

Swinburne University of Technology

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Fragments from a haunted house; or, art at no-arm's-length

Abstract:

There are no ghosts in the halls of Old Parliament House *per se*.
Just the odd whiff of an incumbent spirit distilled and aged
in its oaky cask. Makers' marks carved in press gallery balusters.
Ozymandian Dymo labels lit up on arcane switchboards.

But there *is* a ghost who haunts OPH. One who, like all ghosts, is at his core confused, pinned between competing realities. This is the pitiable, contorted variety of ghost who writes himself into a biographical poem to apologise for having had the temerity to have attempted it, and who hangs around spectrally thereafter murmuring apologies for having materialised in the first instance. This is a ghost who feels someone looking over his shoulder and wheels around only to be confronted by his own ghostly reflection, who sees right through himself and can't help but materialise once more on the other side to let you know, dear reader, that he knows very well his state of semi-transparence reveals a grotesquely non-substantial core. This is the ghost of a writing program graduate and Australian Prime Ministers Centre Summer Scholar deep in the Parliamentary Bermuda Triangle, trapped in the hall-of-mirrors heart of Australia's culture wars, haunted by the fragments of an abandoned poetry manuscript.

Biographical note:

Mitchell Welch obtained his BA in English and Political Science from the University of Queensland in 2010, and his MA in Writing from Swinburne University of Technology in 2014, in the course of which he was awarded an Australian Prime Ministers Centre Scholarship. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Antipodes*, *The Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cordite*, *Overland*, *Rabbit* &c. In 2015 he was awarded the NUW Overland Fair Australia Prize for Poetry. He knows a thing or two about ghosts, earning his living as a cemetery administrator in Melbourne.

Keywords:

Australian political history – biographical poetry – arts funding

Bending one's recalcitrant invention to someone else's need is not just frustrating, it is nearly impossible.

– Peter Porter, 'Working with Arthur Boyd'

1

Prime ministerial biographies were spread across the desk in a state of perpetual war. Menzies, Fadden, Curtin. Triumvirate, three-way scrimmage, or something more complex? The sticky notes poking from the paper-cut pages represented an impossible choir, each one a self-assured, inveigling voice competing for airtime. And here I was re-reading them all cross-wise, looking between the lines for the moment of *coup d'œil* that would give me my way through. I'd been staying at the library late,

listening for Black Rod stalking the corridors with his mace.
For PMs in procession through the cloister, squeaking boot-steps
in the King's Hall portrait salon. For the chorus of histories
in antistrophe. For the archaic babble of a travertine typing pool.

It's there in the empty chamber, a memory, but not an echo;
an echo contains an image of its whole, but this uncanny vibe
moves in whispering gallery waves of misremembrance. There.
Listen. *This* is the sound that haunts me most. The muttering

in the shadows. Murmurs anguished with desertion of purpose,
relegated to deep sub-frequencies and un-cadences, way below
the threshold of the real. After all this time, the chiefest advisors
are lingering. Malingering. Tug-o'-warring threadbare fictions

into highly-strung tightropes. Don't they know any Orphic lyre
as tremendous as this impulses one to pluck? To mete the peaks
and notches of decay. To ring the sustained and superaltern bells
of a bum note. You don't have to lean too hard on your hearing

to find a resonant frequency in the capital's dull, tectonic hum.

I had seven weeks at Old Parliament House in which to erect a work of biographical poetry on these not-so-dormant fault lines. I'd applied for the scholarship with the naïve belief that art bends exquisitely in constraint, and so constrained my art to an equally naïve idea about electoral appearances vs. political realities, a demonstration of how, despite the publicly-constructed acrimonies of adversarial politics, the ruling classes are chummy at best/in deep cahoots at worst. I spent those seven weeks chasing my tail and simultaneously twisting myself in knots. I was a self-constricting ouroboros. The more I struggled to escape my own subjectivity, the tighter I clung to my very-obviously-flailing self as subject.

During the residency – it’s important to note – I was in the uneasy position of being an artist technically on the payroll of the Attorney General’s department (at a time when the infamous Attorney General Brandis also had a hold on the Arts portfolio). I was stationed deep inside Old Parliament House, the all-too-real and truthfully monolithic symbol of the very thing I wanted to pull apart at its linguistic seams – the mirage of Australian Democracy. I quickly became aware under the decorous lights of history that every bit of research would have to be meticulously triangulated. And when I couldn’t verify the truthfulness of what I was digging up from the mire of wartime propaganda, smear campaigns and willful misrepresentation, I had no choice but to write myself into the frame to explain my sins of historicity away. And this is how I wrote myself into a corner.

2

In the end the unfinished manuscript was set to begin with a ghostly epigram:

Dreaming has a share of history. The statistics on dreaming would stretch beyond the pleasures of the anecdotal landscape into the barrenness of the battlefield. Dreams have started wars, and wars, from the very earliest of times, have determined the propriety and impropriety – indeed, the range – of dreams.

– Walter Benjamin, ‘Dream Kitsch’

And it hangs there still at the top of the abandoned manuscript, at the top of laptop’s virtual teletype roll, like a scrap of ceremonial robe torn on an empty corridor’s doorjamb’s nail. I read Benjamin’s essay sitting on the historic backbenches of the House of Representatives. It felt strange, but totally appropriate. No sooner had I read it did I find myself cloaked in the stuff of it, wearing it around the empty halls of Old Parliament House like warm, subcutaneous fat. (Incidentally, I was becoming fat.) Every new page of what became the failed manuscript was typed with hands poking tentatively from the multivalent folds of a conceptual dreamcoat. But like all otherworldly historical material mislaid in the here and now, its weave was loose and almost entirely transparent. When it came down to it, I was buck-naked.

I have an admission to make at this juncture: I went to Canberra with no idea how to write a biographical poem, let alone any idea of how to write a biographical poem about three ideologically-opposed prime ministers thrown together in the ultimate chapter of globalised warfare. I sat in the press gallery looking down at the empty House of Reps. Was I meant to be up here? As in, was this the right angle of incidence for my project? Was I supposed to be seeking some grail of journalistic balance? Of course not, but neither would it be sporting – being the spotlight operator now – to shed a better grade of light on one subject over the other. I was sitting up there in no-man’s-land.

Of course I was acutely aware of the risks: firstly of mythologising these men, these deeply flawed characters, too far, and, conversely, of humanising them too much. We know well the dangers of deification when it comes to historical figureheads, but there

is also a great cost to be paid in skimming the systemic and contextual apparatus in favour of the personal and human data. It isn't especially helpful or relevant, for example, to know that the great contemporaries of Menzies, Fadden and Curtin – Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini – were probably capable of great personal warmth and camaraderie, or that they were kind and giving towards nieces and nephews, or that in the gaslit night they might well have hunkered down in their war castles in a puddle of cuddly puppies. No, these were monster times in the grand scheme of things.

This was the balancing act. On one hand I wanted to rail against the abstract, Olympian scale of war subjects, but on the other hand I failed to find much poetic utility within the frame of close and domestic portraiture.

I had to be safe, I decided. Or, in other words, I cowed there with imagined (but arguably not unreal) missiles whistling overhead. Land mines underfoot. Even the gravest misstep can be chalked up to the lightheaded verve of creative fever, I thought, so why not write like a dream. Just a bit of gift shop kitsch. Mythologise these men all the way to hell, these characters, yes *characters*, take them all the way down into the ultra-camp territory of nightmares. Of gothic romance. Gothic horror. Satire and parody. Blow them up. If it were true that Menzies, Fadden and Curtin were in one sense surprisingly close and warm, but in another sense irreconcilably at odds, perhaps I could extract some dark entertainment from the dilemma: three stooges fighting over one body, a trinity in which each constituent part is paradoxically countervailing to and endlessly undermining both its other parts, and indeed its very constitution. I found my jumping-off point into hyper-mythology via John Curtin's dog-eared, heavily-annotated copy of *The Inferno*...

I work my way into the text, into notations penciled in the margins of a well-foxed copy of Dante's *Inferno*. The dream's opening end has the scent of petrichor and cordite, the tailing sludge of a perilous and rare-earth violence. A bona fide Seventh-Circle-type encounter.

In the bleary-eyed gyre of smoke, time's shape resolves. It is 1942, and all roads lead here. From Creswick, Brunswick and Cottesloe; from Townsville, Mackay, the highest peaks of the Darling Downs; from Jeparit, Ballarat and Parkville – a triple heliform gathers in

like a newborn time-form at the centre of a slithering snake storm. Triskelious, weaving together its nodding limbs. In black Cadillacs; on horseback; on the Indian Pacific playing bridge or hearts across the continent; in headlines and undertows; tied in triple windsors.

Sheaves of telegrammed cables willy through the black-on-velvet-black mountains. Lamson pneumatic tubes burst like burnt tongues from under the earth, spewing Hansard. The record books ignite in a tall, twistering column of old master dread. A colossus of light

emerges now from the deep of night. A minotaur, not of the classic minoan gestalt, but rather in the rearing format of Blake's Dante's bullock-bodied, human-middled beast. A breech rebirth, hind-leg-first

kicking in woolen slacks, the backwards-bending knees, the trunk, the fine-tailored three-piece suit and, howling now, the triple crown of three human heads, all horned and jockeying for bodily control. A material thing of monstrous uncertainty, a grim kinetic sculpture.

Not all shapes of such unequal sides find expression as tricephalic demiurges. But here he is, the bronze and scalene beast, wretched with both false opposites and lips that curl apart in low, grumbling opposition.

It's only a dream, I kept telling myself. Just a bit of kitsch. No different, in affective terms, to a prime minister's likeness on a tea towel. A PM's grinning mug on a commemorative mug. A deck of Parliament House playing cards. Just a souvenir poem. But each night in the courtyard of the semi-serviced apartment on Coranderrk Street, Supabarn dinner on the stove, Glebe Park's English elms rustling, I launched page after scrunched up page into the wastepaper pile. 'The dream' as conceptual apparatus eventually dissolved, very much in the way dreams are wont to do.

3

Day-by-day the Tent Embassy was coming back to life.

Theirs is the silence against which the parliament resonates in standing waves. On sitting days, King Stone George, some days you see him quaver. You smell the turning earth.

It was about 10am and thirty-two degrees. I was sketching in my notebook under the portico of the Museum Café, waiting for my morning coffee. Sketching is by no means my forte, but it helped me pick out hidden meanings in the architecture. On this particular morning, drawing the white metalwork frames of the exterior doors revealed a repeating pattern hiding in plain sight – the familiar double cruciform of the Union Jack. The barista brought my coffee and I turned to face the day.

The sun was pushing its oily time-clouds overhead from behind Mt Ainslie, over the War Memorial (a thing I described somewhere in the abandoned manuscript as, c. 1943, 'an emergent egg-tooth, a byzantine monument / to the dead and not-yet-dead'). There was a hint of wildfires way out on the distant edge of imagination. Then – pulling out to a helicopter shot– the lake, the lawns and institutions, the National

Roses. Finally, the Embassy, a new tent erected every few days as residents returned from all corners of their nations, the proud flag-letters:

S-O-V-E-R-E-I-G-N-T-Y.

I knew it was vital to write these people into my retelling as more than footnotes, which was what they were reduced to in so many of the histories I'd been reading. But my manuscript was looking more and more like a tight-fitting biography of a very specific handful of powerful white men who lived and died standing on the piled footnotes of these people's lives and deaths. I reached back:

To lucerne fields loose in time. Walk across a pasture
peopled by rangy chaff-cutters. Mob of eastern greys
on hindquarters, reaching illiberally for the last green
leaves. National Institutions gone, and those remaining
lit so bright, surround us. Deep ring of blackness beyond.

At the base of Ainslie's slouch-hat shadow,
a ragged molar
teeths...

I was stuck again. Stuck standing in an empty field, somewhere between appropriation and imagination. A burly man in a sharp suit and sunglasses was standing with folded arms on the kerb of King George Road. The barista came back to take away my cup.

'Who's that?' I asked.

'Some kind of head spook,' she said. 'Last time I saw him was the day Julia Gillard lost her shoe running from the Pork Barrel. Smell that? He's watching.'

'Where there's smoke there's fire, is that it?'

'It's a smoking ceremony.' We walked to the balustrade. There at the top of the very white stairs on which the dismissal was announced, on the very land that was not so long ago a great meeting place of the Ngunawal, a black man was lighting a small fire of native grasses on the breach. He was singing quietly, 'Warding off the bad spirits,' the barista said.

'Bad spirits?'

'Hockey and Abbott.'

4¹

-----Original Message-----

From: Mitchell Welch

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Question

Dear [REDACTED],

How is everything in Sunny Canberra?

Here in Melbourne I'm fast approaching a deadline for a paper to be delivered to the Australasian Association of Writing Programs conference, and was hoping you might be able to help. The theme of the conference is 'Writing the Ghost Train', no doubt opening the floor for discussions around Derrida's 'hauntology' and maybe even your translucent old comrade, the Specter of Marx. It's a convenient theme for me. As you know, the unfinished MoAD work which is the subject of my submission is itself a kind of Lovecraftian 'Horror in the museum'-type dream sequence.

E.g.

Last night, instead of political biographies, I read and re-read H.P. Lovecraft's fittingly ghostwritten 'Horror in the Museum' and sank *en fugue*, dreamt of waxing into an insensate display: a politician, or worse: an endorsement. A half-peeling campaign sticker on the well-meaning wall of a heritage-listed media stall. Poo on 4BC! Joh for PM! National Chicken Nutrition Month! Or, the ultimate macabre: an imagined object of Canberra's darkest poet-politicians. A bisected mind in the lurid, luminescent canisters of Whitlam's childhood odes. Bird food for Menzies' eldritch birds of doom; Hasluck's lost explorer's gasping throat; Haylen's bomb.

In fact, I'll admit it. I've become so afraid (read: paranoid) of the unseen ghosts (read: spooks) of OPH, that I can hardly bring myself to face them directly. I've even abandoned my favourite chapter, the one in which John Curtin is visited on his death bed at the Lodge by The Ghost of Christmas Island Future, who in this re-telling of *A Christmas Carol/The Divine Comedy* is a flame-haired Red Cross worker who leads him phantasmally to the Curtin Immigration Detention Centre. Protestors outside hold up signs saying 'Not in my name!'. Curtin, boiling alive in his wool suit, watches the purgatorial souls as they melt into the dust of the earth amidst a sentinel ring of boabs and razor wire. 'Not in my name indeed!', is the basic conclusion.

The problem was this: I was affording Curtin, who was after all a staunch supporter of White Australia, an opportunity to redeem himself by entirely fictional catharsis. Did this mean I was somehow obliged to afford Menzies the same kind of revisionism?

There is, as they say, no way in hell.

Anyway, in keeping with the conference's ghostly theme I'm wanting to work in a subtle allusion to Kubrick's *The Shining* (as distinct from S. King's) re: the experience of writing in residence at Old Parliament House. Hopefully the analogue is obvious enough: the disorienting labyrinth of corridors; the supremely frustrated Minotaur-come-writer pacing up and down; the foundations of that massive, neoclassical building laid over the bones of an indigenous people. I want to invoke Kubrick for his chess-of-the-gods-like representation of the abstract and ageless cycle of power and violence.

I thought about this film every day while I was there. And so the question is: I was wondering: is there a Room 237 at OPH? And if so, what was it used for? I'm imagining a bear-suited office-bearer up to no good. Maybe a ghostly rendezvous down in the members' sauna.

All the best,

M.

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
To: Mitchell Welch
Subject: Re: Question [sec = unclassified]

Dear Mitch,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I have checked the heritage register, and although the rooms are all numbered (and although there are more than 237 rooms), there is no Room 237 at Old Parliament House. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Regards,

[REDACTED]

-----Original Message-----

From: Mitchell Welch

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Re: Question [sec = unclassified]

Thanks for checking that out for me [REDACTED]. What a shame – nothing worse than an incomplete metaphor. Although I suppose it was always going to be incomplete – thankfully I was never driven to *quite* the same level of writers'-block-induced violence as was old Jack Torrance (no axe-holes hacked in those big heritage doors you'll be pleased to know). Still, one can't help walking down the corridors of OPH and getting a sense of 'shining' from some of the rooms. The abandoned members' bar in particular was, for me, a kind of bizarro 'Gold Room' – as you will recall, this was the ball room in which JT encounters the phantom revelers of Independence Day 1921. It could just as easily have been Australia Day 1927, I reckon. Now there's an idea for a themed event if you want to get the punters in.

And even though I wasn't exactly snowed in, the desertion of Canberra in the post-Christmas political off-season was somehow almost as eerie and isolating as the Overlook in winter. I was getting daily nosebleeds from the altitude and dry heat, which – in those slow, old lifts – puts one daily in mind of elevators of blood.

And, after all that, here I am. Running out of time and ideas. Two lines forwards, three lines back. All work and no play makes Mitch go something-something.

All the best,

M.

5

Bronwyn Bishop is shorter than any adult human I have met. Or at least this is how I remember her. Impossibly, impishly short. Photographic evidence from our brief meeting in the President of the Senate's Courtyard, however, calls my memory into question. In reality, in eight-inch stilettos, she very nearly met my eye.

'So you're the poet, are you?' she asked archly over her glasses, 'Yes.' She answered all her own questions. 'You must recite something for us.'

'Oh... I'm afraid I'm not that kind of poet. And anyway, you can't learn by rote what isn't even written yet.' Despite the deflection, the Speaker remained intent on speaking with me to the exclusion of the other Summer Scholars – more serious policy wonks who I suppose posed the threat of an embarrassing question about their area of academic interest: immigration, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, or worse – Bishop's involvement as a beneficiary of John Howard's exploitation of One Nation's anti-Asian sentiments in the late 1990s.

Are poets these days the safer option? The payroll poet is. Mitch is, the Canberra Castrato.

She wanted to know what I was writing about. I told her I was writing about the informal wartime triumvirate of Menzies, Fadden and Curtin, with Chifley's brief postwar interregnum as a kind of epochal postscript before the unfortunate nation went Full Menzies. I told her about Curtin and Menzies supposedly sharing a semi-regular whiskey. 'It's all bullshit, Bob,' PM Curtin used to (allegedly) say, feet up on his counterpart's desk after a long day in the trenches.

In particular I told her I was just that morning interrogating the improbable fact of a wartime Prime Minister (Billy Hughes) personally ordering the imprisonment of a future wartime Prime Minister (John Curtin), both members of the same party, for the latter's conscientious objection to WWI and, years later, that same future wartime leader (WWII, Curtin) being elected an actual present tense wartime leader and having no choice in the matter but to embody the very thing his younger self had loathed, all while being taunted from the opposition ranks by the former wartime PM (Hughes) who imprisoned him, now a defector to the opposition ranks. I told her I was trying to pick a path through that particularly tangled cat's cradle of historical affairs, and confessed that, apart from the gaol sequence, it wasn't an especially poetic constellation.

Tonight's dream dawns like a prison window sun, in a blur of lines.
The TV's flux before its picture resolves. The cross-legged prisoner
of conscience is editing his letters carefully on the cellblock's floor,
a journalist hunting submarines in Rhinelands of unconsciousness.

'Well,' said Madame Speaker, 'there have always been two Labor parties.' Then she leaned in very close and said: 'I think there are two Robert Menzies too. The first one was, well... he left a lot to be desired. But then he went abroad and met Friedrich Hayek.' She lowered her voice to a whisper. 'I'm a Hayekian you know.'²

During the whole conversation I was conscious of a shadowy figure hovering at the fringe, listening but never interceding. This, I was later told, was the Parliamentary Budget Officer. His image came to haunt me in the following days. As we walked back down Capital Hill to the now-much-smaller-seeming Old Parliament, I was hyper-aware that although my somewhat bolshie scholarship application was approved under a Labor government, the gears had turned several full clicks to the right. The following facts suddenly seemed very pertinent to my research outcomes:

1. That my meager stipend and generous accommodations were provided directly by the Department of the Attorney General A.K.A the Minister for the Arts;
2. That the computer in my temporary office was remotely accessible by the staff of the Attorney General's Department's IT Department at all times;

3. That the ABC's Barrie Cassidy had recently been forced out of the Old Parliament House Advisory Council following pressure from the AG/AM, The Hon. George Brandis, due to a perceived left bias; and
4. That the Parliamentary Budget Officer was for some reason attending a reception for the National Cultural Institutions' various Summer Scholars (Was he there to review the program's funding? Would those institutions harboring left-leaners and/or bleeding-hearted artists be financially penalised?).

That was it. From the day of the reception onwards the proverbial supply bills were blocked. I couldn't move my manuscript forward in any direction without some cartoon horror jumping out from the cloisters. But photographic evidence once more calls my memory into question. If he was there at all, the Parliamentary Budget Officer must be the Dracula of this gothic story, for his image does not appear in a single photo from the event in the President of the Senate's Courtyard.

6

'I'm doing some research at the Australian Prime Ministers Centre and I was just wondering if I could see the room where Prime Minister Chifley... er, *stayed*.'

'The Chifley Suite?'

'Exactly.' I followed the receptionist up and around the narrow stairs. I was at the Kurrajong Hotel hoping to find a way out. I wasn't the first and I wouldn't be the last. I suspect Joseph Benedict Chifley had been on a similar mission, albeit abstractly, when he had his fatal episode in this very room. Not in this bed, of course, but in the bed that was here more than sixty years ago. The ghost bed. I'd been reading more and more about Chifley, moving closer and closer to an end point. The light at the end of the tunnel. The light on the hill. But the more I read, the more the archive – the whole notion of 'archive' – became an object of dread and suspicion. If there was indeed a light at the end of the tunnel, then I was an out-of-body rat slowly becoming aware of the carefully-constructed maze between me and the open air.

The carefully spaced out crumbs:

- O' Chifley, laconic leaner on cottage fences, glib admirer of seasonal bulbs;
- O' Chifley, whose direct line at OPH was one digit removed from a local butcher's, and who, as PM, would humbly scribble down the customers' orders and phone them through;
- O' Chifley, who took an hour to cross the road from the pub to the union branch on account of all the handshaking and 'how's-y'r-father'-ing;
- O', Chifley, who lived alone in the Kurrajong Hotel, who left his wife in Bathurst, who late at night was known to ring the local radio station in bouts of melancholy to request the same sad song again and again: 'I'm a Lonely Petunia in an Onion Patch';
- O' Chifley, whose last dictation I found inside a thin folio at the National Library, so crisp and flowery it seemed almost planted. A letter dictated to his

secretary in this very room on the night of his death. Not an edict, nor parliamentary memoranda, but a letter to a personal friend. An enquiry after the attainment of some prize blooms for the garden of his Busby Street home.

I was alone now in the antechamber to a puzzling outworld. How could someone in such a grubby game as politics have led such an artfully, self-consciously avuncular life? How is it that the union leader who sent government troops to break up a coal-strike is remembered as the beloved uncle of the working class? Benevolent Chifley. In my own great fit of Kurrajong fever I began to wonder if I was only drawn to him as a postscript to the wartime leaders' story because his documentary legacy was in fact a purpose-built narrative of postwar closure. A story to put a cracked-up nation to bed. A story that moved the goal posts of the emancipatory workers' movement deep into the distance, up on the hill. A story that buried the revolutionary spirit under potted colour and patted down the grave-top with a fatherly wink.

I was already way past the work I'd done on Menzies, Fadden and Curtin, but I wanted to follow this last idea to its logical conclusion. There was no moment of revelation, but there was work laid out. The old engine driver died in this room, and so I scooped up what was left and loaded him onto the mortuary train. For better or worse I tried one last time to write my way towards the light. End of tunnel.

Research Statement

Research Background

In 2015, Arts Minister George Brandis announced \$100 million would be redirected from the independent Australia Council for the Arts to a newly established National Program for Excellence in the Arts to be administered directly by the Department, prompting many prominent writing practitioners, writing program conveners and academics to decry the policy as an affront to artistic independence. 'Fragments from a Haunted House; or, Art at no arm's length' tests the central claim of the dissenters: that the arm's-length funding model 'is vital to protecting democratic freedom of expression' (Australians for Artistic Freedom 2015).³

Research contribution

'Fragments' combines excerpts from an abandoned poetry manuscript with the narrative of their creation 'at no arm's length' – in other words, with direct funding and oversight from a government department. In exploring the work's dead ends, 'Fragments' reveals the confluence of paranoia, scholarly duty, political sympathy and invisible ideology that haunts the writer under these conditions, and lends credence to the argument that dissent in these circumstances is stifled, if not formally, then at least by way of psychological bottleneck. That the grey eminence of political interference is so strong a force that it functions to disrupt the practice of art even if entirely imagined.

Research significance

Both the practice and praxis elements of ‘Fragments’ were conducted during a residency at Old Parliament House as part of the Australian Prime Ministers Centre Summer Scholarship program. Certain of these fragments have been read or performed in the following forums: during two public Australian Prime Ministers Centre seminars at Old Parliament House; as part of a keynote address to the National Roundtable of Prime Ministerial Collecting Agencies at Curtin University; and as part of a public lecture, ‘Poets in power’, a recording of which is held in the collection of the Australian Prime Ministers Centre library.

Endnotes

¹ Sections of this chain of email correspondence have been redacted in accordance with the various email, privacy and use-of-digital-carriage-services policies of the Attorney General’s Office. Others sections have been fictionalised.

² *So she says*. In hindsight it seems Madame Speaker’s greater unacknowledged bias leans towards the economic thought of the other mega liberal thinker of C20, Milton Friedman, if only on the basis of her spectacularly literal reading of his famous analogy: ‘dropping money out of a helicopter’.

³ at http://www.australianunions.org.au/australians_for_artistic_freedom, accessed 19th February 2016.