Creative Ecologies: A Postgraduate Retreat in Creative Arts Scholarship

22-26 September, 2013

Information Package

**Featuring presentations by:** Prof Anthony Uhlmann, Prof Ivor Indyk, Prof Gail Jones, Prof Hazel Smith, Prof Donna Lee Brien, Prof Jen Webb, Assoc Prof Sara Knox, Assoc Prof Hart Cohen, Assoc Prof Marion May Campbell, Dr Antonia Pont, Dr Keri Glastonbury, Dr Mridula Nath Chakraborty, Dr Milissa Deitz, Dr Rachel Morley, Dr Matthew McGuire, Dr Belinda Castles, Dr Martin Edmond and Dr Jane Skelton
The Writing and Society Research Centre is calling for applications for a four day residential master class/workshop program for Australian university postgraduate students currently engaged in research that incorporates a creative writing component and exegesis. The retreat will be held at a multi-award winning, 4-star eco-friendly property in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. A limited number of placements are available via a competitive application process.

This is the second year that we have held this Retreat. Feedback from the first event, held in 2011, can be found at the end of the information package.

About

In her oft-quoted essay, *Exegesis and the Gentle Reader/Writer* (2004), Jeri Kroll suggests that the task of producing an exegesis requires that students become ‘expert reader[s]’ of their own work, both the ‘critic and examiner’ of it. The exegesis, she goes on to say, calls on the skills of being able to ‘read’ between the spaces of theory and practice, combined with an ability to find resonance in the cultural discourses that inform them. Yet for many students this process is fraught with difficulty – despite the passing of time since Kroll’s essay was first published. For while, almost ten years on, the exegesis is now part of everyday parlance in creative arts scholarship, the non-traditional, hybrid nature of the form still has the potential to invoke anxiety, particularly with regard to negotiating the relationship between theory and practice, and the associated challenge that can come with situating oneself as an active participant within the body of the research, given that institutional expectations can often seem at odds with creative practice.

*Creative Ecologies* will explore some of the challenges, tensions and pleasures associated with this work. The main aim will be to develop an awareness of the nexus between creative and critical discourses so students can approach the writing process with more confidence while developing their skills as creative researcher-writers. Participants will have the opportunity to work with some of the best creative arts scholars and writers from across the country. Guest speakers in 2013 include Prof Anthony Uhlmann, Prof Ivor Indyk, Prof Gail Jones, Prof Hazel Smith, Prof Donna Lee Brien, Prof Jen Webb, Assoc Prof Sara Knox, Assoc Prof Hart Cohen, Assoc Prof Marion May Campbell, Dr Antonia Pont, Dr Keri Glastonbury, Dr Mridula Nath Chakraborty, Dr Milissa Deitz, Dr Rachel Morley, Dr Matthew McGuire, Dr Belinda Castles, Dr Martin Edmond and Dr Jane Skelton.

Program

*Creative Ecologies* is comprised of expert guest lectures, plenary discussions, reading and writing circles, and time for personal/free writing. The program is divided into four broad topic areas:

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

Each day will commence with an ‘agenda-setting’ lecture led by an expert who specialises in that day’s theme. This will be followed by a plenary discussion oriented around a set of readings (to be distributed in advance) and facilitated by three
academics who will respond to issues raised by participants, both in their application essays and in-session. The afternoon sessions will focus on writing, beginning with a group workshop in response to the day’s themes, led by practising writers. Participants will then break into small groups where they will 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 will be facilitated by an experienced academic/practising writer.

*Please note there will be 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 and accommodation

In 2011 our participants organised their own accommodation. One of their suggestions, if we were to run the retreat again, was for group accommodation so conversations could continue after hours and to provide participants with additional space and time for writing and reflection.

In response to this we have secured the beautiful Old Leura Dairy for the 2013 Retreat (see pictures in this guide and [the Old Leura Dairy website](#) for more information). Located in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, the Dairy is a perfect location for creative practice and reflection. It’s a multi-award winning, 4-star, eco-friendly property with six separate dwellings, all of which make creative use of recyclable materials. (Some of the lodging names are Buttercup Barn, the Strawbale House, the Milking Shed, and the Workers’ Cottage.)

The dwellings are surrounded by native gardens. In amongst the flowers you’ll find a series of little nooks perfect for writing and thinking. Participants will share facilities and lodgings, however, the buildings are very spacious and generous. Each has its own quirky touches – think fabulous artwork and inventive re-workings of recyclable materials. The Retreat itself will also be held on the Dairy site, cutting out the need for daily travel.

The Dairy is located on the north side of Leura. It’s a ten-minute walk to the village and it’s also in a perfect location for gentle meandering.

Cost

The cost for attending the Retreat is $1000. This rate has been subsidised by the Writing and Society Research Centre, and students are advised to access their university funding for further fee assistance. **The cost includes attendance at all workshops and classes, all meals and drinks (including breakfast and dinner), and four nights accommodation at the beautiful Old Leura Dairy.** The package does not include transport. Participants will be responsible for arranging their own travel to the retreat.

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 2013 cohort. Please see the application instruction sheet on the Retreat Homepage for further information on how to apply.

The deadline for applications is **Friday 28 June, 2013**. 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. Please see the application instruction sheet for further information.

**Feedback From Creative Ecologies 2011**

“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.”

“I was expecting this retreat to save my project from oblivion and it did.”
The Writing and Society Research Centre, housed at the University of Western Sydney, brings together scholars, writers, critics and editors with a common interest in exploring the social power of writing. The Group promotes research in literary publishing, literary history, the new technologies of writing, and changing patterns of readership, in addition to its commitment to the publication of contemporary literature and literary criticism through the Giramondo book imprint and the Sydney Review of Books. Its members are specialists in Australian literature, scholars engaged with classic works and authors, literary theorists, poets and novelists, and practitioners in the new genres of non-fiction. Because our members are writers as well as researchers on writing, we are vitally concerned with practice-led research as a legitimate field of academic research. See the Writing and Society website for further information.