



AN  
INTERVIEW  
WITH

ANIA  
WALWICZ

By JESSICA L. WILKINSON

PHOTOGRAPH: NICHOLAS WALTON-HEALEY

'I always had such a good time, good time, good time girl'—these words are looping in my head as I approach a small figure sitting at a table for two on a sunny Sunday afternoon in Melbourne's CBD. The words are from Ania Walwicz' prose poem 'Little Red Riding Hood,' and I am heading to meet the poet responsible for this feminist rewriting of the original fairytale.

A university tutor introduced me to Walwicz's writing when I was a young student. I remember being surprised by the sustained dynamism of *red roses* (UQP, 1992), a book-length poetic/ficto-critical meditation on 'becoming one's mother': 'i want to write about everybody's mother everything is becoming my mother everyone is becoming my mother all texts speak about her' (21). Without punctuation or chapter breaks to pace reading, one proceeds breathless through the text and arrives at the 'end' somewhat exhausted. Until reading this work, I had never realised how much I had come to rely on the conventions of grammar and syntax to guide literary representations of the world. Walwicz was one of the first writers to challenge my language use, and to push me towards my own language play and experimentation.

Beneath this flouting of convention, however, Walwicz' works explore complex political, social, cultural and personal issues. Many of her prose poems in the collections *Writing* (1982) and *Boat* (1989), for example, address questions of identity. As a Polish immigrant to Australia in 1963 (aged 12), Walwicz frequently touches on themes of alienation, subordination, dislocation and loss of language. In 'so little,' for example:

We were so big there and could do everything. [...] My father was the tallest man in the world. Here we were nothing. There vet in the district and respect. The head of the returned soldiers and medals. Here washed floors in the serum laboratory. Shrinking man. I grow smaller everyday. The world gets too big for me. We were too small for this big country. We were so little. We were nothing. We were none and naught and no money. We

were no speak. There we were big and big time. Here we were so little.<sup>1</sup>

Other poems explore sexual identity; in 'Cherry,' she draws a connection between sex(uality) and violence:

Cherry, cherry pie. Sugar baby. Baked these pies in New York. Very bright, very red. Cherry pie time now, then [...] My mother, she beat me. Made my nose run. Red lady. Cherry time. (*Writing*, 9).

And 'needle' suggests a complex process of stitching together self-identity:

i sew me i get a packet of needles i'm a needle now i'm sharp tip with a little eye i go right in i make me better i make me i sew me needles and pins that's how it begins' (*Boat*, 219)

Surrealism, psychoanalysis and dream-works are among Walwicz' many influences, as we note from the fluidity and stream-of-consciousness style of her writing. As she has said, '[i]t appears that I am producing this dismembered language, but in fact I am producing language which is actual and closer to the actual process of feeling and thinking. My motto is: notation and enactment of states of feeling/being.'<sup>2</sup> Walwicz often combines these dream-like narratives with the use of fairytale mythology as a way towards exploring self-identity. We see this in the aforementioned poem 'Little Red Riding Hood,' where Little Red is appropriated to assert a rebellion against norms of female subordination. The poem 'king,' which follows this interview, explores the kingdom of the self and the characters through which one imagines or projects that self.

In addition to her books, Walwicz' work has been published in more

1. Qtd. in Sneja Gunew, 'In Journeys Begin Dreams: Antigone Kefala and Ania Walwicz,' in *Framing Marginality: Multicultural literary studies*, Melbourne: MUP, 1994, 71-92.

2. Jenny Digby, *A Woman's Voice*, St. Lucia, UQP, 1996, 109-10.

than two-hundred journals and anthologies. She has performed her work locally and internationally (including, as she notes in this interview, a performance in Geneva alongside one of her inspirations, John Cage) and currently teaches Creative Writing in RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing program.

Prior to this interview I had listened to her 52-minute non-stop recitation of *Body* (1999) and wondered what sort of fire would accompany this seemingly boundless energy. She suggested we meet at Federal Coffee Palace off Bourke Street in Melbourne's CBD. As we discuss writing, politics and teaching over cups of tea, I am struck by the wicked and delightful wit that punctuates her responses. We end up talking, non-stop, for almost three hours.

JESSICA L. WILKINSON

**JW:** *In a 1996 interview<sup>1</sup> you discuss your writing as an avant-garde practice and how not a lot of experimental work at that point in time was really being produced in Australia. The literary scene has changed considerably since then. How do you feel about the state of experimental writing in Australia now?*

**AW:** I think the whole scene is ruled by very conservative writers. There's a kind of hierarchy and the experimental writing is still seen as a sort of suspicious category. Inescapably, perhaps, but I don't know... But when self-motivated or self-organised projects arise, people can leave that hierarchy. That's what I tell students: self-publishing, self-motivated activity is the best and I think it's always been like that. Bukowski wrote a poem along the same lines; that there's a certain kind of poetics that will always re-surface.

Many, many years ago I was in New Zealand and I was invited to send some work for publication and a person who was in charge of selection was an author who clearly didn't like what I did. Anyway, recently I met another New Zealand writer who [told me that] the author's still there, still in charge, and this is twenty years later... So it's amazing the kind of rule of certain conservative modes of thought. But the opposition to that perhaps is created by that very same hierarchy, so it could be argued that maybe they're doing the world a great favour because people then work against it.

**JW:** *What writing would you place in that conservative category?*

**AW:** I've just been reading about that terrible acid attack in Russia—you know with that man who attacked the artistic director of the Bolshoi theatre [Sergei Filin]. Someone attacked him, so I better not get into this! That idea of 'what is good poetry' reflects the political ideas of society. You know, I always go back to the reception theory of Roman Ingarden, who analysed how national identity is constructed through literature; it's a politicised field.

1. Interview with D.J. Huppertz, *Alt X* 19/3/1996, <http://www.altx.com/au/contact.htm>

Australia is perversely now entering into a very conservative view of itself, so the kind of poetics that that fosters is a very literal level. In fact, literature could be seen as representing a complete indirect perverse mirror image of the political life of a nation in the way certain people are 'selected.'

I'm always in the category of the borderline. It used to be 'multicultural affairs.' But 'multicultural affairs' are now reserved for terrorists, you know, not what is seen as desirable!

*JW: The Melbourne poetry scene is quite vibrant at the moment, which is wonderful. The down side to this is that cliques or bands are forming; your loyalties towards particular people and particular modes of writing is important if you want to survive.*

AW: Yes. You know what? I've been staying away from all this, being introverted. But indirectly, in teaching, I was confronting all of these things head-on because I was proposing [to the students] liberation from all these restraints.

*JW: So you don't see yourself as part of a particular group?*

AW: No, no. And these things can be truly bizarre because as soon as you become a member of a certain group, there's a certain allegiance that's asked of you, then you have to stick to it in a paradigm. I'm the lone wolf! But clearly you and I have established some sort of contact so... I would rather people would read something I did and then have some connection with me.

I've had very mixed reactions to my work, from the gradient of great admiration to absolute aggression. Even last year I had nasty emails from high school students; some teacher was using my work from the past and then probably proposing to them that they contact me... It was a very old piece I wrote about Australia [called 'Australia'] in fact, so it was going back to that sort of politicised view. But I wrote this in my youth.

Maybe the more diverse reactions symbolise a stronger response. If all people can say is that they love [your work], then you're writing like Pam Ayres, whom I don't despise but it's a populist notion of what writing can be.

I have an enormous amount of writing that I haven't even proposed to anyone because as soon as I do it I just want to hide it. But I must come out of the shell. I find it all very difficult because of those sorts of disparate reactions and my own reaction to their reaction. Perhaps one should just throw it out the window and not worry!

*JW: Do you think that your teaching has influenced your writing or had certain effects on your writing at any point?*

AW: Not really. I think I've used my own writing the most when I've worked with children. And their writing, which is very beautiful, has affected me more than adult writing. I haven't done any projects with children for a while now. But it was working with children that had, sort of, invigorated my own writing because of their... more, well, diverse creative response that is still not beaten out of them. Education seems to create a sort of space where there are paradigms or outlines which people are pushed into. Well, not all, but some. So I don't know, I'll have to seek the company of children.

*JW: There's a sort of emotional honesty with children, perhaps, which I suppose aligns with a lot of your work and the idea of the unconscious and subconscious being voiced, or uncensored.*

AW: Yes, a more spontaneous sort of realm. I remember fondly the projects I have done with children. I did a big project in a Girls' School and the students were from very diverse backgrounds and I'll never forget their writing. One child wrote a ten-page story called 'How I Love to Think'—it was amazing and I showed that story at a teachers' conference and they refused to believe that a child wrote it. They thought I wrote it!

*JW: And you frequently work with a genre of literature associated with childhood—the fairytale. Tell me about your relationship to fairytales.*

Actually the project I'm beginning now [*Horse*] is involved with a book of fairytale; an amazing situation, that... I was teaching at RMIT and a person came to my class—an older woman, a librarian, who met me when I was eleven, nearly twelve when I arrived in Australia. She brought with her a fairytale book, a Russian fairytale, called *konyuk garbunok*—'The Hunchback Pony.' And I almost fainted; it was a book that I was once given as a first-grade prize for my endeavours. So my work is now connected with re-writing this fairytale and also analysing what I'm writing. And, in a way, it's the story of my life. Isn't it an amazing situation, where teaching was like a sort of conduit.

When I started to write as a child [I was] writing a major fairytale—a sort of journey of the heroine—and it wouldn't end. I'm returning back to it, maybe it's a natural depiction, like a diaristic depiction of my own psyche that I've always come back too. It was about a king who is ill and a magician has to travel to rescue this king. So it's like two sides of the psychological life: the self rescuing the self. And in fact that theme continues right up to *Horse*. So what am I doing in fact? I could be having all sorts of constructs of fabrication and construction. Maybe all I'm doing is fashioning a diary or imprint of myself.

*JW: Tell me more about Horse.*

AW: *Horse* will be part of my doctorate. It is exciting me now because all the time ideas are coming to me. So it will draw on this fairytale 'The Hunchback Pony,' where the downtrodden hero is helped along with the assistance of a good spirit—this pony. Strangely, it does not have the darkness of my other work. *Horse* will incorporate a little film—I've made little films in the past—so a multi-media element is emerging in my work. I don't know how

it will pan out but I feel enthused.

*JW: You also produce visual art work, some of which we feature throughout this issue of Rabbit. Tell me about these works.*

AW: I've had shows about once every five years. Two years ago I had a show in Youill Crowley, in Sydney, of drawings but with writing on them. They are drawings of inner-states. But they are more connected to graffiti or Antonin Artaud's realm of depiction. The drawings I showed in Sydney were all done on A4 pieces of paper so one of them did feature in a literary magazine. They're very easy to reproduce and they're very rough and ready. They haven't found favour but then finding favour... is that what one wants? It's curious isn't it? Like looking at Schwitters. I love his work. Seeing his exhibition in January at NGV's 'Mad Square' was so sobering and wonderful. I went to see it twice because it showed how art exists in a completely different realm than the one that is favoured by the political sphere or the one that is constructed by society.

*JW: Kurt Schwitters produces a lot of collage work and you do that in red roses through a kind of verbal collage...*

AW: That's the beginning of the ficto-critical writing which was being produced around that same time. I'm incorporating literary theory into the work and also I began at that stage to write little essays, so I'll continue with that. My latest one was presented at a conference last year, and it will be published this year; it is called 'cut tongue' and it is about 'mechanism of defence' or 'writing as a mechanism of defence.' I actually quote Freud saying the only reason I write is to analyse myself. The only reason I write is to analyse Ania. So actually I am playing with literary theory and that is an enjoyable area of ideas.

*JW: Tell me more about the psychoanalytic threads in your work.*

AW: I've been keeping dream diaries since '93. Twenty-years. God.

My book *Palace of Culture*, which I have ready for publication, is all based on the dream-diary. So I've been analysing myself and I'm still continuing with it... self-analysis. I love this sort of play of ideas. But the [ideal] kind of audience for my work would have to be someone who is widely educated and engaged in this kind of thinking.

*JW: For an audience who doesn't know about psychoanalytic theory or feminism or postmodernism there is still a forceful energy in your work, which evokes certain responses from the reader.*

AW: Well I'm very pleased. You are the ideal reader! But I've had so many bizarre responses to my work. Quite off-putting. Sort of irrelevant or antagonistic responses.

*JW: What do you think drives these adverse responses?*

AW: There is a threat to that kind of homeostasis of human thought when a different idea occurs. It is strange. People have reservations against altered states. I used to think that I was engaged in furthering human consciousness, it's a very communist idea—I did grow up in a sort of communist realm...

But it is strange isn't it? Should one worry about it? No. I think one should do these things and not worry. But then when it comes to publishing, it becomes a sort of confronting area.

*JW: Can you tell me a little bit about the energy in your work—the way red roses moves non-stop with such speed, for example? Where does it come from? And what drives that energy?*

AW: It's driven by madness (laughs). A person once came up to me after a reading and said, 'if you didn't write, I don't know what you would do.' I was lost for something to say. I should have made some comment, I don't know, but I just wonder how I appear so diabolical. I think it's the monologue of the unconscious that exists

within everyone, but people don't want to confront that. But, you know, so many people have done this—when it comes to cinema no one questions this, but when it comes to writing it becomes a more questionable activity. So the literary area is a much more regulated area.

*JW: It's interesting that avant-garde visual art has been more accepted than avant-garde poetry.*

AW: Yes. And it seems that in America the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets and other more recent poetic forms are mostly published for educational purposes, so in large books. As soon as anything's different, it is seen as dangerous. Why is that? It's a kind of selection that happens. The norm, for instance, the worship of sport—which I always find the most perverse of all, being totally uninterested in it—you know how you have news about different events and immediately the football comes on and the fascination of the simple play of men throwing balls at one another! It always amazes me that people can get into it. The ability of people to watch tennis—watch the same thing repeated—is re-iterated in literature too. That sort of family format... that's human nature, perhaps.

But I do know people enter into a state of semi-consciousness on the whole. Lacan said people cannot live within The Real; reality escapes them, but that's the very state I want to induce in people. It's uncomfortable and people have objected to that and they would much prefer to be in that semi-sleep, and sport supplies that. I'm amazed that people actually favour that state, which to me is incredibly tedious. But I'm in the minority.

I took a friend to these various plays I was involved in and she said, 'Why do you go and see plays like that?' and I was offended... Then I thought about the kind of comforting art with redemptive qualities that she looks up to, like *The Sound of Music* for instance—to me these things are less interesting but the majority of the population favours them. You know, in Germany people objected to a

certain shopping arcade as being very glitzy—the very people who designed it then showed statistically that most people said they found it beautiful and they had proof and that's a very alarming and sobering thought.

*JW: Thinking about the autobiographical aspects of your writing, how much of 'Ania' is in your works?*

AW: Strangely, I feel that what I have done in my writing is probably the most direct notation of my own psychic processes and I'm only appreciating that looking back upon it.

As a child I remember wearing a red jumper and looking in this mirror in the bathroom with silver or steel studs in it and I wrote about it—well, this is the Lacanian mirror stage. I said: I have to remember what I look like and this is how I look. It was as though I was going to meet myself somewhere. That's been the obsession, which probably shows how tenuous my ideas of identity have always been. If I was a healthy person, I would've become a footballer by now. So that's how life drives us to different forms of perception. I really like Oliver Sacks too, his notions of what perception is, and maybe my own work is sort of emerging as a kind of 'trial.'

You know, the more one reads, the more one realises a correlation between one's autobiography and their writing. It's inescapable. Even when people start saying it isn't so at all, it *is* so. Always is so. Maybe that's all anyone writes; the story of their life. That's my latest idea.

*JW: How has the experience of coming to Australia at a very young age come into your work? You mentioned before the poem 'Australia,' and there is a sense of alienation in that poem...*

AW: It is there. I can never live this down. I tried to stop it from being published at one stage!

*JW: And in other pieces like 'so little'...*

AW: I would say alienation already existed as a concept for me in Poland too because I questioned ideas. I remember marching in a Communist march with children on the first of May and really enjoying myself and carrying a flag. I had a moment of utter horror when I realised the Nazis felt the same way as they were marching. And I found an encyclopaedia in the attic of my house in Poland which I thought was a Communist encyclopaedia before I could read; it was actually a Nazi encyclopaedia... So as a child I grew up in what was West Prussia—German territory—I was going to school with children who were German, as I was born in 1951. So that whole sort of realm of shifting identity was right there in front of me and it was bizarre. And to think that six years earlier, the parents of the very people I went to school with were in the German army.

You know, in Poland, in first grade, they showed us a film on the beginning of the Second World War. Polish children were shot from the German helicopters and the Germans made the film themselves and we started to cry. They had to switch the film off. That sort of political confrontation with reality was always part of my life. So there was nothing new in coming to Australia. Of course, at the moment, Australia's reliving a tremendous sort of frightening aspect of the refugee crisis, where identity is seen in a completely different light. I heard this Australian diplomat talking about how in the past there was a day of the refugees and how Australians became so defensive. So we're living in a most bizarre world situation now, altogether with terrorism, questions of identity have resurfaced...

The idea of the peaceful place that Australia was no longer exists. I think after Bali, Australia has descended into a realm of anxiety. But curiously, is it depicted? Or maybe in times of greatest anxiety people will try to escape, just as Hollywood created the musical at the time of the Depression. So maybe the opposite will happen—

the more violence there is the more people will be engaging in musicals—how awful! Frightening things are too frightening. And maybe the experimental modes flourish at times of greatest wealth, like Beckett's work became popular in the 60s and 70s when the economy was functioning very well. Maybe the stylised modes of convention are manifesting the violence we are living in, because people can escape the horror of economic collapse by going to see some jolly musical, something placating—*Jersey Boys*...

*JW: Your work not only confronts cultural identity but also gender identity and power relations. My favourite piece of yours, 'Little Red Riding Hood,' presents a strong female character. I love the line 'I was so lively, so livewire tense such a highly pitched little'—the idea of pitch and sound and a woman's voice, raised against the wolves, or becoming as strong as the wolf. It's a very feminist poem.*

AW: Well it was written in that era. That was actually my first published piece of work. It was only a little poem and actually looking back upon that, there's the fairytale again, and it's almost a physiological fairytale too... (referring to the story of my body).

I've done an art performance based on or connected with it. I wrote a much longer piece and I had a Little Red Riding Hood outfit and I made a wolf out of my hands like shadow-play which I learnt from a book on shadow-play. It was [performed] in a theatre in Adelaide with a big screen behind me. It was the wolf coming out of me. Growling. I made a voice in the kitchen, my cat got very frightened but, when I played that voice, it was actually the voice of a devil. I got frightened myself! So sometimes my own work puzzles me or frightens me. And the psychological forces within it I'll be analysing now—analysis is never complete.

*JW: Do you think that your feminist perspective has changed over time?*

AW: Very much so. Actually there was a very interesting student

who made the point in class that, in his view, the voice of feminism has been suppressed—in the contemporary era—and that is so. Actually in my own life I've seen this great flowering of expression and this is being suppressed and there's a whole wave against it. I never knew that in my own lifetime I would see such a complete reversal in attitude. It is very frightening. And I think it's palpable that the Women's Studies courses have now been incorporated into history—in fact they are history. And in fact, no one wants to even talk about it now. It's a historical movement. But I wonder how the contemporary young students view it? Do they see it as no longer concerning them? That frightens me.

*JW: Yes, and activities and writing that were powerful and subversive in the sixties and seventies are almost viewed with suspicion now...*

AW: Yes, or no longer looked at. And it may be impossible to go back to that reading that I had as a young person of certain works that were presented to me in a feminist mode.

Apparently, the number of women writers has dwindled now. So we're moving backwards. How to affect the situation? I don't know. And feminism did have a great success in the academic sphere. In my early teaching, people said 'half women's writing we'll study,' but no one talks in that way anymore. This gender question has become a historical question. And even in queer theory when we look at who is writing queer literature, it's heterosexuals that are doing it. So what an amazing theft! But that is the transgressive nature of history. Everything changes. I wonder what the literature of the future will be? It might operate on a completely different level.

*JW: In your ficto-critical paper 'The Reluctant Debutante' you ask—yourself? the reader?—if you are allowed to write like Cixous now; if you have permission, or if that writing is confined to its own era. Can you talk about those ideas?*



AW: It is an interesting question. How we view material from the past. Certain authors from the past—nineteenth century authors—would be completely scandalised in the way we read them now or misread them or, as Derrida said, every reading is a misreading. So it's a malleable position and the author no longer has control of things or they can't specify the way they will be used somewhere.

I wrote a piece about racism at one stage, which is written from the perspective of a racist, and actually a person criticised it saying it could be used by racists. Well it's a very unlikely sort of idea, but on the other hand, Henry Lawson became a mouth piece for a right wing movement in Western Australia. How bizarre that is! How would he feel about that? No one asked him! And I was in Japan at a conference where I read a paper which incorporated Yukio Mishima, whom I love, but afterwards I was surrounded by tremendously enthusiastic old Japanese. Then I was told there's actually a whole movement which wants to reclaim that Chinese territory. You know at the moment this has resurfaced very strongly, but they have taken Mishima as their 'source' because of his nationalism and very radical viewpoints. How strange that is. Would he like it? Maybe. Maybe. But literature is such a minefield. Rushdie—did he anticipate what would lead from comments that he made? And we are living in an era now where literature can actually be considered an act of tremendous political punishment... Well you know sedition laws in Australia ... what effect will they have on literature?

*JW: You once met one of your major inspirations, who was at the forefront of experimental artistic production, John Cage. Tell me about this encounter.*

AW: Yes, I performed at this event in Geneva with him. Highlight of my life. That was a long time ago. 1990. Just before he died. I felt so privileged to meet him. You know the story he told me which shocked me? This was at the height of his fame; he had his own biographer travelling with him and had concerts arranged all over the place. An orchestra in Germany in 1990 had destroyed his

equipment he personally bought. Little microphones which were in the floor, they stomped all over them. He was almost crying when he told me that. I couldn't believe it. All because they refused to perform his work. This is someone so famous, which shows how there's a response against difference. In America, he had the same response—orchestras damaging his equipment as a form of protest. I just thought it was unbelievable.

*JW: I can imagine someone like Cage incorporating that into his work.*

AW: No, he didn't... He was profoundly hurt, almost crying when he told me about it. It was amazing. How can that be? They were professional musicians! This is how human beings respond. How they can object to culture.

You know, apparently people walked out of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* continuously. Until he became enshrined. Now no one dares to walk out. It's the same way that you cannot be critical of Shakespeare. Who will be critical of Shakespeare? One will be killed. You know when I was at school, here in Australia, I decided to write a critical review of quite a famous author. I always got very high marks. Suddenly the marks got lower and the commentary was that I should re-read the work and at that point, the message sunk in that 'you will believe what others believe.' There's a collusive thought in operation in culture. Inescapably so. And how can one regulate that when one can't regulate the banking industry?

*JW: Reviewing in a literary culture that's so small, as it is in Australia, is fraught with difficulty! If you don't write a favourable review or even if you do write a favourable review, there's always going to be someone whose going to attack your view. A number of people have voiced their concerns about this.*

AW: Plenty of people enact revenge. And a person told me that if she sees two good reviews then she wouldn't dare write a bad review.

That shows a certain lack of courage. But, maybe it's better to stay away from these areas, because look what happened to this Russian director! This could be more and more dangerous. But, how to approach culture now? I've often thought, my god, I have to escape this. Never again! I will just become a copywriter. I will just become a footballer. No. Too late for that! Work in permaculture or... but, inescapably one goes back to it, but it is a fraught situation. How do you think it will function in the future? If the government doesn't fund these areas, they become independent areas. Will this go on, though? In England, I saw culture flourishing. Then suddenly, there was nothing happening. So what to do?

*JW: There will probably be a revitalised underground scene running counter to a kind of mainstream scene, funded by philanthropy.*

AW: Yes, and philanthropy is a worry. I saw a collection of Rilke, the German poet, and in the frontispiece it said 'this poetry belongs to the Princess such and such and such.' I couldn't believe it. So she bought his work indirectly so she would be affiliated with it. Quite off-putting! But it could be seen as a heroic act by this princess to sponsor him. He was living off this for many a year. This is Stephen King's *Misery*, you know, being directed by the reader. But maybe literature is indirectly directed that way anyhow. Although we don't think it is. Through the way it's taught. Through the way it's published. Through the different kinds of writers' festivals. That perverse selection's already at work.

*JW: How do you feel about poetry publishing in Australia at the moment?*

AW: It's in a very dangerous position because, if it becomes a plaything of fewer and fewer people, some of them will fashion their own little club... It seems quite repugnant that this is in operation and perverse. But then let's say I win Tattsлото, millions, thirty millions, I begin to publish poetics... Now, what kind of poetics would I publish? Clearly, you see, that personal taste would domi-

nate. And then there is a kind of cohort. That's a very perverse situation isn't it? And the way the mainstream publishers have rejected poetics, unless it sort of sells enough and then an economic-rationalist argument is there.

*JW: There's a lot of the same kind of work being published by fewer and fewer publishers...*

AW: Because it will move. It will be accessible. And it will sell, but then when all culture is seen at that level the same paradigm will be refashioned, and maybe we'll have literature on the level of computer games. Which will be predictable. And this is already happening with serialised modes like *Harry Potter*. These forms have a right to exist, but there has to be another realm. So how to fund that realm and how to nourish it? I don't know, this is where I need that thirty million! Or maybe that realm will arise out of independent thought and very simple means. I published little zines at RMIT which were done from a photocopy source and they were just demonstrating everybody's work on an egalitarian level in a compilation. That was a very pure form of publishing and sort of a beautiful event. Incorporating all and representing all. Maybe this kind of movement will arise?

*JW: So what does language mean to you? What do you want language to do?*

AW: For me it is a liberation. It is a liberation and an act of play in its pure form. And freedom from restriction. But then restriction is ever part of cultural endeavour, so I am still functioning within a certain mode—a literary mode. But it is an act of delight.

*JW: Do you see your play with language as a little cheeky?*

AW: Well, yes, but people worry, too, thinking that there are certain rules that I'm failing to deliver to them. But the more complex a person's thought is, the more they can engage with play.

*JW: Could you talk about your writing process?*

AW: I am employing the automatic realm of surrealist techniques, which are related to psychoanalysis. The person who coined the term, Pierre Janet, was a psychoanalyst. He employed that mode for the release of the language of the patient. So I use that, but in a more structured way. I do plan the work and rework the writing. So there are different forces at work.

*JW: How significant is sound to your work?*

AW: It starts as writing and is writing first and foremost. Fundamentally it has to be in writing because sound productions can be dismissed. The act of writing, for me, is an aural event. The processes of thinking and reading are aural. Other people have read my work in a different way. The problem with my public reading of my work is that people think that that's the way it has to be read. But it's open to interpretation. My work is not easy reading or listening—it involves an active engagement with the literature. I'm a demanding person! (laughs)

*JW: The endings of your pieces fascinate me—while there is that sense of automatic writing, the conclusion to each piece seems logical, marking the arrival at a kind of epiphany.*

AW: Theoretically, they are endless, like the *red roses* book, it's like a loop—my mother becomes the Eiffel Tower and I come out between her legs. But the book could begin again, so it's the endless present of the psyche that I'm always investigating.

*JW: How do you know when a piece is finished?*

AW: Sometimes I don't. And sometimes there are errors made, where someone cuts the piece or makes an error with printing the piece, but I accept it. They might look finite because they've been published. But in fact, I too could rewrite them. I've done that in

the past—rewriting the same piece. Maybe writing is never truly finished until the writer is gone. It's a living experience. Carver rewrote his story *A Small, Good Thing*, even though it was such a famous story.

*JW: Tell me more about your relationship to the 'error.'*

AW: 'Little Red Riding Hood'—there's a big error in there. It says 'I bought the wolf.' I never wrote that. Someone typing it up wrote that. But it's part of the poem now.

I also accept my own errors. Once I was writing 'Baby' in *red roses* but it came out 'Abby' and I liked it, this Abby persona, so I kept it. Interestingly, there was a famous journalist in American culture who had a 'Dear Abby' column, where people would confess things to her. Errors produce this union synchronicity or mysterious coincidence of events. This is the sort of writing accepted by the Spiritualist Church, where they would have automatic writing or drawings as a form of witnessing the presence of spirits.

*JW: Many poets (including myself when I was younger!) would be annoyed if even a punctuation point was printed out of place. What drives this obsession with control, do you think?*

AW: I did a reading at the Australian Poetry Centre with Ouyang Yu and he made very interesting comments that in the West there is the idea of the finished piece, but in the tradition of Chinese poetry, it is always unfinished and should be seen like that. Asian pottery is meant to be imperfect, suggesting that it is unfinished—that's a much more sophisticated form of thought.

*JW: Perhaps it's the poet's job to seize hold of those chance circumstances and little mistakes, or to find the relevance of these errors?*

AW: Absolutely. When you look at the Dada use of chance or John Cage's use of chance you see that Buddhist practice. It's strange

how people see poetics as such a structured process: rule number 1, rule number 2 etc. If you say to people 'there are no rules,' that scares them. But free play of intellect is always dealing with boundless universe. Even though one formulates an area of interest, like Wagner, his area of interest was residing within a certain realm. That sort of rule making always amazes me. That people think there is a golden rule of writing. And an error is seen as the crime of shifting something. Most people are obsessed with the finite universe, whereas my obsession is with the infinite universe.

Why is poetry still relying on these ideas of finite production? Maybe the kind of people who admire that have the money to publish it, thus they're proselytising it. Why is there such antagonism towards free form ideas, whereas all the other realms—of cinema and art—have incorporated experimental forms? Maybe we are dealing with the most conservative of all fields. How does one combat that? Maybe just by simply going on and working.

A person once said to me that the act of writing is the ultimate act of hope. That you have this empty page and you can do something with it. So that's a beautiful thought. We can always start again.

