, diving deeply into my own vocabulary, listening out for obsolete words in the hope of recuperating them, and also drawing upon a basic facility in some other languages, dead and alive (chiefly French, Italian, Latin and Greek.) I relied on popular and portable sources of information, in the form of a dictionary app on my smartphone, and the Etymology Online webpage, and using both on a daily basis. I cross checked these against my hardcopy of the Macquarie Dictionary (Third Edition) and found little variation (in fact forming a suspicion that the dictionary app must have links with the Macquarie as a source material.) Other e-based methods included excess, exhibitionism, excursions, and emailing links and ideas to myself so I wouldn’t forget them.

F

Flower-pressing, believe it or not, was a method I used to allow me to suspend flora in time, mid-decay, to examine botanical structures. I used photography to the same end. I also did some film-making for grant applications, and for milestones.

G

Graphistry is a word, and a method of my own making, intended to infer graphic ‘artistry’ of several kinds. Amongst these was a return to formative experiences of lettering and spelling, through the use of copybooks, and later exercise books, and finally through the use of typographical experiment with fonts in a bid to amplify the fragrant and flagrant florality of the text. Media employed included graphite pencils, ink, chalk, cockatoo feather quills, and finally, in preparing this document, decaying font colour. These materials afforded the opportunity for play around ideas of permanence and impermanence, indelibility and erasure.

H

Hoarding was a method of warehousing the excess of this work. I have kept all papers, notebooks, drafts of everything in cardboard archive boxes.
I

I-witnessing is one of the main methods in play. Others i-lights include improvisation, inscription, installation, and invocation.

J

Jest-setting as a method sent me to Dublin and back in a week to surprise my Irish twin and to watch her tread the boards. Expensive and tiring, jest-setting is not recommended as a sustainable method for the mature researcher.

K

Keep-saking is not unlike hoarding, but in this context is a method of holding onto and tapping no longer used objects (such as old clothes) for memories and stories.

L

Listing is listed for its many meanings, including list-making, and for the physical experience of being so unbalanced as to incline to one side, or to lean.

M

Mishandling, mishearing, misspelling and other misfires regularly delivered useful ideas. The write/rote/wrought/wright/rote/roto/roto/roto/roto matter is a case in point.

N

Neologising has two meanings, according to my dictionary. They are: to make or use new words or create new meanings for existing words and to devise or accept new religious doctrines. I have loved playing with the materiality and plasticity of language (which is of course what we also do in punning, where the phonic ‘matter’ is the malleable means). My love of neologising is exemplified in the title of my first
‘professional’ play, Wallflowering, in which I overlaid the word wallflower, with the word flowering to produce a new idea. The opening lines of that play are repeated, regularly, throughout this dissertation. (What would you like to know? Everything. You have to tell everything 1992,1.) Over the course of this research I began to see this method as part of my exploration of the materiality of texts, and was emboldened in this by Kenneth Goldsmith’s book, Uncreative Writing. Devoting Chapter Six to Infallible Processes: What Writing Can Learn from Visual Art, Goldsmith examines how acts of appropriation, of cutting and pasting, and of transcription may refresh, renew, and reinvent the idea of writing (2011, 125-149).

O

Oration was a major method in the final phase of this study, as I was invited to give a succession of lectures. In each instance, having accepted the invitation, I found myself unable to ‘write’ the lecture in advance, leaving me no choice but to ‘wright’ it, in situ. This is not to say my lectures were unprepared. They pre-occupied me, sleeping and awake, for weeks in advance, so that I did not go into any of them ‘empty-headed’ or ‘empty-handed’. I invariably took some kind of prop, be it a PowerPoint presentation, my sash or other keepsake and found a growing capacity to ‘speak to’ these with fluency over time. I was eventually able to give these kinds of addresses to tightly defined time frames, some as short as seven minutes, others as long as an hour.

P

Pranks-giving is one of my favourite still unworked ideas. I made close study of the place of the prank in Australian political activism (McIntyre, 2013), but as a method it is something I have yet to master.

Q

As elaborated, in queering, queerying and as ongoing queer-elous-ness.
Rhapsodising, residing, reciting, rein–proofing have all been key methods.

Sound-effecting as a method emerged in my use of a metronome to underscore my first official PhD milestone presentation. The idea was extended throughout the study through a range of live sources including kitchen timers, and via audio recordings of my own footfall, as well as through exercises in audio memoir conducted at Varuna. I saw these as extending my range of compositional practices as I acquired fluencies in media that were somewhat familiar to me from the theatre. I was also experimenting with the means to ‘clock’ the passage of time, to ‘record’ or register my own ageing over the four years of the doctoral programme. Sleep-working as method has been discussed in the preface as a source of new ideas.

Tattle-taling is usually the remit of small children with stories or rumours to share but in this study it is code for getting a tattoo and not telling anyone about it. Except in the tiniest of fonts.

Underwriting is a beloved method for its multiplicity of meanings, as per my dictionary app: to write under or at the foot of, especially under other written matter, and also to insure.

Vow-breaking was a constant method, for instance around the intention to maintain a blogsite through this research project. See https://unfundedexcellence.wordpress.com
Walking has long been a part of my daily practice and numerous studies have endorsed the link between walking and creativity. I find it particularly telling that during the liminal phase of this study I was hobbled for almost a year.

X-dressing. This is not to be confused with cross-dressing, the practice of dressing in clothing ‘typically’ worn by members of the opposite sex, a curiously outmoded idea for 2017. X-dressing in this usage means getting dressed while angry, feeling contrary, cantankerous or otherwise out-of-sorts. X-dressing, then, may be the remit of women who use their seniority, as exhorted by feminist scholar Carolyn Heilbrun to ‘take risks, make noise and become unpopular.’ (1989,131). It is used here as a method of counteracting invisibility. Firstly, one gets very cross, and only then does one get dressed. Through this method one may develop a truly age-appropriate ‘look’.

Yay-saying. This is a practice encouraged in theatre-based improvisational practices and games, and was very much a part of my early training as a performer and practitioner of *commedia dell’arte* and other low arts such as clowning and stand-up.

Züberance is a portmanteau word built from a group of ideas and other words that include Zumba® (a dance-based exercise I do when I cannot get to NoLights, No Lycra), Uber – from the German preposition über, meaning over, beyond or above, could any word be more of the zeitgeist? – and exuberance. Züberance, then, indicates a superabundance of always moving, always changing enthusiasm and vitality, a profusion of growth and productivity.
APPENDIX G: A TIMELINE

In the year preceding this research project (2012 – 2013) the Arts sector contributed $50 billion to Australia’s GDP. This timeline includes details about changes to arts funding over the life of my inquiry (2013-2016) and is based on information sourced from Ben Eltham’s Platform Paper 48, August 2016, and Alison Croggan’s widely shared weblog post, Black Friday, 2016.

2013

March: The Candidate begins postgrad research. A week in, Simon Crean’s Creative Australia Policy is launched on 13 March, one day after her 55th birthday. Policy includes pledge of an extra $73.5 million over for years for the Australia Council

April – June: Research Strategies Module completed
Contextual and Literature review completed

July – September: Gillard government out, Abbott government in
Ethics Approval granted
First conference abstract accepted
Creative Development: Swansong!!!The Musical!!!
First Showing at The Blue Stone Church, Footscray

October: Confirmation of Candidature

November: Attended AAWP Conference, Creative Manouevres, University of Canberra
Essay selected for publication in edited book

December: Revised essay for publication
Wrote, produced, directed Swansong!!!The Musical!!!
Second Showing: RMIT First Site Gallery
2014

The Abbott Government announces cuts of $100 million from the Arts over four years, including a $28 million dollar cut to the Australia Council

March: Produced, performed in and directed TTFO at FCAC
Third Showing: Swansong!!!The Musical!!!

April – June: Initial interviews and transcriptions completed

July – September: Application to Varuna, immersion in the essay

October: Case Studies: surveying the performance essay

November: Varuna: Writing for Audio in the Digital Age

December: Attendance and participation in CELAB/RMIT Symposium at Macquarie University

2015

Arts Minister George Brandis announces plans to move $108.4 million from the Australia Council over four years to a new fund under direct ministerial control. It is called The National Program for Excellence in the Arts, until later rebranded as Catalyst.

January: Developed and designed Ware with a Translucent Body Experiments in essaysque dismemoir

February: Ethics Progress Report Submission to NonFictioNow 2015 Panel on the performance essay

March: To Dublin and back in a week Midpoint Candidature Review completed
April – June: Preparation for *Ware With A Translucent Body*
Submission of further abstracts to conferences (AAWP)

July – October: Artist-in-Residence – Roslyn Smorgon Gallery, Footscray
Community Arts Centre
Creative Development, WWATB, with collaborator, Rachel Burke
First performance of *Litanies for the Forgetful*, a work of *essayesque dismemoir* as part of embOLDen showcase at FCAC
Failure to deliver paper for AAWP Conference

October: Further performance of *Litanies for the Forgetful*, as a work of *essayesque dismemoir* at NFN Conference, Arizona

November – December: WrICE Residency, La Posada, Arizona
Failure to deliver paper at Dialogues and Atmospheres Symposium

2016

New Arts Minister Mitch Fifield rebrands Catalyst and restores some money to the Australia Council, but a $73 million shortfall remains. In the course of the year a further 65 small to medium arts organisations lose their funding. Statistics suggest that since 2014, the number of supported arts organisations has dwindled by almost 30% while grants to individual artists and their projects have fallen by 70%.

January: Failure to contribute essay to anthology
February: Completion Seminar
March: Re-drafting of dissertation as Florilegium

April: Panelist at DDCA Symposium in Newcastle

May – June: Further attempts at journal articles (alone and co-authored)

July – August Planning and concept development: Missa Pro Venerabilibus

August – September: Further residency and creative development at FCAC, culminating in MPV performances, exhibition, installation

October – December: McCraith House Residency: first draft completed

2017:

Since the Coalition Government took over more than $300 million dollars has been lost to the arts sector. This continues under Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. On 9 February, 2017 the Department of Communications and the Arts gave advice to Parliament of further cuts to the Australia Council in the form of an efficiency dividend. This will see an additional cut over the next three years of another 9.2 million dollars.

March: Last W/Rites – durational performance, wake, requiem, and interment of dissertation and artifacts at FCAC to follow the Women of the World Festival, 2017
APPENDIX H: A COLOPHON AS COPYBOOK

△ How is your handwriting? Is lettering, for you, a long lost art?

Overleaf is space for you to pick up a pen or a pencil, cuneiform or quill, and have fun with fonts as you try to mix-n-match the examples given to the following list, most of which were displayed throughout this Folio:

Abadi MT Condensed Extra Bold – for Instructions to the Reader
Adobe Garamond Pro – for textual title pages and works in the classical style
Arno Pro – for Correspondence and Conversations
Avenir Book – for Journal entries

**Avenir Next Demi Bold - for Epigraphs**

Bickham Script Pro – for Prefatory Remarks in a Florid Font
Calibri – for Samples from the Wardrobe Catalogue
Chalkboard – for Extracts from a Vocational Memoir
Consolas – for Field Notes on Audio Artefacts

**Copperplate – for WTF is a Florilegium?**
Courier – for Scripts for Film and Digital Storytelling
Didot – for Asides from Anonymous Women Artists

**ENGRAVERS MT– FOR THE FALLEN WOMEN**

Futura – for Lectures
Gill Sans – for Application Forms

**Handwriting – Dakota – for Case Studies**
Lucida Console – for Email to Supervisors
Optima – for Dictionary definitions

**Orator STD – for Inventories and Lists**
Times New Roman – for Proper Academic Writing
A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOGS.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.

A quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs.
THANKS:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, thanks and more thanks, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed
del one last activity. Can you guess how many times the word ‘space’ appears in this
dissertation? Write your answer in the space below. Duis aute irure dolor in
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non sanity proident, sunt in culpa qui officia The answer will be revealed when next
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mollit anim id est laborum family, nieces, friends and my partner and my dogs.

I can’t believe it’s over. Now what do I do? Perhaps a good long walk?


Δ ANSWER: The word ‘space’ appears in this dissertation ___________ times.