

A clean touch

Spencer Reid

Creative arts therapist statement

A clean touch is the outcome of two years of self-reflexivity questioning feelings of frustration and disempowerment relating to professional practice and existent social, political and cultural power structures.

Creative writing has always been a significant part of my arts and creative therapy practice. Over the past few years speculative fiction has become my main focus, as I find the genre works exceptionally well for social justice-oriented fiction writing. Speculative fiction allows the writer to question what is realistic, identify change, and create alternative worlds to recognise or reorganise social and political rights. I find speculative fiction offers space to explore ideas about how society should or could function and analyse social rights issues through abstract ideas.

Through speculative fiction I am able to integrate activism and social justice into my practice, raising questions around social responsibility and definitions of therapy. Speculative fiction is the creative medium with which I am deepening my understanding between the body, identity and community, through lenses of intersectionality and post-colonial theory.

The process of writing speculative fiction and in particular *A clean touch*, has enabled me to push my own boundaries with regards to what constitutes creative arts therapies, and to be confident in taking notions of care and well-being as ongoing processes that are embedded in culture, politics and social policies of our everyday life.

A clean touch

The BOT's silicon feet imprint the firm sand, sunlight flushing out warm auburn highlights from the dull brown implants on its crown. In the early afternoon heat of a Someday, EMP241's tattooed expression betrays the dissociation of sensation from its exoskeleton. With its lumbar awkwardly extended, a gust of fragrant salt breeze caressing carbon fibre legs, EMP241 launches Callum's boat delicately onto the water. The boy's pupils blaze, a fire ignited by an arsonist whose spirit dances purple rings through sleepless nights. The child adeptly manoeuvres the bow of the cardboard vessel into the frothing crest of an oncoming wave, leaving the BOT on shore with the fresh pockmarks oozing smoldering bomb carnage in the sand, after another SiAW air-to-ground missile (AGM) strike.

Turning its head in the direction of two opaque figures emerging from the dry parasitic haze, EMP241 observes the vibrant colours of the non-political government recognised organisation employees (WNPGR0E) flack-jackets, meandering to avoid the remainder of the smoking shards of shrapnel.

The gaiety in their stride masks a social paralysis, thought the BOT.

Perhaps ethical confusion manifesting as malleable terror, used to uphold deep rooted colonising government policies.

Passively authoritarian with an overly choreographed formalism in their comradery, narrowly plucked brows framed an air of condemnation, as their downturned lips begin a ceremonious smacking,

‘Looks like it’s going to sink.’ A united discharge of droll cynicism from the (WNPGR0E).

EMP241 nods affirmatively, measuring the derogative conjecture of their claim.

‘I hope the child can swim.’ Equal measures of cynicism.

EMP241 nods affirmatively again.

‘As members of a recognised non-political government organisation, we cannot condone working in humanitarian or cultural practices which are outside of government policy.

‘We suggest you share your concerns with a small empathetic group of cohorts who may have some suggestions as to the best way to address your desire for non-colonial ways of being. Not one practitioner within our entire organisation has engaged in or enquired about forms of practice which sit outside of the professionally, thoughtfully, empathetically, ethically, constructed manifesto of the (WNPGR0E), EXCEPT FOR YOU. Non-Colonial culturally accepted practices which challenge systems of power and control are not our priority. We are a non-political organisation.’

‘The child doesn’t even have a life jacket’, exclaim the (WNPGR0E).

EMP241 nods affirmatively again.

Callum’s boat sits half submerged, the cardboard becoming heavily waterlogged beneath the copious amounts of bubble wrap and tape used to construct the vessel.

‘There’ve been sharks spotted in this bay for the past three weeks, not one government department would agree with or give official consent to your project’, advise the (WNPGR0E).

Callum reclines in the slowly sinking vessel with his hands dangling overboard trailing in the water, a broad smile consuming his hunger, while the reddening sky behind him fat with streaky white phosphoric cloud, sissles like a cooked breakfast, burning buildings on the horizon.

EMP241 nods again, aware of the community gathering on the beach next week, for a swim and family fish 'n chips day.

EMP241 studies the (WNPGRÖE). The (WNPGRÖE) study EMP241.

'Please don't swim in the water', request the (WNPGRÖE).

EMP241 glances at Callum reclining in the boat, then slowly wades into the waves and turns the boy around towing the boat into shore. The boat and boy are heavy with water and fatigue. The BOT hauls the vessel onto the beach, a mulch of ambition, emotion and cardboard, the boy completely spent. Meanwhile an incendiary tank shell is suspended in silence for a moment, its origin hidden between two eight-metre-high dunes 100m away, declaring the experiences of the two (WNPGRÖE) 'spent'. EMP241 stares at the dunes and then passes its eyes across the two smoking corpses.

The BOT contemplates the idea of shared lived experience, and the concept of a safe space within a world whose politicians demand the spilling of blood, and at present will not enact an end to its flow.

NOTE: The yearning for acknowledgement by and bewildering support for a government still continuing to build policies rooted in coloniser settler ideology, by (WNPGRÖE)'s has led to the production of the EMP241 by the Body for Social Justice and Resistance (BFSJAR). The model's cross cultural collaborative projects (CCCP) based practice has been implemented due to the lack of belief in the ability and integrity of current organisations, who profess alliance and anti-discriminative policies, although they have demonstrated an inability to implement them due to organisational structures which uphold Neoliberal ideals known as the 'Dark Ism's': individualism, ableism, exceptionalism, classism, exclusivism, racism, ageism and settler colonialism.

EMP241 and Callum emerge from the waves, water beading on the surface of skin and silicon, the boy's eyes squinting from the glare of hot conflict junk sand, while the BOT's eyes widen surveying the potential for hostility to begin again. Both make their way around the rubble of the public toilet, across the ashen tuffs of spear grass and spinifex, across dunes formed from the dust of bones. Both BOT and boy pause, feeling the need for the intervention of something lost. Is it the existence of an alternative ecology, post-Cartesian collaboration, acknowledgement for the valued relationships between the living and non-living object, rocks, sand, a BOT and a boy, an end to dualism and the manifest destiny promised by a malevolent god?

Callum embraces EMP241, the BOT returns the embrace, a rare although on occasions acceptable act practiced in sessions, officially referred to by the (WNPGRÖE) as a 'clean touch'.

I'm sure other spiders will visit the eaves again; they may wiggle and jiggle and niddle as they feast on butterflies. But as I learn to befriend them, I learn their purpose; not to hurt, keep stuck or trapped, but to protect.



Spencer Reid, *card IIIIIIIIIII*, 2021, oil pastel on paper, 1,200mm × 1,500mm.

Published:

March 2024

Issue:

Vol.19, No.1

Word count:

1,137

About the author:

Spencer Reid

Spencer is an art therapist and practicing artist. He works across sound composition, writing and installation. He graduated with Honours in Fine Art at the University of Tasmania in 2015 and completed his Masters of Art Therapy at the Western Sydney University in 2021. His sound compositions have been curated into national and international festivals, and are included in public collections such as at the Art Gallery of NSW. Spencer is currently employed as a trauma focused Art Therapist working with children within the education system.



This work is published in *JoCAT* and licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA-4.0 license.

Cite this creative contribution:

Reid, S. (2024). A clean touch. *JoCAT*, 19(1). <https://www.jocat-online.org/c-24-reid>