

## University of Western Sydney

### Hazel Smith

#### *Mix-Ups and Underbelly*

##### Biographical note:

Hazel Smith is a research professor in the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney. She is author of *The Writing Experiment: strategies for innovative creative writing*, Allen and Unwin, 2005, which was shortlisted for the Australian Publishing Association Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing, and *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: difference, homosexuality, topography*, Liverpool University Press, 2000. She is co-author of *Improvisation, Hypermedia And The Arts Since 1945*, Harwood Academic, 1997, and co-editor with Roger Dean of *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Hazel is also a poet, performer and new media artist, and has published three volumes of poetry, three CDs of performance work and numerous multimedia works. Her latest volume of creative work, with accompanying CD Rom, is *The Erotics of Geography: poetry, performance texts, new media works*, Tinfish Press, Kaneohe, Hawaii, 2008. Formerly a professional violinist, she is a member of austraLYSIS, the internationally active sound and intermedia arts group. She has performed her work extensively in the US, Europe, UK and Australasia; has been co-recipient of numerous grants for austraLYSIS from the Australia Council (including a key organization grant 2000-2004); and has had five large-scale commissions from the ABC. Hazel was the founder editor of *infLect*, an online international journal of new media writing based at the University of Canberra (2004-6), and is now co-editor with Roger Dean of *soundsRite*, a journal of new media writing and sound, based at the University of Western Sydney. Her website is at <http://www.australysis.com> Email: [hazel.smith@uws.edu.au](mailto:hazel.smith@uws.edu.au)

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## Mix-Ups

Culturally, no 'Asia' exists, and the peoples who inhabit 'Asia' often have little in common with each other.

Philosophically, there is no definitive blue; the sky is always salted with clouds.

Chronically, we sort words into piles, stitch up the scattered mess of the senses.

Sometimes she speaks fluently, sometimes she stutters. She feels connected to her visitors, but doesn't know how they relate to her or to each other. She forgets a great deal, but she remembers that which absorbs her.

She keeps saying she is sad because she hasn't had any babies. They retort, again and again, we are your babies. She says, I think I'll adopt one, and they laugh and throw it back: how could you adopt one when you need people to look after you?

She thinks she lives upstairs. She is sure there is an attic. Shuffled, beyond the control of buttons. She is forced to improvise; the habitual is crooked.

She weeps and weeps, believing her father has just died. He is in the next room and she has neglected him.

They claim she will never learn anything new again. But she does, and last week did better in her memory test.

*out of the soup of ideas you pick the most aromatic pare them down until you reach  
the core grows smaller disappears have to call it back by pulling on its fragrance*

*out of the soup of illusions you pick out the mongrel looks most like you lower her  
voice grainy rough resistant*

*into the soup of impossibilities you stir inter-stellar morphing*

*as the soup is about to be served you snap the ladle*

If you have never killed someone you won't know what this is about.

That day the elevator wasn't working so I took the stairs. There seemed to be thousands of us, like refugees, there was barely room to climb or breathe. I was anxious in case the stairs collapsed under our collective weight.

Outside the sky was blue but the streets were homogenous grey. I knew I had murdered someone, and that murder was something from which you didn't escape. The details should have been sharp, but instead they were pale and vague.

It had happened, but everything suggested it hadn't.

As I was walking a woman appeared and begged me to take the child she was

holding. The child's skin and eyes seemed to suggest she wasn't Caucasian. I wanted to take the child, it was as if she was mine; the woman's pleas were loud and urgent. But I couldn't because I knew I had killed. If you have killed you can't look after a child, everyone knows that. I turned my back and walked faster and faster, until I could no longer hear her pleas. When I turned round the woman and child had disappeared, though I seemed to still see them.

Sharp and vague, this sense of loss, this sense of connection.

Note: The opening sentence of this text was taken verbatim from a sign in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, California.

## Underbelly

as insistent as an algorithm  
it pursues a strident pulse  
has no arms but holds you in position tightly

shakes you up  
but doesn't shrug its shoulders  
rarely listens though its ears twitch  
exhales stale breath as if it were a fragrance

Made from syllables but not words. A not-language, a non-land.

The first time she performed it, she was overtaken by what she had raised up, the accent she had adopted. Her eyes started to dilate; the distance between the sounds and her collapsed.

This moment had found a migrant inside her and was pushing it out. And a stranger outside was coming to meet her.

Finnish, Lithuanian, Welsh  
but also the cut and pasting of passports.

She performed the language often, she inhabited it as home

but it never had the same effect on her again.

the child only a child myself 1960 clinging to her mother she'll be better off with  
parents who can look after her the couple much older they had to be a Jewish couple  
only a child myself don't remember what they look like didn't realise the child only a  
child myself they talked her in a single mother without money she'll be better off my  
aunt looking for her name in the wedding lists it's a terrible thing to take a child away  
from her mother my mother wails the child only a child myself clinging to her  
mother's dress realised didn't realise crying

Minutes after the train crash, he shed his clothes, wallets and mobile phone.  
He walked away, shutting down thought or expectation.

Hours after the train crash, the wish to reassign, the promise of the not-yet-mapped.

Days after the train crash, a recycled ghost, he returns with buttered lies.

The lure of familiarity? The problematics of deceit? Or the pull of the pre-written and already spoken?

however much loss, however much regret, you have known this love, you have felt  
what others would have abandoned time itself to feel

however many tasks were left undone, declarations remained silent

however many slights, humiliations, embarrassments, misattributions, and even  
though you have disappointed yourself and others over and over again

however much this declaration may itself be mocked, lampooned, publicly derided

you have known this love, you have avoided distraction and deceit, you have made  
willing sacrifices

you have known what it is to know this, and you know that knowing this is almost  
everything

however much

## Research statement

### *Research background*

*Mix-ups* and *Underbelly* are part of a poetry volume and multimedia CD-Rom in progress, which focuses on cross-genre and cross-media writing. The research question is: how can disparate fragments of prose and poetry be combined so that they resonate with each other and create multi-layered meanings, but still remain independent? Also, how can emotional intensity be communicated in writing which does not have a central theme or unified style? The work is situated within an experimental tradition of poetry that is international but under-exposed in Australia, and links this to realist, lyrical and allegorical traditions of writing. It also builds on academic research I have previously published: this draws on cultural and cognitive theory to distinguish between affect as pre-cognitive affective intensities (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) and emotion as the representation of cognitive emotional states in literary texts (Smith 2007, 2009).

### *Research contribution*

The work is part of a research project, spanning 20 years, concerned with exploring innovative creative writing forms and processes across different genres and media in creative, pedagogical and research contexts. The pieces demonstrate that emotional intensity and meaning can be sustained across unrelated fragments by evoking a combination of pre-cognitive and cognitive responses in the reader, using techniques ranging from realism and allegory to metonymy, repetition and sonic association.

### *Research significance*

*Mix-ups* and *Underbelly* are examples of a substantial body of work by me which has been published by reputable publishers and journals, shortlisted for awards, enthusiastically reviewed, and taught on university courses in Australasia, the US and UK.

## Works cited

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