

Call for Papers - *TEXT* Special Issue on the Essay

Edited by Rachel Robertson, Curtin University and Kylie Cardell, Flinders University

But, what *is* an essay? In his introduction to the 2014 volume of *The Best Australian Essays*, Robert Manne tackles the question of definition (intriguingly in itself, one nearly every editor in the series has also foregrounded) and hopes, given this is his 'second innings', that it is an issue he now has a clearer view of: 'I had thought of an essay as any brief piece of non-fiction prose. I no longer do [...]. For me at least, an essay is a reasonably short piece of prose in which we hear a distinctive voice attempting to recollect or illuminate or explain one or another aspect of the world. It follows from this that no essay could be jointly authored. It also follows, that, with an essay, we trust that the distinctive voice we hear is truthful or authentic, even when perhaps it is not' (ix). That Manne drops 'non-fiction' from his definition seems significant. As does his emphasis on a *distinctive voice*, authentic and truthful, *even when perhaps it is not*.

This issue of *TEXT* is an invitation for writers, scholars, and creative practitioners to think through the implications of the essay as an evolving contemporary genre in Australasia. While we presume a focus on contemporary literature and national context, given the recent popularity of the essay here, we also welcome contributions that gauge and reflect on the genre as it has developed historically, or that trace its inflections in international contexts of relevance to Australasian stories and voices. The essay is a diverse and fluid genre and attentiveness to issues of definition seem important. The essay is a pedagogical mode, one that often seems far removed from its more literary relatives, and we welcome interventions in thinking through the essay as it is used in tertiary contexts as a creative practice. What is an essay? Who writes essays, and how? What does the essay do in the Australian publishing context and why should we pay attention to this? What is problematic about the essay, and why? We welcome abstracts on these and other themes:

- The essay in Australia and New Zealand
- Defining the essay
- Subgenres and styles
- New media and the essay
- The essay as poetry or performance
- The essay as journalism
- The publishing industry and the essay
- Indigenous voices
- Questions of gender
- The essay as polemic
- Social justice and the essay
- The essay in South-East Asia.

Submissions may be scholarly articles of 4,000-6,000 words or creative works of up to 4,000 words. Creative works must be accompanied by a Research Statement outlining the work's background, contribution and significance. Selected book reviews will also be included.

Please send your **abstract** of 350-400 words with a 50 word bio statement as a word document attachment to Rachel Robertson at R.Robertson@curtin.edu.au by **25 March 2016**. The editors will choose abstracts for development (based on their strength and how they fit into the issue as a whole) and respond to you by 22 April 2016. Papers provisionally accepted by the editors will be due by **12 August 2016** and then sent for peer review.

Please send any queries to Rachel on R.Robertson@curtin.edu.au.