

RMIT University

Peta Murray

Please supply own title: _____

Biographical note:

Peta Murray is a writer, dramaturge, teacher and HDR candidate in Creative Writing at RMIT University. Her practice-led research project, 'Essayesque dismemoir: w/rites of elder-flowering', employs variations of the 'performance essay' to devise queered and performative nonfiction on themes of the creative life course and the embodied experience of ageing. Peta's short fiction has been published in *Sleepers Almanac* and *New Australian Stories* and her best-known plays are *Wallflowering* and *Salt*. A recent work for performance, *Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda* saw production in 2014. Critical writing includes a chapter in *Creative Manoeuvres: Writing, Making, Being* (2014), edited by Shane Strange, Paul Hetherington and Jen Webb. Peta is co-founder and creative director of The Groundswell Project.

Keywords:

Queering – Interactive – Essay – Performance – Memoir

An interactive essay, for performance on the page:

Co-authored by B. Loose¹ and W. Lust² in the absence of The Candidate

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

Thank you for completing this interactive document entitled: _____
_____ (PLEASE SUPPLY OWN TITLE) in place of a
conference paper that was to have been entitled: *(Es)say what? queering the
performance essay*. In the absence³ of The Candidate, I/we/I (PLEASE CIRCLE AS
APPROPRIATE) have taken it upon MYSELF/OURSELVES/MY OTHER SELF
(PLEASE⁴ CIRCLE AS APPROPRIATE) to broach the breach, as it were, and offer
this _____ by way of _____.

When she (?????) submitted said abstract⁵ 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,WL⁶) would have at least one of the epiphanies needed to draw⁷ together some

¹ 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?* Other contributions include *Bearding The Liar*, and a seminal performance installation, with sideburns, the acclaimed *Dressing/Re/Dressing*.

² Ms Lust is (Acting) Professor of Manicure at the University of The Third Age. She publishes widely on The Fingernail as Art.

³ The Candidate is not absent, merely elsewhere. Alongside. Beside, and below. Lurking in the margins. Living *prepositionally*, as Francesca Rendle-Short (see 'How the How: The Question of Form in Scholarly Writing', 2015) and Mary Cappello (see 'Propositions; provocations; inventions' 2013) suggest. Where something other may be afoot(note.) NOTE: Other footnoters of note: Margaret Cameron (I Shudder to Think, 2016) Xu Xi (*TEXT* Special Issue 18) and is it Michael Martone who got himself in all kinds of trouble with his footnotes for Fugue?

⁴ 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.

⁵ Abstract. Exactly. Ungraspable. Air. Unlike the concrete spatial poetry I have worked with, by which I mean the clay that is The Play.

⁶ TC = The Candidate, BL = Buster Loose, WL = Wanda Lust. 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'.

⁷ Say 'drag' here. Drag would be funnier.

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’, ‘explicit oration⁸ to implicit know-how’. (Gibson 2010: 7 ~~but in future PLEASE APPLY YOUR OWN REFERENCING SYSTEM BY FOOTNOTE~~).⁹

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 etc¹⁰ midpoint candidature review complete _____¹¹ and an artistic residency ahead _____ and two made-up words, *essayesque dismemoir*, on repeat, in ____ head.

(Es)say what? queering the performance essay.¹²¹³

The Candidate was pleased with ____ submission, and happier¹⁴ still when you came back with an invitation to proceed in which you wrote something kind that has since been ~~misaid/erased/eaten by a small brown dog~~:

PLEASE WRITE HERE WHAT YOU WROTE BACK THEN:

Esssssssssay what: queering the performansssssse esssssssssay

~~(BL: Please don’t do that.~~

⁸ Love a good oration.

⁹ No room! No room!

¹⁰ Are they really going to persist with this for the duration?

¹¹ Patently not.

¹² 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 ‘*essssssssssssssss*’.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Happy? Was I happy? Happiness is not an emotion I associate with my candidature. Anxious, besieged, ashamed, aggrieved. But happy?

~~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 not fall from me though I must grow old. (REPEAT)

To see the words fade on the fading page, (REPEAT)

To feel the skin numbing in fold on fold, (REPEAT)

The mind and the heart forgetting their...¹⁵

WL: Wright!

BL: Right!

¹⁵ 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: The poet's name is _____

BL: Right! Right! You're bloody well ...

(PLEASE SING A VERSE¹⁶ of SUPERTRAMP'S 1974 SONG *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 point¹⁷, naturally enough, towards Adriana Cavarero's 2005 treatise on 'Women Who Sing' in her book: *For More Than One Voice. Please research and insert its subtitle and other publication details here* 😊.¹⁸

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 ...

¹⁶ Stop! Do not sing more than x% without legal advice. See <http://apraamcos.com.au> to apply for clearance and pay appropriate royalties!

¹⁷ Is it David Halperin, quoted by Annemarie Jagose (*Queer Theory: An Introduction*, 1997), who writes: 'For Halperin, as for Butler, queer is a way of pointing ahead without knowing for certain what to point at'?

¹⁸ And now, an emoticon. In a letter of apology to a conference convenor and/or double-blind referee.

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.¹⁹

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 Event²⁰ occurred at the hands of her mother.²¹

PLEASE ELABORATE YOUR OWN TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD INCIDENT
HERE:

¹⁹ Michel de Montaigne. Obviously. But what do I know of snow, what do I know of anything?

²⁰ 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*?

²¹

And there, we have said it. Writing is agony and torment. And there we freeze. And there we fall silent.²² Listen. _____²³

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.

²² I have been unable to write any form of prose with grace or fluency or confidence since.

²³ The sound of silence.

²⁴ 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 failing²⁵ 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 ‘tude²⁶.

All of this could have been avoided, perhaps, if only she had gone with the dog memoir.²⁷

*Say what?*²⁸

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.

MAKE A LIST OF THREE EXAMPLES OF ANIMAL-THEMED MEMOIR HERE:

- 1.
- 2.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Oh, please. ‘Tude? ‘TUDE?

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ I know for a fact that there is at least one PhD out there dedicated to memoir writing on the horse.

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 Phase²⁹, in which said older dog, an amiably scruffy Border Terrier³⁰, seemed to come to accept, even delight in The Antics of the aforementioned new dog, ³¹who 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: *'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.³²

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 (Knopf, 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

²⁹ Capitalisations here denote possible Chapter Titles.

³⁰ Salty

³¹ Loretta

³² 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.

at all but about her life after the death of her beloved husband; a husband who had Alzheimer's Disease³³.

Like my/our mother.

Not to mention that Jennings' dogs, like mine/ours, are Border Terriers³⁴.

A Border Terrier is a thing. PLEASE RESEARCH³⁵ 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 *essayesque dismemoir*. And this is not an essay. A paper. Or is it?³⁶

Paper. Paper. Paper. Any word, repeated so, loses all meaning. Becomes a melange, a ~~blancmange~~ of sound, plosive, diphthong, plosive, neutral vowel.³⁷

Try it for yourself here: _____

Reader, we do not know what a paper is.

We intend to find out.³⁸ But not in time to write this paper.

³³ Like my/our mother.

³⁴ Or, as I like to call them, Border(line Personality) Terriers. FAIL.

³⁵ Google it.

³⁶ When I drafted my abstract for you in three careful paragraphs, I felt that I was mapping out my paper. The 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, *meta*? 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.

³⁷ Is it possible to type phonetic script in Word? Perhaps using Symbols? It would seem not.

³⁸ We will. We must.

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 circles³⁹ 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:

the quick brown fox⁴⁰ jumped over the lazy

dog.⁴¹

GO ON. DO IT HERE. YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO:

Essayesque dismemoir.

~~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~~

³⁹ The bats and balls?

⁴⁰ FAIL. Fox. The word is fox. The point is to use every letter in the alphabet.

⁴¹ Fun with fonts.

~~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/w/rites*) 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.⁴²

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.⁴³

POSE A QUESTION LIKE: Is it possible to say something of what it may be?⁴⁴

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 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.*⁴⁵

⁴² Trans lose cents?

⁴³ Ware With A Translucent Body is not a dog memoir?

⁴⁴ Thank you for asking.

⁴⁵ My cares. My wear and tear.

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 false⁴⁶, 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.'⁴⁷

A dog memoir would be so much nicer.⁴⁸ 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. 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.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ New science tells us there are only false memories, flawed memories. Forgeries, forgettings and fabrications.

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ Nicer? Such a weakling of a word.

⁴⁹ Or is there?

*(Es)say what? queering the performance essay.*⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ We saw how she might go on to introduce our own contribution, a variation on that theme,⁵² 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.

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.⁵³

Lessons from Tara.

Until Tuesday.

⁵⁰ 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!

⁵¹ Swallowing my pride, and setting aside an invigorating encounter with Caryl Churchill's latest 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 Davey, Nicola Gunn, and Margie Fischer, and beyond, in the work of Lin Hixson, Matthew Goulsh and their erstwhile collaborators in the Goat Island Project, and of others like Anne Carson, Ira Brand, and Mary Ruefle.

⁵² I call it *essayesque dismemoir*.

⁵³ Unless of course it is to be a queer tale in which one owner's life is transformed for the worse?

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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

BL: About dogs.⁵⁶

Now we've forgotten all she knew, and have no secrets to impart as far as the curbing of savage beasts ...⁵⁷

Instead, let us make you an overture.

As she ~~sit~~ sat down to write this, in the middle of the year, she ~~is~~ 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,

⁵⁴ I wish I was/were researching the dog memoir. I should be doing the dog memoir. Everything points to this. Even my backstory. Ten 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.

⁵⁵ About dogs. Example: Did you know that three dogs survived the sinking of the Titanic? All were lap dogs from First Class cabins.

⁵⁶ I was a dog bore, a dog whisperer, a para-veterinarian.

⁵⁷ FAIL. This is a common misquotation. Unless? *Is the essay a savage beast?* Discuss.

she was ~~is~~ simply surrounded.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

HERE IS SPACE FOR YOU TO INSERT A GOOD QUOTE FROM ONE OF THE ABOVE SOURCES YOU MIGHT HAVE LIKED HER TO USE:

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's⁶⁰ 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.

⁵⁸ I am snowed in.

⁵⁹ Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh! I look at these and know they are needed. And yet, that's not it. That's not it.

⁶⁰ At last! Yes, this is it, this is the elegance of a unity in trinity we have been missing.

*A-per-çu!*⁶¹

⁶¹ ~~WL: Gesundheit!~~

One looks to the dictionary and there it is, cedilla and all: *a comment or brief reference which makes an illumination or entertaining point.*⁶²

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-ssssssounding it. So as to tell you about something that does not yet exist. Yet.

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 footnote⁶³!

Have a great ☺

⁶² At this moment in time one could be happily immersed in the writing of a dog memoir.⁶² 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.)

⁶³
left blank

This space intentionally

Research statement

Research background

The essay is a queer and hungry beast. Accounts of its metamorphoses come from Francesca Rendle-Short, David Carlin, and Noëlle Janaczewska, whose proposition of ‘the performance essay’ has been central to my research. Significant international publications such as *Bending Genre* have illuminated the essay’s possibilities as a hybrid text, promiscuous in form and ever open to new couplings. As its editors contend: ‘Essays like to dress up as other things’ (2013: 75). For, as David Lazar, in the same collection, proposes: ‘... the essay is a queer genre... The desire of the essay is to transgress genre’ (2013: 16).

Research contribution

Through my research into variations of the performable essay I give testimony to the embodied experience of ageing while in quest of means to extend its narratives beyond the usual binaries of triumph or decay. This creative work is from a suite composed over the course of my HDR candidacy. It expands on my contribution of *essayesque dismemoir* as a live art-form in which the rhapsodic meets the parodic, bringing these playful, yet contrary impulses to bear on the page. In so doing, I offer a queered and defiantly fallible response to Judith Halberstam’s call for a dismantling ‘of the logics of success and failure with which we currently live’ (2011: 2).

Research significance

In 2015 the NonfictionNOW Conference in Arizona devoted a panel to Performing the Essay, illuminating works that fused practices of essaying variously with drawing, with walking, and with punk. My presentation examined essaying from the vantage point of past professional practice as a playwright. This work extends that project, inviting the reader to contribute to the essay’s construction in time and space, while resisting closure, and defying completion or disciplinary coherence to the last.

Works cited

Cameron, M 2016 ‘Opera for a small mammal’ in *I shudder to think*, Ladyfinger Press, Brisbane: 77-107

Carlin, David (with Nicole Walker) 2015 ‘Breaking the rules—part 4. OK, Nicole, thanks for asking’, *Essay daily* (27 July): <http://www.essaydaily.org/2015/07/david-carlin-with-nicole-walker.html> (accessed 10 August 2016)

Capello, M 2013 ‘Propositions; provocations; inventions’ in N Walker and M Singer (eds) *Bending genre*, Bloomsbury, New York: 65-74

Castagno, PC 2012 *New playwriting strategies: language and media in the 21st century* (second ed), Routledge, London

Cavarero, A 2005 *For more than one voice: towards a philosophy of vocal expression*, PA Kottman (trans), Stanford University Press, California

- Churchill, C 2013 *Love and information*, Theatre Communications Group, New York
- Gibson, Ross 2010 'The known world', *TEXT Special Issue: Symposium: creative and practice-led research – current status, future plans*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue8/Gibson.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2016)
- Halberstam, J 2011 *The queer art of failure*, Duke University Press, Durham
- Jagose, A 1997 *Queer theory: an introduction*, New York University Press, New York
- Janaczewska, Noëlle 2013 'Hardheads and woolly thinking', *TEXT Special Issue: Nonfiction now*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue18/Janaczewska.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2016)
- Jennings, K 2008 *Stanley and Sophie*, Knopf, North Sydney
- Lazar, D 2013 'Queering the essay' in N Walker and M Singer (eds) *Bending genre*, Bloomsbury, New York: 15-20
- Manne, R (ed) 2014 *The best Australian essays*, Black Inc, Melbourne
- Martone, Michael 2011 TITLE UNKNOWN Fugue 40: The Play Issue reference to which was found here: <http://htmlgiant.com/random/oh-that-playful-fugue/>
- Rendle-Short, F 2015 'How the how: the question of form in writing creative scholarly works', *New writing: the international journal for the practice and theory of creative writing* 12, 1
- Singer, M and N Walker (eds) 2013 *Bending genre: essays on creative nonfiction*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York
- Wright, J 1971 'Prayer' in *Collected poems, 1942 – 1970*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney
- Xi, Xu 2013 'I had a "Tiger Mom" and my love for her is', *TEXT Special Issue: Nonfiction now*: <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue18/Xu.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2016)