

Creative Ecologies: A Postgraduate Retreat in Creative Arts Scholarship

16-18 September 2015,
Female Orphan School, UWS Parramatta

Information Package



Female Orphan School 1870-1875¹



Female Orphan School, University of Western Sydney

Featuring presentations and workshops by some of the nation's leading creative arts scholars and practitioners:

Gail Jones, Ivor Indyk, Donna Lee Brien, Jen Webb, Hazel Smith, Ross Gibson, Sara Knox, Kate Fagan, Dominique Hecq, Lynda Hawryluk, Joshua Lobb, Matt McGuire, Maria Angel, Anne Rutherford, Matthew Thompson, Michael Richardson, Milissa Deitz, Hart Cohen, Melinda Jewell and Rachel Morley

¹ [Female Orphan School, Parramatta, 1870-1875, by the American & Australasian Photographic Company. Carte de visite photograph. SPF / 2661, State Library NSW](#)

WRITING AND SOCIETY
RESEARCH CENTRE



Call for Applications

The Writing and Society Research Centre is calling for applications for *Creative Ecologies* – an award winning three-day masterclass program aimed at Australian university postgraduate students currently engaged in research that incorporates a creative writing component and exegesis. This is the third year we have held the retreat. Our alumni includes the following writers: Christopher Kremmer, Belinda Castles, Jesse Blackadder, Luke Carman, Tessa Lunney, Nandi Chinna, Irini Savvides, Claire Scobie, Caroline Williamson, Miro Bilbrough, Jen Craig, Kate Middleton, Gretchen Shirm and Teresa Bell, among others.

Feedback from our previous two events – held in 2011 and 2013 – can be found at the end of this information package.

Who can attend?

Creative Ecologies is designed for students currently enrolled in a postgraduate Creative Writing degree (MA by research, DCA and PhD) at an Australian university who have completed at least *one year* of their candidacy (either full-time or part-time). To benefit from the event applicants should have commenced work on both their creative project and their critical component.

About Creative Ecologies

Creative Ecologies was developed to respond to the challenges students experience producing and presenting doctoral research within the discipline of the Creative Arts, particularly the field of Creative Writing. As scholarship on Creative Arts postgraduate pedagogy shows, the non-traditional nature of the Creative PhD/DCA program typically means that students grapple with distinctly different issues to those engaged in more traditional research degrees (Boyd, 2009; Burr, 2010; Krauth, 2011; Webb, Brien, Burr, 2012). This is especially the case when it comes to researching and writing the exegesis. For while the exegesis is now part of everyday parlance, many Creative Arts students continue to find the non-traditional, hybrid nature of the form perplexing and sometimes even mystifying. Central to this anxiety are questions relating to the relationship between theory and practice, and research and creative output; purpose and intent; method, form, genre, style and tone; the place of oneself as an active participant within the body of the research and the creative process; and the act of measuring and defending original contributions to knowledge in creative forms. *Creative Ecologies* responds to these challenges and seeks to address them in ways that translate into meaningful take-home actions. Working in a participatory, highly collaborative environment the retreat aims to help participants develop an awareness of the nexus between creative and critical discourses so they can approach the writing

process with more confidence while developing their skills as creative researcher-writers.

Program

Creative Ecologies is participatory and interactive. It draws on the most up-to-date research and features nationally and internationally renowned disciplinary experts from cross-institutional settings. The program is comprised of expert guest lectures, plenary discussions, reading and writing circles, and dedicated time for personal/free writing.

The 2015 program is divided into three broad topic areas:

- **Day one/** form, genre and tradition
- **Day two/** creative arts research methodologies
- **Day three/** style, voice and technique

Each day commences with an 'agenda-setting' lecture led by two experts who specialise in that day's theme. This is followed by a plenary discussion oriented around a set of readings (distributed in advance) and facilitated by three academics/practitioners who are asked to respond directly to issues raised by participants. The afternoon sessions focus on writing, beginning with a group workshop in response to the day's themes, led by practising writers. Participants then break into small groups where they have the opportunity to workshop their writing and explore the day's topic, as it relates to their research, in a concentrated environment. Each group is facilitated by an experienced academic/practising writer.

* Please note there no formal student presentations. Instead, participants are expected to explore issues relating to their work in response to set readings and discussions in an ongoing fashion for the duration of the retreat. This event is designed to be an interactive, student-led experience. Full participation is critical to its success.

Location

In 2015 *Creative Ecologies* will be held at the historic Female Orphan School situated on the banks of the Parramatta River, UWS Parramatta Campus, and a ten-minute drive from Parramatta city. A highly significant and atmospheric site, the Female Orphan School was built during Governor Macquarie's time, without convict labour, to house female orphans. It has stood against some of the most important social changes in Australia's settler history. Completed in 1818, it is one of the few surviving public buildings of its size from the early colonial period; certainly it is the oldest three-storey building in the country. With its powerful and potent histories, surrounding gardens and proximity to the river it is a perfect location for creative practice, reflection and gentle meandering.

The Female Orphan School stands on the traditional lands of the Darug people.

Cost

The cost for attending *Creative Ecologies* is \$340. This rate has been subsidised by the Writing and Society Research Centre, and students are advised to access their university funding for fee assistance. The cost includes attendance at all workshops and sessions and morning/afternoon tea and lunch. Participants are responsible for their own transport and accommodation. Accommodation suggestions will be made available to accepted applicants.

Application Process

One of the key principles of Creative Ecologies is participation and interaction. Our retreats are participant-led. For this reason we keep numbers to a minimum to ensure each participant experiences multiple opportunities to discuss their work and obtain feedback. We also believe it is important to get the right group – one bonded by common concerns but which is also ready to be enriched by unique and diverse experiences.

For this reason we have developed an application process to assist us in assembling our cohort.

How to apply

The maximum capacity for the retreat is 20 students. Ten places will be reserved for UWS students. A further 10 will be awarded to external Australian university students. All placements will be awarded on a competitive basis.

All applicants must submit the following documents to be considered for the program:

- A cover letter noting name, degree, institution, stage of candidacy and contact details (½ page max)
- Project title, abstract/synopsis for the overall project – creative and exegetical works (1 page max)
- A short account of challenges faced in the production of the exegesis (2 pages max)
- An extract from the creative work (1000 words)
- A brief CV (1 page max)

The deadline for applications is **Friday 24 July 2015**. Applications should be emailed to the Retreat Convener, Dr Rachel Morley at r.morley@uws.edu.au.

Applicants will be assessed on the merit of their proposals and requested materials.

Assessment

A committee convened by Dr Rachel Morley and consisting of members of the Writing and Society Research Centre will assess applications. Participants will be selected on the basis of merit. The committee will take particular note of the two-page essay given the interest in responding directly to existing challenges in participants' creative

research practice during the course of the Retreat. Applicants can expect to be notified about their application by **Friday 31 July 2015**. Accepted applicants' short essays will be emailed to the academic presenters in advance of the retreat as a means of briefing them on issues specific to the 2015 cohort.

Feedback From Creative Ecologies 2013 participants

"Utterly transformative, thank you. [I have] new knowledge of my project; a new and more nuanced understanding of the dissertation and its possibilities. A renewed sense of intellectual confidence and a greater sense of creative direction."

"The various discussions have completely - no exaggeration - reinvigorated my approach to my project. Not only in the sense of the knowledge gained, but also because...the retreat has gifted me with the enthusiasm to embrace the challenges."

"From all the sessions, I have discovered that the creative and the metaphorical are just as important in the exegesis as they are in the creative work ... and this important realisation could not have occurred to me without this wonderfully diverse, thought-filled, encouraging set of days."

Feedback From Creative Ecologies 2011 participants

"This retreat far exceeded my expectations. Prior to the retreat I did not know what I did not know. I feel my knowledge and skill and confidence in relation to writing my exegesis has been GREATLY enhanced and feel sorry for all of those people who did not get the chance to attend."

"I feel I am no longer stuck and have all the answers to the questions I came with."

"All I wanted was some concrete answers to, 'what is my exegesis meant to look like?'. I got that from so many angles; it's inspiring. And I got more: 3 days of eloquent talk with passionate people about the possibility of literature. Everyone had so much to say and were so keen to forge connections with others. It made it easy."

"To date the most useful and interesting thing I've done since starting my DCA. Congrats on an outstanding event. It felt essential to me."

"This was perhaps the most important and definitely the most useful course/retreat we have had. The breadth and depth and knowledge of the presenters was extraordinary and their generosity in giving feedback invaluable. It was a profound retreat, using language that creative practitioners could access and make their own."

"Unlike the didactic approach of most academic events on creative arts research, Creative Ecologies was participatory, collegial and highly focused on our own challenges as doctoral candidates. Dr Morley carefully structured the program to lead us from wider issues, such as the range of possible forms of the exegesis, to detailed discussion and examination of those issues in relation to our own doctoral projects."

"I was expecting this retreat to save my project from oblivion and it did."