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Awe and broken things: Articulating the agony and the ecstasy of creativecritical 'wrighting'

Abstract:

Scholarly conventions allow us to say certain things within certain forms and shapes. Yet, how can something be “research” if you know where you are going on the page before the writing begins? In this braided case study, scholars Peta Murray (AUS) and Ames Hawkins (USA) consider how the paradox of surrender and the awe of not-knowing may hold space for the inchoate and the formlessness that precedes form. Through reflections upon respective projects they consider the place of the epiphanic, the erotic and the ecstatic as preconditions for radical transformations within new exegetical casings. Murray revisits her first foray into *wrighting* towards the creativecritical via *Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda*. Hawkins considers their creativecritical composing processes as they emerge/d while drafting “Feeling through Numbness, Healing with Awe”, a chapter for a forthcoming volume on sensory rhetorics. In three parts, each bounded by broken things – interstices, gaps, fissures between images and words – this paper asks: how might alchemical and material transformations occurring within liminal spaces – before, during and as a result of the writing process – be shared as an ethics of aesthetics, now and then?

Biographical note:

Peta Murray is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, Melbourne. Her research focus is the value of “meaningful irreverence” in fomenting social and cultural change. She performs essays, coins neologisms and publishes on the making of queer mischief within emergent discourses of the creativecritical.

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Keywords:

Wrighting, not-knowing, compositional processes, aesthetics, awe

I. The Epiphany – *on suddenly sensing where one needs to go*

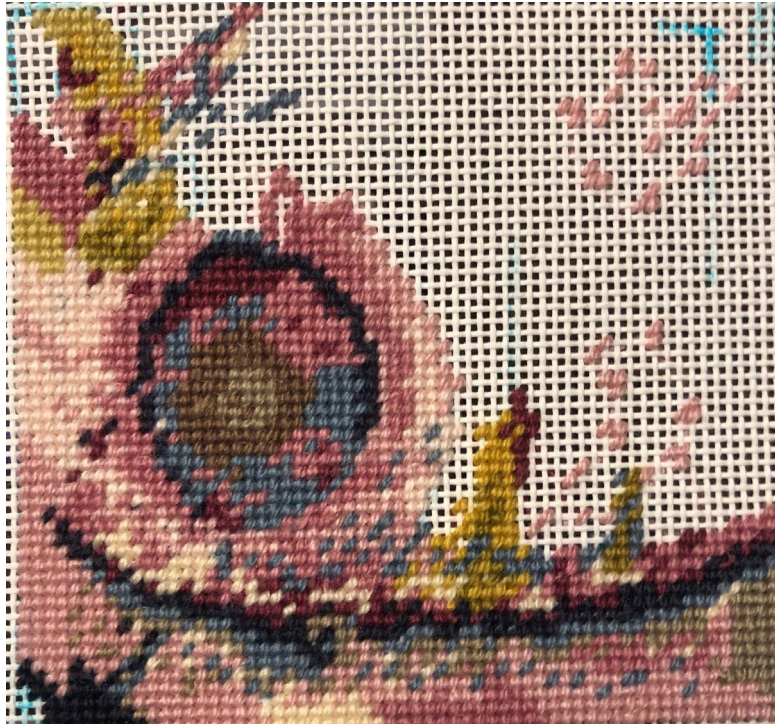


Figure 1: *Healing Progress, Week One*

§ My first thought is to reach for the nearest Bible. Yes, I have one, I have more than one. I have an ancient family heirloom, King James version, High Anglican, reeking of the great rift in my family, the inter-leavings. I have a funky New Testament, 1970s style, printed to look like a newspaper for cool Christian kids, but before I can even lunge for the library ladder and ascend to the shelf, I remember what they called it: *Good News for Modern Man*. So much for 70s funk. Even so ... I rack my brain. Did someone with a name like Paul write something, a letter, to the Epiphanes, just like someone else with a name like Paul wrote something, a letter, an epistle to the Corinthians, who, I surmise, were simply the good people of Corinth? I cannot call it up, even from the dimmest parts of the memory banks, the remote storage underground archives of memories of a childhood spent in Catholic church, Catholic school. Catholic-ism.

There was much to love. Words. *Catechism. Scapula. Monstrance.*

There was much to fear. And all of it *frankincensed*. Oiled. Hymnalled. Concepts like *transubstantiation*, and *plenary indulgence*, and the *Eucharistic prayer*, shrouded in holiness, daubed in mystery, endlessly up-lifting and down-casting. Yay, verily, I have inhaled sacredness, and it smells like *olibanum*, the aromatic resin obtained from trees of the genus *Boswellia* in the family *Burseraceae*.

But no epiphany there, bar the odd *epiphyte*, those organisms which grow on the surface of a plant and derive moisture and nutrients from air, rain, water. I sense what I am doing here. Do

you? Following these words in and out of -ologies. I will look to etymology to tell you that *epiphany* is no place, no people. It is a noun, yes, for a date, for a festival, celebrated January 6 usually with a capital -E, and in commemoration of – here is the good bit – the manifestation of, the striking appearance of, the making conspicuous of, the apparition or revelation of something (someone) divine. *Aha!*

Three hundred and forty-nine words and they have delivered me nowhere, and yet I know what I am doing. I am waiting for a synaptic shock, a charge of current when some new neural pathway delivers a moment of such _____ that in that instant, no longer than an inspiration, it is all there, it is all seen, it is all known, it is all visible. And then it is not, and the dimness returns, obliterating the visitation.

I carried the legacy of my Catholic childhood with me everywhere, through decades of theatre practice, and latterly, into the academy. In the late noughties, for reasons I no longer remember, I commenced a Master of Arts in Playwriting. I signed on to a remote university and began the solitary endeavour of trying to make something demonstrative of mastery. What *transpired* – there is another of those words, right there – was a battle of biblical proportions, an epic wrestling bout over three years between the forces of form and the forces of formlessness. Between the inchoate and its nemesis. Between a once-a-playwright and an incipient-scholar.

There is neither time or space here to enlarge upon the travails that preceded the delivery for examination of *Things That Fall Over: an anti-musical of a novel inside a reading of a play, with footnotes, and oratorio-as-coda* (to be referred to as TTFO from this point forward). Let the title speak to its unruliness and its excess. But if I tell stories of it now, it is with epiphany as *omphalos*, the navel of its earth, its centre and its hub.

§ As early as I can remember, I resisted the constraints of scholarly form. My favourite assignments were always those that invited the creative turn in service of critical thinking. In sophomore/grade ten English Literature, we were required to write a Chaucerian-styled Canterburyesque tale inspired by an image in a magazine. I chose a full-page glossy photo from *National Geographic*, a close-up portrait of an old woman with a small, purple-coloured mole under one of her eyes. I wrote a portrait of this character via a story of woe that turned a single tear into a permanent mark upon her cheek where, as I remember it, “a discoloration sat”.

I tossed out most of my grade school work decades ago, but I continue to save a few essays I wrote in college, one of which, “Personal reflections on *My Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, by MLK, Jr.”, was for an upper-level course in Intellectual History. The objective was to write as Martin Luther King, Jr. – in voice and style – and argue why the “white moderate” presented more of a danger to the Negro than the white supremacist. It was required that we incorporate two other readings from the class into this exposition.

I loved this assignment. It was exhilarating to think through these ideas and challenge

myself to craft language in the style of Martin Luther King, Jr. Powerful to imagine myself channelling him, be-come-ing King through/as/by *imaginative(ly) writing!* I cannot see or identify the epiphanic moment in the essay. But a trace of my aha moment, or at least its result, is recorded in the feedback from the Graduate Teaching Assistant who, in red ink, offers as critique:

This is, at times, a very thoughtful paper but also very abstract. It is conspicuously lacking in clear references to the books and in examples of what you mean by such things as knowledge and identity. The result is a recurrent vagueness and greater difficulty for the reader than is necessary. Although you have perhaps reproduced some of King's thoughtfulness, you might work more on emulating his clarity and directness.

Many of my sentences do offer up inane broad generalisations. There are some real gems such as 'Being free from outside control, the university has the very qualities we need, as a people, to influence the public into accepting their human responsibility'. But, what I also recognise is that, when offered the option, I resisted turning this creativecritical assignment into an academic essay. Why am I so sure that I nailed these rhetorical elements, that I was onto something here besides my own excitement? In a single, one-line comment following the feedback from the teaching-assistant, the instructor had this to say about my piece in 1989: "Very resourceful use of this device! A".

§ The delivery of my monstrous Master of Arts in Playwriting thesis was attended by all kinds of signs and symbols, all manner of annunciations and visitations. And the occasional theorist (See Halberstam, Sedgwick, Richardson & Adams St. Pierre). But ultimately it was capitulations that were game changers: capitulations to the bleeding obvious; capitulations to cliché and metaphors so timeworn they were threadbare. It is hard to write about this with the requisite efficiency. What I will say is I set forth to understand the experience of late blooming; of the artist, typically she/her identifying, who feels a calling, a vocation, but for reasons of motherhood and/or wifedom and/or other mostly gender-ordained duties and distractions, is unable to answer it until mid-life or beyond. Taking a vantage point from my own part of the world, Australia, I lit upon two such women who had not come into their *art-foolness* until they were in their late sixties, the writer, Elizabeth Jolley and the artist, Rosalie Gascoigne. I read all of Jolley's works, and studied catalogue after catalogue, essay upon essay about Gascoigne's long slow metamorphosis from housewife to bricoleuse. I tried braiding their life stories together, sifting through the synchronicities for touchpoints, letting them speak to me, or through me, as if I were some kind of medium.

Everything I tried had a deadness to it I knew well, inducing in me a state of existential weariness and defeat. No matter how I tried, I could not weld these women or their worlds together. No matter that I sensed they were pivotal to this ... thing ... whatever it was, whatever it wanted to be ...! I could do nothing with them, and they would do nothing to help me. The

distress, the sense of psychic gridlock was tangible. From the Latin, *tangibilis*: to touch. It scorched me.

Extraordinary somatic sensations accompany this kind of creative constipation. There is a contraction of the spirit, a clenching of the making-musculature at its source. It is an excruciating torment of the most anguish-filled kind, a foretaste of what it must be like, surely *in extremis*. And one must wait it out; one can no longer work one's way through it by daily diligence or "showing up" at the page. Things are beyond that point. It will take something revelatory. Something epiphanic. Something far beyond the edges of oneself, far beyond the limits of one's stock of words or knowings. It will take awe, and wonder, muchness and moreness, and an extra-sensorium of uber-perception.

Do me a favour? Hop onto your streaming platform of choice and find a recording of Brahms' Alto-Rhapsodie Opus 53. Turn the volume to loud. Sit and dedicate the 13 minutes and seven or so seconds it will take to listen to this choral marvel from first chord to last. Let it shimmer into decay. And then resume this *essaimblage* (Murray, 2020).

§ Though I have been trained as a scholar and am well-versed in academic genres, I have always been uninterested in writing pieces where the structure is discursively and academically predetermined. I write to challenge, expand and re-envision possibilities for/with academic writing. My desire is to engage in a life-long practice of illustrating the promise inherent in creativecritical form/s.

Prepositional methods serve me well in this endeavor, the practice of writing toward, through, around, across, beside and so forth (Rendle-Short, 2021). Depending upon the project, I may also engage in mystic documentary telepathy (Howe, 2014), speculative documentary (Gumbs, 2018), needlepoint and/or letter writing, all of which reflect my larger methodological frame of iterative thinking, the idea that through repetition and accumulation I might ambulate my way toward a revelatory flash: illustriously illuminated insight. I am doing it now, but you can't see it. This syntactical repetition, reworking sentences in multiple ways, by continually moving words in circles – concentric, overlapping, oblong, Venn-ed, constellated, congruent, rhizomatic, queered, contoured, compound-complex – until the pieces fall into place and that which I didn't even know I wanted to say has found its way onto the page.

I do most writing while sitting in a room alone, and yet I am always writing *with*. In communion with a co-author and/or audience, I write toward (a)-we. One way to understand what I mean is that though it may be ill-advised, I do not choose to submit work to venues simply because of their academic ranking or disciplinary regard. Rather I seek to be part of projects and publications that place my words in the company of (particular) others'. The epiphanic pilgrimage is worth the struggle when I imagine myself in divine constellation with the words of an/other, writer/s with whom I feel in *communitastic* (Taylor, 2023) energetic synch.

I am not sure which other authors will have chapters in *Sensory Rhetorics*, the volume for which I have proposed “Feeling through Numbness, Healing with Awe”, but the reputations and multimodal work of the editors and their call “to encourage accessible, evocative, sensorially-rich writing”, felt like an invitation for me push against-beyond the constraints of academic form. I know what is expected of me as a scholar. I know how to make scholarly ideas immediately understood. Yet I resist writing anything where I know how and where the piece will land. I do not want to know where I’ll go before I begin. There’s no discovery in that, no revelatory bliss. The problem – the real agony of this process – is that I write in a state of not-knowing. I know that I don’t know where I am heading and know that I won’t know the form my piece will take. Until I do. The agony of not-knowing: to know that you’ll have to wait. Wait by writing. *Wraiting*, as Peta might say. Purposeful syntactical struggle and compositional flailing. Not-knowing that you know you will arrive but only after becoming utterly lost.



Figure 2: *Orlando* (Wil Stracke) sings *Let Me Turn Your Pages over their beloved sleeping Verity* (Margaret Dobson). Photo Credit: Lucy Crossett

§ Let me listen to Brahms with you. Those surging opening chords, the strings, low and fierce. I am *w/rite* beside you. Stirring bassness, then the trebling. Flutes and lightness. Shimmering strings. You would never know, not in a thousand years, would you, where you are headed? This is the thing. Silence. Pause. Enter, now, her voice, alone, the last sound on earth. Much of it on just one note. The basses dive to the ocean floor. She sings on. The flutes and violins embroider her voice with tenderness. She growls, those low notes at the end of her range, her register. The piccolo pipes up. She sibillance of these German words and then that interval. Two, three notes, inscribing an upturned V and we still haven’t a notion of what is to happen. She sings on. We are four minutes in. There is an assertiveness now, an insistence to the voice, demanding attention. String section, brush strokes tint the colour wall and the voice climbs again. My eyes fill. I am starting to get an inkling of something. There are – what is the word

for it – the chills that raise the hairs on the arms and the back of the neck? Piloerection? Horripilation? The string section is a deep well, a pool of such profundity one could dive in and never resurface. The voice grows stronger. It wavers and firms, firms and wavers, and still you do not know what awaits you. You are more than seven minutes in. There are horns now, calling, beckoning something forth. Here it is. Soft chorale of tenors and basses, human-voiced now, crooning below hers, prayerful and strong. They lift and hold her voice aloft. It curls and sighs like sonic smoke. A reprise. That same phrase, this time a handover. She will take the line, the lyricism and propel it on. Now a reed instrument, *cor anglais* or oboe, as we hold our breath, and then, the choir alone. For me, real tears as now the swelling of the strings – all colours, all hues. The cellos are plucked, soft yet sprightly, while the voices fuse and merge into something beyond my experience, beyond my words. Is it the female voice suspended thus, privileged thus? Is it at last how their voices are only meant to brace hers and let it be heard, in a never heard before yet utterly known way. A key change now. Are you listening? Hear how the cadence changes, how the last few bars carry us, drop us, stranding us where we need to be on the shores of the music, silent and spent. This is my tilt at writing an epiphany, live and in the moment, of course it is climactic, of course it is an orgasm of the spirit, for how could it not be so?

II. THE EROTIC – *on being led by a desire to write as rite*

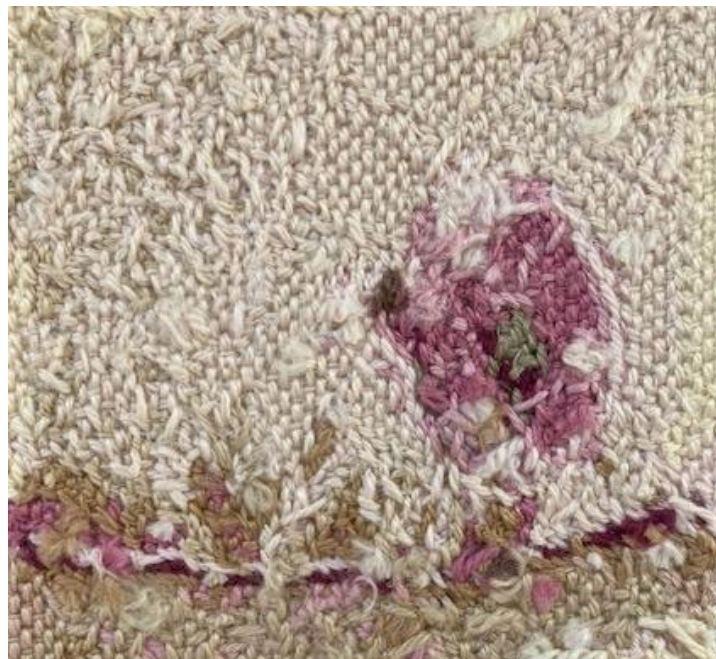


Figure 3: Back of the Tapestry, Week Three

§ Audre Lorde's oft-cited essay, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power", presents a definition of the erotic that accretes. Rather than offering one, single, clear, quotable statement, she offers multiple assertions about the erotic, any one of which could be cited by a scholar to undergird an argument. Reading it again, for perhaps the hundredth time, I open myself to its magic; the generative, expansive, mercurial,

lyrical writing. I'm looking for the quotation I most need to move forward, to explain what it means when I say that writing creativecritical work is, for me, ever-always connected to the power of the erotic. I look by listening with my third eye. I wait until it is Lorde's voice I hear rather than my own. As though she is sitting across from me, I hear her say,

The erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness. (p. 54)

That fullness. The fullness of the feeling in the doing. This is how I know whether I'm on the right track as I search for the right quotation, the right form for any piece that I write.

In the case of "Feeling through Numbness, Healing with Awe", my initial epiphany is the realisation that my 'completion and satisfaction' are connected to the erotic charge I experience by needlepointing. This needlepoint-as-doing begins with a trip to the haberdashery shop only a couple weeks following top-surgery. I'm masked (this is deep pandemic times) with elastic bandages wrapped around my chest. The salesperson kindly offers to assist, but I do not want to explain what I am working on, so I sneak peeks of the image of my postoperative chest on my phone while choosing the right colours of yarn. Upon checking me out she looks up and shares, "We have another man-stitcher". *Man-stitcher*. Not quite right. But not wrong either. *Man-stitcher*. Suddenly, I am in an Emily Dickenson poem, the one I memorised in grade four. I am not-not connected to this other "man-stitcher", but the real connection here is with my father. *Then there's a pair of us — don't tell! / They'd banish us; you know!* (p. 116). He and I in our erotic connection to fibre arts.

At home I pull the colours out one at a time and line them up in all their glory. The canvas will be small – 4.5" square (about 11.4 cm), the suggestion of "life size". Working without any template I move back and forth between the canvas and the image, intuitively translating lines into stitches, moving from a whole to the smallest of parts. There's always been a clear connection for me between needlepointing and writing, both of which are the "endeavours" that bring me to fullness. I want to feel the whole of what has happened to me, to feel it all. I want to better understand what happened. The image shows me but for me to feel it – in all its fullness – I will need to recreate my connection by doing, a stitch at a time.

§ I turn to the one and only scholarly work that has, to date, attempted to grapple with the sprawl of my magnum opus of the preposterous title, and gather into one hand a bunch of quotable quotes. "Murray's play turns the tapestry of theatre-making inside out, revealing the

loose threads behind the making” (Clode, 2022, p.144) takes me to the back end of the work and to the metaphor we, Ames and I, have used elsewhere in the polyphonic and aforementioned essay on *communitas* for the *Sydney Review of Books* (Taylor et al., 2023).

However, it is Clode’s observations about open-endedness that strike me. In her critique she speaks of *TTFO* as both “Murray’s celebration of the unresolved” (2022, p. 151) and as “reverent yet upbeat re-iteration of the celebration of the unfinished” (2022, p. 151).

What does it mean, I ask myself, that I wrote the work from, even towards, such sites of *un-*ness? Furthermore, in posing that question of myself back then, was I foreshadowing my own creativecritical PhD (Murray, 2017), in which I went on to paraphrase, somewhere, a quote from Bryce Courteney so as to deliver among my findings the invocation that one must never underestimate the “power of un-”?

Here, then, is my awe in broken things. Here is the wonder in undoings, in “giving up, at whim, one path for another” (Murray, 2017, p. 282). Here is the potency of a prefix, which, in a mere two letters can denote absence and lack, can overturn states of selfishness or worldliness, and can rob rest or truth of their virtues. Stronger, and less neutral than *non*, it may be also used to cancel actions (*unsettle*, *untie*), reduce powerful entities to a lesser state (*unman*, *undo*) and even usher certain actions across liminal zones into states of epiphanic release, wherein they may be unburdened and unshackled with *gay a-band-un*.

See what I did there?

§ It’s a funny thing to be writing about writing “Feeling through Numbness, Healing with Awe” and to invite you into this process, dear reader, *in medias res*. After completing a first draft, the editors told me:

Dear Ames,

What a wonderful, vivid, and affecting piece! We love the work you are doing here. We especially appreciate how much it leans into lived sensory experience.

You’ll notice we don’t have many comments on the draft below. At this point, we’re really happy with what you have and where you’re headed.

That said, and as much as we welcome the personal/experiential work in the piece, we’d love to see it balanced a bit more with some theoretical work that might be applied more broadly.

As you continue to work on the draft, we hope you will provide ideas/theory/etc that the reader can take up and utilise in their own work. There is theorising here, but you give it a very light touch. We like this, but hope that you might

amplify the more theoretical bits to ground the piece in scholarship that would give the piece a bit more pragmatic traction for readers. [For example, we notice in photo captions there are new insights on sensory rhetorics. That stuff might be moved into the main text and developed. The intro and planned conclusion might also have gestures toward that kind of content.]

Thanks so much for this moving piece! We look forward its continued development!

I knew these editors would be kind and generous with their feedback, authentically interested in seeing how I – anyone might – engage ideas through creativecritical form. That said, I was not at all surprised by their request to “amplify the more theoretical bits to ground the piece in scholarship”. Citations, we all know, are the backbone of academic writing. Making an/y argument necessitates outlining the lineage of an idea through other already sanctioned scholarly works. This is the worst of the trudge, my inherent resistance to the oft-used practice of outlining an argument through preselected quotations à la literature review. Instead, I tend to feel most inspired, most connected to my writing and work when practising my own form of bibliomancy, selecting theorists and quotations by erotic provenance, by divinational design. I explained it to the editors this way:

There’s a lot I could say about the pressure one feels to identify the theorists BEFORE one has something to say – we think that’s the “natural” way to do it. But there’s no “natural” way to do scholarly work. Pushing against the boundary – especially for a project like sensory rhetorics – feels awesome.

To which one of the editors responded thus: “I really love this. I agree wholeheartedly.”

By awesome, I really mean erotic. I mean a cellular connection with embodied true knowledge, an internal satisfaction that I have in the marrow of my bones, a sensation I trust, to which I may once again aspire.

§ I want to write about how I wrote the piece when at last I wrote the piece or rather when it w/rote itself through me. I want to speak to an erotics of parturition, a full-bodied birthing of the first draft over a run of days and nights in which I did not sleep, I barely ate; unwashed, I rarely left my desk. I want to write about creative contractions, those muscular pulses that propel a work through, out and beyond the body. I want to write how they become unstoppable, at a certain point, once the waters have broken, the dam is bust, the gush of verbiage spills and there is no sandbagery that will hold it, and it can only be diverted into channels of non/sense-making.



Figure 4: *Nursie-Nursie* (Caroline Lee) is on the case. Photo Credit: Lucy Crossett

For *TFFO* these channels were acts and scenes, songs and set pieces and feats of hyper-hyphenation that allowed me to lash anti- to musical, oratorio to coda, commedia dell'arte to community theatre. They allowed me to create for a cast of incompatible characters: Verity, Orlando/Orla, Doula, Dr Vedova, St Lisbeth the Jolly, Nursie-Nursie, Three Horrible Men, Tobias Wunderkind and more. They freed me to set refrains from *Madame Butterfly* for ukulele, to mash together childhood pop culture icons (Skippy the Bush Kangaroo) with Biblical figures (St John the Baptist), to riff on words and languages dead and living, to reference promiscuously (*The Story of O*, Rumpelstiltskin) and to place Muriel Spark beside Coleridge and Shakespeare beside Stephen Sondheim. *TFFO* became a monumental mash-up in the form of a willfully flawed attempt to deliver ALL the things, in CAPITAL LETTERS and at FULL tilt, leaving NOSE TONE unturned! It is profligate, immoderate and OVERdone in every way. I gave it my all.

§ It is 5 a.m. and the erotic pulses through me, ferrying thoughts and ideas around and around in my body, a recursive review of where I have already been while writing this piece, where I have gone, what I have still to figure out, where I might be headed, what still needs to be said, what else I might do. Signposts appear as apparitional assertions. The ones I have been making without saying, the ones that – if this were a more traditional academic piece – might need to be clearly stated closer to the beginning of the essay and not here nearly three fifths of the way through so as not to rely upon the ghost of the argument. A ghost from Dissertation-writing Past warns: *Be clear. Be explicit. Make sure to say what needs to be said.*

Each work I produce has associated with it a piece-specific epiphany, a moment of revelation. A blazing-white hot-flash of discernment resulting in an understanding of how, in this instance, to meld scholarly and artistic (in)tension/s. Enlightenment made

manifest on the page as creativecriticaling insight. The erotic is the power and connection, the fulfilment I feel – once this epiphany has occurred – when I write. The erotic also enables me to push forward, to keep going, letting me know I am on the right track. The other ways of making and doing remind me that the erotic is always there, always with me. Only fear and doubt – which is really another way of saying white supremacist capitalist trans&homophobic ableist ageist patriarchy – are all that stand in my way. The promise of the epiphany motivates. The power of the erotic mobilises. The presence of the ecstatic perpetuates. An ecstatic pulse achieving alchemical transformation. The Ecstatic: Multiplies. Magnifies. Mystifies. Shatters. Comes together in having been broken apart.

III. THE ECSTATIC – *on over-cumming the limits of the individual self and its desires*



Figure 5: Nipple Sticker, Week Six

§ The ecstatic as irritant. What bites, what scrapes, what itches? Where is the rub, you ask? Where does it hurt? Where does it abrade? Where does the soft skin pucker and weep? And is there pleasure in the pain, and where and why? As on the page the women gagged and bound, with archive boxes rampant, hurl their unread words through the air. Snarl and dash their unpublished manuscripts, their unperformed plays, their unfinished trilogies, their stillborn notes for novels against the unread, the unwritten, the abortings of others. Their essays, small, twisted, minor and unformed. Their words, scrapings of syllables, the ideas half-baked.

§ The ecstatic as opulent. What scale, what size, what beauty? Where is the sumptuousness, the grandeur, the splendour? In the voluminousness of my libraries, the ones on my shelves and in my head. In words and ideas. In the constellations upon constellations of the thoughts of Otherwriters who might find their way here to speak with-and-in these ideas I've got. Engaging in an embodied not-knowing as a method, tomes are transformed into grimoires. Through a practice of citational divination, quotations are revealed rather than chosen. Offerings. Oblations. Found by finger, felt with third eye.

§ The ecstatic as oracular. What augury, what prescience, what prognostication? Where is meaning divined, and how? Through what cytoplasm am I channeling the sages and the crones, the prophets and the iconoclasts? As on the page a nun-like woman with short grey hair and rimless spectacles enters. She wears a tie-dyed caftan and Roman sandals. She carries a voluminous handbag from which she dispenses can after can of tinned beetroot, the juice of which shall be used as ink so that Verity may write her trilogy.

§ The ecstatic as abjection. What abhorrence, what abomination, what disgust? How do we know that what we desire is ever-always connected to that which we abhor, that which sickens us, that which repels. A repulsion predictable as the warm blood that throbs grotesque and gorgeous beneath our skin. What if I asked Kristeva herself? What does it feel like when you realise where a piece of writing needs to go? "A weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me (p. 2)," she replies. I am as she is-has-been: destroyed and delivered. Omen.

§ The ecstatic as melodious. What euphony, what harmony, what mellifluousness? Where does the sonic insinuate itself, and how? Through what auditoria do I receive the soundings and the re-soundings, the strains and the strainings towards utterance and speech and song. As on the page, finally, somehow, Doula, in spite of her gag, begins to sing. It is *In*

Consolation: A Choon. Doula sings on. Soon the other women join in the chorus. Because they are gagged, we hear no words. There is only the music. They sing on, consoling themselves with the beauty of this strange piece.

§ The ecstatic as invitation. What opening, what fissure, what crack? Where does the aperture reveal itself, and why? Look to “the site of loss, the seam, the cut, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss”, Barthes bades (p. 7). *Want*. Want with and for a-we. Want the writing that allows us to lose ourselves even as we meet ourselves; to welcome the ecstasy of eluding ourselves even as we greet ourselves as the alien subject we’ve always known ourselves to be. As an aphorism(!): we write using words and words ultimately (always) fail us in any attempt to explain what’s happening when we write.

§ The ecstatic as consummation. What heights, what thrills, what flair? Where does the making complete itself, and how? Through what union does the work release itself, and how to temper the heat of its emission? As on the page, and with great activity now, ORLANDO goes that way to find MANNIE. DOULA goes that way to boil water. And VERITY tries to take up her pen, but her hand cramps violently. The pen falls. Everything scatters. VERITY falls to the floor amidst tinned beetroot and shredded paper. VERITY lies on her back like a beetle. Her huge pregnant belly protrudes as she kicks her arms and legs uselessly. She feels for her toy dog. She winds it up.

§ The ecstatic as transition. What transformation, what tribulation, what trance? Where does desire metamorphosise? You might better ask, when does bliss catalyse? Whenever and wherever creativecritical forms alchemise in-as ex-CITATIONAL states. Gayle Salamon, summarising M. Merleau-Ponty, phenomenologises that such magic happens during and within *transposition*: “the process by which the desire that houses itself in my body *becomes* my body itself – not held proximately by thought, but felt and experienced (as opposed to only referred to) through and as the body” (2010, p.

52). The writing and I are one and the same: desire.
An organic orgasmic oracularity decreed.



Figure 6: *The Weaver* (Lisa Maza) and *Mannie* – Tracy Bourne, attend the dying *Verity*, her final work stillborn. Photo Credit: Lucy Crossett

§ The ecstatic as awe in broken things. What reverence, what dread, what wonder? Where does kin meet *tsugi*, where does glue meet shard, where does lacquer meet wreckage? And how to stay in the ruins long enough, resist the urge to mend to fix to fortify the frangible? As on the page MANNIE throws off the last of her seven veils. She is armed with a toy dog's head, severed from the body of SKIPPY. Wires and cords dangle from its neck. It is all terribly John the Baptist.

§ The ecstatic as awe in broken things. What sacrifice, what surrender, what heed? Where does memory meet not-knowing, where does syntax find strand, where does comma splice greet interrobang? Perhaps in the hope and feather of re-mem-bering that creativecritical writing is, if it *is* (anything) at all, a both-anding of scholarly senses and artistic impulse. A thrumming. A thirsting. A threshold. A thread. I ear it, feal it, sear it. My creativecritical-calling! To constantly, consistently and confidently: Queer! Sense made by fuxkling with form! I may not-know how I got here, but I recall-and-respond to these forms of love at first cite!

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