

Falling into Place:
Place and its Imaginary in Making Performance

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Summary

This study began with a personal recognition of the importance of space in my creative process. As a theatre director, I need to see and feel the space for a work before I know how to direct or create the performance. Once I know what the space is — everything falls into place. This fascination with space in my creative process has triggered a larger investigation into the operations of place in the making of contemporary performance.

The first part of the thesis embarks on a series of theoretical and creative journeys to learn more about place and how it is positioned within contemporary performance. It journeys through contemporary theory on place in the work of Gaston Bachelard, Edward S. Casey, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé. These theorists think about place as a product of human dwelling and social production, and its conceived dimensions as psychic structures for a culture that embodies the fantasies, desires and visions of our places.

The thesis traces my physical journey from Australia to the Wooster Group in New York City and Forced Entertainment in Sheffield where I observed and worked with two significant contemporary performance companies, each in their own place. The Wooster Group has maintained an ongoing ‘osmotic’ relationship with SoHo, absorbing the underground experimentations of performance makers in the 1960s, to the retail experimentations of Prada today in the now gentrified district. Similarly, Forced Entertainment has lived through a rejuvenation of Sheffield, which is examined in relation to a shift in the company’s aesthetic and style. I also encountered these companies and another, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, at festivals in Australia. Societas Raffaello Sanzio avoid endless repetition on tour with *Tragedia Endogonia* — a project that creates a new work for each place it performs in — balancing the desires of the international performing arts market with a portable strategy towards place.

The second part of the thesis returns to examine the imaginaries of Australia and Adelaide, the nation and city in which I work. It considers the impact of these imaginaries in a performance laboratory called *The Rope Project*, which explores Adelaide’s myth of ‘The Family’ and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope*. Lacan’s notion of the imaginary is used to

examine the 'national imaginary' of Australia as place where people disappear, an imaginary maintained by representations that imbue the Australian landscape with a hostile agency. The thesis argues that the erasure implicit in the colonial concept of *terra nullius* has informed a national imaginary obsessed with disappearance. A dossier of *The Rope Project* reveals the myth of 'The Family' explored as a representation in the performance laboratory. 'The Family' is the result of two competing imaginaries connected to the city of Adelaide: its founding utopian imaginary, the 'Athens of the South', and its horror-inverse, 'The World's Murder Capital'. This mythology was generated as a conservative backlash to the social reforms of Premier Don Dunstan and maintains a perceived connection between homosexuality and deviance. The thesis offers in conclusion fresh insights into the use of the imaginary and lived aspects of place in the creation of new performance works.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: _____

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Introduction

One day a whole damn song fell into place in my head

— Billie Holiday¹

There's nothing quite like the moment for an artist when suddenly everything comes together. After beating your head against the creative brick wall, trying to work out what to do, something is unlocked and everything falls into place. Often artists get stuck in this way. You have a sense of the work you want to create, but something blocks you. There's an absence — something is missing. And once that missing thing is there, it all comes together. For me as an artist, the missing thing I need is space.

This study began with a personal recognition of the importance of three-dimensional space to my creative process in my work as both a theatre director and creator of performance. When I trained as a director, I was also taught set and costume design and within the course the directing students also designed the set and costumes for their work.² The majority of theatre work I have created I have either designed myself, or worked with a set designer in a highly collaborative way. In this way making space has been integral to my own creative process. I find that until I can see and feel what the space is for the work, I can't work out how to direct or create the performance.

I first became aware of this when I started directing plays. Until I worked out the space, I would be unclear of how certain thematic or discursive choices would operate in the work. The choice of the space and design would tell me how I would be approaching the material. Beyond allowing me to visualise what it would look like, the space would let me know what it would feel like. Once I know what the space is, I know what to do — everything falls into place. This recognition of the importance of space leads me to question how space and place works within the creative imagination of the artist, and why space is so significant in my process.

¹ Billie Holiday cited in CD booklet by Steven Lasker for *Billie Holiday — The Complete Original American Decca Recordings*, (MCA Records, 1991).

² I was trained in set and costume design at the Flinders University Drama Centre by Mary Moore, an experienced designer who has worked extensively in the United Kingdom and Australia, and who is now a designer that I work with professionally.

This awareness of space for me is particularly three-dimensional *spatial* as opposed to two-dimensional visual. A sketch or an illustration does not provide this sense of space. There is something about the volume of space in a 1:25 scale model that provides me with a feeling that a drawing cannot provide. I find that once a visual concept is spatialised into a model, I get a *feel* for the space; I can project myself into the volume of space to understand what it will feel like in the theatre.

For me directing is very much a spatial act — much of the work I do as a director is making choices about visual composition, proxemics, particular actions or movements that the performers execute, along with the overall aesthetic of the design. In collaboration with a designer, a director develops a spatial concept (actualised as a model and eventually a set) which they use as a three-dimensional palette to compose space and action to communicate to an audience. This aspect of directing feels very different from the emotional, psychological and interactive choices made with the performers. While the aspect of working with performers is central to the role of the director, it is inextricably connected to the performer and ultimately it is something that they execute. In contrast, the spatial arrangement and communication of a performance emerges from the director's work.

These two aspects of directing, one focused on the performers and one focused on space, can be followed in the emergence of the role of the modern director. My training with designer Mary Moore tapped into the modern theatre tradition of the director focusing on space in their work. Mary Moore's design practice comes directly from the European minimalist tradition derived from Edward Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia. Craig and Appia gave modernist theatre a spatial aesthetic, and initiated a directorial role focused on visual and spatial assembly. Craig envisioned the theatre as a collaborative art form, but called into question the primacy of the actor and emphasised the orchestration of the visual components of a performance by an outside eye.³ Similarly, Adolph Appia revolutionised set design by creating three-dimensional set objects instead of two-dimensional painted scenery. The actor and their three-dimensional body were central to Appia's theory, and were to be presented within a three-dimensional spatial environment.⁴

³ Edward Gordon Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1968) and Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of the Theatre* (Australia, Canada, China: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1983).

⁴ Adolph Appia, "Actor, Space, Light, Painting", in *Adolphe Appia: Texts on Theatre*, ed. by R.C. Beacham, (London: Routledge, 1993).

When training as a theatre director I was also a student of cinema studies, where I developed an interest in the montage techniques of the early Soviet directors, and later, Alfred Hitchcock. The rise of modern theatre directors — with their emphasis on space and the visual — was paralleled by the advent of film, where the construction of the *mise en scène* was controlled by its director. Early in film history Soviet directors pioneered their notions of montage, with Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin experimenting with composition and editing as the way a director communicated and immersed an audience in an experience.⁵ Later these montage techniques would find their way into Hollywood cinema through directors such as Hitchcock and remain in a mutated form as one of the cornerstones of film direction. There is an emphasis on visual assembly and construction as the primary task of the director within film direction. Reflecting on the work of the director in film, it is interesting to consider the parallel emphasis for the theatre director on composing and organising space.

I am interested in understanding *why* space is important in my creative process, and how it has become a way for me to approach directing or creating a performance. In this study, I propose that there is a spatial transference at play in my creative process. The concept of transference comes from psychoanalysis and is discussed by Sigmund Freud in the context of transference with an analyst:

[T]he patient sees in him the return, the reincarnation, of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions which undoubtedly applied to this prototype. This fact of transference soon proves to be a factor of undreamt-of importance, on the one hand an instrument of irreplaceable value and on the other hand a source of serious dangers. This transference is ambivalent: it comprises positive (affectionate) as well as negative (hostile) attitudes [...].⁶

Freud discusses transference in terms of a projection of previous experiences with other people onto the figure of the analyst, but transference as a concept has been applied in other contexts. There is a notion within acting that when creating a character the actor ends up — through transference — creating the character out of people they know or

⁵ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York, St. Louis, San Francisco: McGraw-Hill, Inc, 1994), pp. 136-152

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-analysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), pp. 31-32

have encountered.⁷ The suggestion in this thinking is that actors represent what they have experienced or encountered; their particular lived experience is converted into character through an act of transference. I wish to borrow from this application of transference in the process of actors creating characters to explore how artists draw upon their lived experience in the process of creation.

In this study, I explore how the theatre director (and designer) create space through a similar kind of transference: the places that they have encountered and experienced inform the kinds of spaces they create. A good example is my own process in the performance laboratory for *The Rope Project* (see Dossier: *The Rope Project*). The central feature of the design was an imagined lounge room space of the so-called 'Family'. I sent photographs of the set of the project to my colleague, set and costume designer Matthew Kneale. Matthew emailed back saying "don't be freaked out, but the set reminds me of your house." At that moment I had an unpleasant (and somewhat surprising) realisation that Matthew was right: it did look like my house, and particularly my own lounge room. Despite the complexities of the collaborative process and the material that I was working on, somehow unconsciously I had bled elements of my own experience of my lounge room in my house into this theatrical representation. The feeling of my house had somehow permeated the design through my collaboration with designer Mary Moore. Perhaps our transferences had merged in the process of realising the design. Was this due to the extent that we collaborated? What had Matthew recognised of my house in the set? I find the mysterious workings of this transference compelling, and my fascination with this process underpins this thesis.

If transference is linked to one's lived experience, it is the places that we have experienced or encountered that we are likely to reproduce. While the term space suggests a three-dimensional actuality, the term place offers three additional qualities that are relevant. Place implies an experiential dimension: something or someone is in place, and that object or person has an experience of being implaced. This is of particular relevance to transference, which is directly tied to experience. Secondly, there is an aspect of function, purpose and cultural shaping with the notion of place. Space can be purely abstract and geometric as a concept, whereas place carries the shaping and purpose of those who dwell in it. A place has a particular cultural function (for example, a house) which is built from experiential relationships (my own experience in my house) coupled

⁷ This is an articulation of part of the training process for actors at the Flinders University Drama Centre when I was an undergraduate student in the acting course. The notion of transference, character and personal experience is also discussed by Steven L. Reynolds, "Imagining Oneself To Be Another", *Noûs*, 23.5 (1989), pp. 615-633 and Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

with the cultural concepts of what that place is (house as a specific dwelling place in our culture). Thirdly, given the encultured formation of place, it can have a conceived or imagined dimension. Place can embody a cultural vision or aspiration, it can also be a canvas for our collective fantasies or desires. It allow us to imagine what we are or could be.

Given these additional dimensions, I embark on this study with an interest in the concept of place, and how place — with its three-dimensional actuality, and experiential and cultural information — relates to the creative processes and imagination of the artist. This thesis travels through understandings of place within contemporary theory and performance, looks inside the creative processes of established contemporary performance companies, and finally returns to Australia to interrogate the imagined dimensions of place and their impact on developing new performance.

In the first part of this thesis, I embark on a series of journeys to learn more about place and engage with contemporary performance practice. I visit a range of theorists who have dealt with how we perceive place and how it is generated through human and cultural activities; here I encounter Gaston Bachelard, Edward S. Casey, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé. I also undertake a physical journey to work with and observe the processes of two significant contemporary performance companies, the Wooster Group in New York City and Forced Entertainment in Sheffield in the United Kingdom in 2002.

While I was with these companies I considered how place and space figured in their creative processes, and how important or fundamental it was to their way of working. How much was place and space a starting point in their work? Could I observe the channelling of spatial transferences from their places into their performances? Had the changing nature of their places over the past twenty to thirty years impacted on the work they created? In addition to my time in New York City and Sheffield, I encountered the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment at the Adelaide Festival of Arts and Melbourne International Arts Festival respectively. Subsequently I encountered Societas Raffaello Sanzio at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, which destabilised my reflections on spatial transference and provoked a further layer of theoretical work.

In the second part of the thesis, I return home to my place to investigate these concerns by looking at the imagined dimensions of place within a national identity of Australia, and contested identities of Adelaide. I take up the concept of the national imaginary, drawing

on the psychoanalytic thinking of Jacques Lacan. I examine a national imaginary of Australia as a place where people disappear; I look at the representations of the lost white body within the Australian landscapes of the beach and the bush. I then explore two competing imaginaries connected to the city of Adelaide — one is its founding utopian imaginary, the ‘Athens of the South’; and the other is its horror-inverse, ‘The Perfect Setting for a Horror Film’. I look at the interplay of these two imaginaries within the mythology of the so-called ‘Family’ — an alleged group of high-powered, deviant homosexual men who abduct, rape, and mutilate young men.

I finally present a dossier of materials from the performance laboratory of *The Rope Project*, an experiment in generating a contemporary performance work tied to Adelaide. *The Rope Project* examines the perceived connections between homosexuality and deviance in the visual language of Alfred Hitchcock’s 1948 film *Rope* and Adelaide’s mythology of ‘The Family’.⁸

I conclude by examining my own connection to place to Adelaide as an artist, and in what ways it enables a space to pursue experimentation, while managing the material need for mobilisation nationally and internationally. I ultimately consider my fascination with place through my desire as an artist to speak to people through the complexities of their own experiences, lived and imagined.

⁸ The first research and development of *The Rope Project* was in January 2003 with the support of the Australian Performance Laboratory, the Adelaide Festival Centre and Brink Productions; the second performance laboratory was presented in December 2006 with the support of APL and the Australia Council for the Arts.

PART I

1 *Place and Performance Making*

Having proposed a spatial transference for the artist, I was curious to find out what discussions there are about the performance maker's relationship to place, and how they might relate to the psychic influence I am theorising. What is the perceived relationship between the artist and place? How does the artist in their process of creation and representation draw upon place? And what is the dynamic between the actual places the performance maker dwells within and the theatre in which they create their representation?

There are three areas of research into place and performance that I now journey through. I begin with site-specific performance, which has the largest body of work considering the relationship between place and performance. Here I learn about the direct relationship between the performance maker and place, but not about the analysis of place and its representation within theatre spaces. Consequently my next consideration is of the operation of space and place within the theatre building and the workings of fictional representations on stage. As fictional places and narratives are not the focus of much contemporary performance, I conclude with an analysis of the spatial strategies and visual aesthetics within contemporary performance.

There have been a range of books, journals and articles that discuss place and performance: *Unstable Ground* edited by Gay McAuley, *Performance and Place* edited by Leslie Hill & Helen Paris, and journals such as *Modern Drama* with its specialist issue on place, space and performance.¹ In these publications I find not only answers, but also clarification regarding the questions I am addressing in this thesis.

¹ *Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Gay McAuley (Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2006); *Performance and Place*, ed. by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Gay McAuley, "Place in the Performance Experience", *Modern Drama*, 46 (2003), pp. 598-613; Dean Wilcox, "Ambient Space in Twentieth-Century Theatre: The Space of Silence", *Modern Drama*, 46.4 (2003), pp. 542-557; Michal Kobińska, "Theatre and Space: A Historiographic Preamble", *Modern Drama*, 46.4 (2003), pp. 558-579; Michael McKinnie, "The State of This Place: Convictions, the Courthouse, and the Geography of Performance in Belfast", *Modern Drama*, 46.4 (2003), pp. 580-597.

Place and Site-specific Performance

Place is often most evident in the creative process when the performance maker leaves the theatre and creates work within a found place. So it is not surprising that my first serious encounter with an analysis of place and performance was in connection with site-specific performance. Site-specific work is a practice of performance making that embraces a place as the location (and often the subject) of a performance, instead of using the 'neutral' built environment of a theatre. A specific (non-theatre) place becomes the location of the site-specific performance, and often an aspect of its history figures as subject matter of the representation.

I wish to briefly discuss the work of two theorists dealing with site-specificity and place. Nick Kaye looks at the history of performance within the site-specific, and Mike Pearson proposes an archaeological relationship between a performance maker and a place. There is a range of other analyses of place that have been informed by Kaye and Pearson's ideas of site-specific performance and place in Australian theatre.²

Nick Kaye's influential book *Site-Specific Art* focuses on the importance of the site within contemporary performance, and traces the origins of this emphasis to the site-specific work of visual artists who came to prominence in the 1960s. Kaye discusses the dynamics of the site in relation to the visual art work:

'Site-specificity' [...] occurs in a displacement of the viewer's attention toward the room which both she and the object occupy. Rather than 'establish its place', the minimalist object emphasises a transitive definition of site, forcing a self-conscious perception in which the viewer confronts her own effort 'to locate, to place' the work and so her own acting out of the gallery's function as the place for viewing.³

² Fiona Wilkie, "Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 18 (2002), pp. 243-260; Sally Mackey, "Drama, Landscape and Memory: To Be is To Be in Place", *Research in Drama Education*, 7 (2002), pp. 9-25; D.J. Hopkins, "Mapping the Placeless Place: Pedestrian Performance in the Urban Spaces of Los Angeles", *Modern Drama*, 46 (2003), pp. 261-284; Victoria Hunter, "Embodying the Site: the Here and Now in Site-Specific Dance Performance", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 21 (2005) pp. 367-381; Rose Gaby, "'Here's a Marvellous Convenient Place for Our Rehearsal': Shakespeare in Australian Space", *Australasian Drama Studies*, 46 (2005), pp. 124-138; Rebecca Pelan, "Identity Performance in Northern Ireland and Australia: The Belle of the Belfast City and Radiance", *Australasian Drama Studies*, 46 (2005), pp. 70-79.

³ Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 2

The role of the site is intrinsic to the operation of the artwork; the artwork is both focused by the site and referential to its features. Kaye quotes visual artist Richard Serra in reference to this relationship: “To move the work is to destroy the work.”⁴ Many site-specific performance makers also use the site as a ‘text’, mining its features, qualities and history as material within the content of the work. This kind of performance draws the audience’s attention to the material elements of the place and its specific dynamics. Mike Pearson and Michael Shank’s book *Theatre/Archaeology* pursues this line of thinking by employing notions of archeology as a way of analysing and discussing the processes of theatre and contemporary performance.⁵ Pearson and Shank’s proposition is that site-specific performance often has an archeological relationship to place; it ‘excavates’ aspects of the meaning and history of a place, as well as exploring its physical traits. Creative material is superimposed on the location, like a palimpsest.

In 2001 I worked as part of the creative team as a director and researcher on Mary Moore’s site-specific performance *The Memory Museum*. This work was created for the Centenary of Federation in the Torrens Parade Drill Hall in Adelaide. It is a good example of a site-specific work that ‘excavates’ the meanings, histories and spatial uniqueness of the site, recapitulating the place within its performance. An account of this work by Julie Holledge can be found in McAuley’s edited volume: *Unstable Ground*.⁶

The Memory Museum was a labyrinth-like space built inside the Torrens Parade Drill Hall where “layers of memory were created [...] through personal stories, documentary film, photographs, sound recordings, video interviews, letters and diaries; and presented through a mixture of installations and live performances”.⁷ The project pursued an archeological notion of excavation in its visual aesthetic. Its performance logic was also archaeological: memories were retrieved and reconstructed from objects within the space, “on torn postcards; in censored letters; at the bottom of an old cooking pot; in the chemical developing trays of old photographs; on a decaying tape recording; and in ‘phantom’ laughter at a half-recalled popular wartime joke.”⁸

The Memory Museum engaged in two strategies towards its place. The first was an ‘excavation’ of the site’s history, quality and aesthetic as the content of the work. The

⁴ Serra cited in *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁵ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁶ Julie Holledge, “The Memory Museum: A 2001 ‘Sacred Site’ for a Secular Society”, in *Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Gay McAuley, (Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 95-110

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97

second was the creation of a representation of the place within the place itself, a palimpsest that encourages an audience to re-view the place from a new perspective. Both of these were at play in the entrance to *The Memory Museum*, where audience members walked through an excavation of a series of honour roll boards submerged in dirt with performers identifying the names on the boards and recording them. The aesthetic of the Drill Hall as a space with half buried honour boards was crucial to the design which relied on a concept of rediscovery by both audience and performer.

Site-specific practice reveals the explicit relationship that the artist forms with place. It figures as both the location of the performance, and often as the excavated subject of the work. In processes such as *The Memory Museum*, there is a reimagining of the place within the performance. But unlike spatial transference this process is driven by a more conscious interest in recapitulating the place's own history and aesthetic features, rather than those of the artists' experience. Site-specific practice has an obvious attention to place which contradicts the supposed 'neutrality' of the theatre.

Place in Modern Theatre

I would like to start thinking about the operations of place within the theatre building by looking at text-based modern theatre and the places it creates for an audience. One distinction between modern theatre and contemporary performance that I would like to draw is modern theatre's interest in representing fictional places. This focus in modern theatre differs from much contemporary performance, which is less tied to traditional narrative structures and the depiction of the fictional places that house the narrative's events. I will explore this proposition in the next section of this chapter.

Unlike the site within site-specific performance, in modern theatre the stage seeks a spatial (and place-like) neutrality which is used as a canvas for representation, as Jane Goodall describes:

A stage is a place that has to be freed of local identity, so that it can be any place. In order to be available for the creation of imagined locations of diverse kinds, it must be cleared of the associations belonging to that particular locality.⁹

⁹ Jane Goodall, "Haunted Places", in *Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Gay McAuley, (Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2006), p. 112

Whereas the use of the site focuses and rearticulates the specifics of the locality, the theatre constructs a 'blankness' to enable it to represent other places. The emptiness that Goodall notes is epitomised by Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, where the act of the body within an empty stage being observed makes the act of theatre occur.¹⁰ Andrew Quick approaches this notion from a more paradoxical point of view; he suggests that we deny the actuality of the place in order to make performance present:

[T]he live can be seen literally to 'take' place, removing from the scene of experience those pre-existing referential frameworks that would predict the occasion and outcome of any encounter. This is why the live can be seen to make place less, even as it situates itself in/as the site of an encounter.¹¹

How exactly is the 'blankness' of place utilised to create other places, and what are the various aspects of this process? *Space in Performance* by Gay McAuley approaches the complex operations of literal and represented space (and place) within modern theatre.¹² McAuley's taxonomy of spatial function is useful in understanding the operations of place within theatre; it isolates the various spatial (and place-like) complexities that happen within the theatrical performance:

¹⁰ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 11

¹¹ Andrew Quick, "Taking Place: Encountering the Live", in *Live: Art and Performance*, ed. by Adrian Heathfield, (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 93

¹² Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000).

- I. The Social Reality
 - Theatre Space
 - Audience Space
 - Performance Space
 - Practitioner Space
 - Rehearsal Space

- II. The Physical/ Fictional Relationship
 - Stage Space
 - Presentational Space
 - Fictional Place

- III. Location and Fiction
 - Onstage Fictional Place
 - Offstage Fictional Place
 - Unlocalized in relation to Performance Space
 - Localized in relation to Performance Space
 - Contiguous/ Remote Spectrum
 - Audience Off

- IV. Textual Space

- V. Thematic Space¹³

I wish to apply McAuley's taxonomy to an analysis of place. 'The Social Reality' in the taxonomy recognises the theatre as a built place with a specific cultural function as a site of entertainment. There are a number of defined places within it (the foyer, auditorium, stage, backstage, etc).¹⁴ This first dimension of place within theatre is the actuality of a built place designed to house performers and audiences for the purpose of entertainment.

The second idea that McAuley introduces is the notion of the "Physical/Fictional Relationship". This duality articulates the presence of the physical actuality of place (an audience within a darkened auditorium viewing performers on a stage space) and the presence of a fictional place in which the audience is immersed through representation. McAuley notes that the way the representation of fictional place is actualised can vary greatly (from a detailed naturalistic set to a highly abstract, impressionistic aesthetic, or

¹³ Ibid., p. 25

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25

only the text or actions of performers) but within this spectrum there is a place created that is 'somewhere else' layered upon the physical actuality.¹⁵

McAuley further articulates the concept of fictional place (within the category of "Location and Fiction"), delineating the relationships between onstage and offstage places and their relationship to the events of the performance. "Textual Space" engages with the notion of the text carrying spatial (and place-like) information within it (its dialogue, represented events, stage directions); the final category of "Thematic Space" in part encompasses the others, as "the articulation of fictional place and dramatic event are fundamental to the thematic concerns of playwright and production."¹⁶

McAuley's taxonomy provides a clear delineation of the complex ways in which place operates within the theatre, engaging with both the physical actuality of the theatre and auditorium for both audience and performer, and how the fictional representations of place are generated and read. McAuley's taxonomy is effective in analysing modern theatre that uses the blankness of the stage to represent fictional place, but how is place operational within performance that does not have the same interest in creating fictional places?

Place in Contemporary Performance

Much contemporary performance I've encountered takes a very different approach in the use of the theatre building to create representations of place. Contemporary performance refers to a kind of performance making practice which has a strong relationship to both experimental theatre and performance art. In very broad terms, experimental theatre (or alternative or avant-garde theatre) encompasses a broad range of theatre companies, from the 1950s to the end of the twentieth century, who rebelled against theatre traditions, pushing the boundaries of style and form and interrogated mainstream culture.¹⁷

Parallel to this, performance art (which emerged in the 1960s) encompasses a performance making that developed from actions and events performed by the artist as their artwork.¹⁸ I define contemporary performance as a term that encompasses work with

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-28

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 33

¹⁷ The terms 'alternative theatre' and 'avant-garde theatre' have been used to describe the experimental theatre from the 1950s onwards, although 'avant-garde' is a term also used to describe work from the early twentieth century. See Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000) pp. 1-6

¹⁸ Tate | Glossary | Performance Art, Available: <<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=218>>, [accessed 20 June 2005].

aspects of both of these traditions, and on the whole refers to more recent work (from the 1980s to now). One use of the term today is within the Centre for the Advanced Study of Contemporary Performance Practice at Lancaster University. The Centre's website links to a range of artists and companies, including the Wooster Group, Forced Entertainment, Richard Foreman, Lone Twin, Odin Teatret, Goat Island and Bobby Baker.¹⁹ This grouping of artists under the term contemporary performance can be linked to both the traditions of experimental theatre (The Wooster Group and Odin Teatret) and performance art (Bobby Baker and Lone Twin).

Unlike Peter Brook's notion of the theatre as empty space that creates fictive places, contemporary performance is not driven by the need to create fictional places to advance narrative. Instead the theatre space itself is foregrounded; a space of representation and deconstruction that draws attention to the act of watching.

Tim Etchells's and Hugo Glendinning's photo essay "Empty Stages" considers whether theatre stages offer emptiness.²⁰ Etchells and Glendinning photograph a range of stages, from large proscenium arch stages to small stages within local halls. Their photo essay draws attention to the lack of neutrality in these theatre stages: there are kitsch curtains, text written on the proscenium arch, tables and chairs left on stage, a fan plugged into the wall in the corner, speakers and cabling on the floor. Instead of being blank, neutral containers, they are places filled with their own idiosyncratic aesthetics and representational technologies (their curtains, wing space, lighting bars, and so on) to which the photos draw attention. The lack of blankness in these photographs offers a very different starting point for creating place within the theatre space.

In *Theatre and Performance in a Digital Age*, Matthew Causey explores the notion that scenography within contemporary performance is "post-illusory".²¹ He proposes the set designs of the Wooster Group, Societas Raffaello Sanzio and Richard Foreman are seeking "the ruins of illusion".²² What I extract from Causey and from Etchells and Glendinning is the notion that contemporary performance has moved away from the tradition of creating the fictive illusion through the 'erasure' of neutral theatre space. I will consider this in three ways: through aesthetics that relate to the deconstruction of text

¹⁹ *CASCPP: The Centre for the Advanced Study of Contemporary Performance Practice*, Available: <<http://www.cascpp.lancs.ac.uk/>>, [accessed 26 June 2008].

²⁰ Tim Etchells and Hugo Glendinning, "Empty Stages", *Performance Research*, 10.1 (2005), pp. 2 ff.

²¹ Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 91-104

²² *Ibid.* p. 93

or the deconstruction of the theatrical experience; through an abstract aesthetic that does not represent a singular place; and through the disruption of onstage illusion through scenography that draws attention to the actuality of the theatre space.

Both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment employ scenographic aesthetics that are deconstructive of either the text or the theatrical experience, disrupting the creation of a cohesive fictive place for the audience. Causey identifies how the Wooster Group's designer Jim Clayburgh has "shaped a stage vision that is both functional and demonstrative of the company's devising strategy: that of deconstruction, bricolage and appropriation."²³ Causey describes the set for the Wooster Group's *Route 1&9* (1981),²⁴ which staged part of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*:

A railing, reminiscent of Richard Foreman's regular framing barrier between audience and stage runs along the downstage border. White lines on the floor echo the metal-framed house and ladder that stands to one side of the stage. It is a skeletal form that stands in as a ruin of an American home, perhaps like that of *Our Town*, but houses an obscene scene of blackface comedy. The metal-framed room is transparent, with a table inside like that of the frame itself. Three tracks along the ceiling run perpendicular to the audience from which are hung video monitors that slide towards the audience via a pulley system. It is a negative space, primarily black and white in makeup, costume, set, video imagery, and a negative space in which the theatrical illusion has been cancelled and reconfigured as violent eruption of repressed libidinous drives.²⁵

The fictive place of the house from *Our Town* is juxtaposed with a bold deconstructive aesthetic which seeks to reveal and destabilise the Wilder text it represents. This strategy simultaneously represents a fictive place and creates a critique of the fictive place. It therefore is distinct from modern theatre, which creates an immersive representational illusion that the audience read as the fictive place.

²³ Ibid. p. 100

²⁴ The Wooster Group's *Route 1&9* juxtaposed Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* with a reconstruction of a comedy routine by Pigmeat Markham. The work caused controversy with its use of blackface, resulting in the New York State Council on the Arts reducing the company's funding by forty percent. For a full account see David Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, 1st edn (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986), pp. 9-45

²⁵ Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, p. 100

Forced Entertainment employ a different deconstructive aesthetic in *Bloody Mess* (2004).²⁶ The theatre stage is bare, and individual performers contest the logic of what is happening in the performance and playfully engage with the audience challenging how they and the performance are being perceived. The company describes the performance as follows:

A strobe light flickers, pointed at the ground. A pair of clowns in smeared make-up start an ugly fight that threatens to take over the stage. A delinquent cheerleader dances and yells. A woman weeps in a fit of operatic grief then stops, changes costume and starts again. The strains of *Deep Purple* or maybe *Black Sabbath* blast from the PA only to be replaced by the *Bach Cello Suites*. A bloke starts to tell the history of the world from the Big Bang onwards but is quickly interrupted. A sound check. An interview. A seductive monologue. Rock-gig roadies creep across the stage — bringing disco lights, new speakers and a microphone that no one really wants. A woman in a gorilla suit chucks popcorn at anything that moves like a demented refugee from pantomime. A dance is performed by two beautiful well-dressed men sporting homemade tin foil stars. A beautiful silence is staged.²⁷

The various worlds of the characters collide with and contradict each other. Numerous places are staged simultaneously, all of which collide and juxtapose with each other. The contradictions in what is being represented destabilise the suggestion of a cohesive, fictional place containing the performance. The performers also actively draw the audience's attention to their experience of watching and reading the performance. Early on in the performance, each actor confides to the audience how they wish to be seen during the show (as the leading man, the object of desire and so on). In a later section, Cathy Naden addresses a potential response to an act she is about to perform. She tells the audience she is about to lie down and, that when she does this, it will be the most moving thing they have ever witnessed, and they will not be able to stop crying. These techniques focus on the actuality of the theatre, and on the reception of the performance, not on the depiction of a fictional place inhabited by characters. This creates an additional

²⁶ Forced Entertainment's performance *Bloody Mess* was created in 2004 in the company's 20th anniversary year, and referenced the company's earlier style of creating works that were chaotic, jumbled and focused on physical and visual elements. The work consists of various competing and conflicting elements that are described shortly in this chapter.

²⁷ Forced Entertainment, *Bloody Mess*, Internet page, Available: <<http://www.forcedentertainment.com/?lid=2>>, [accessed 15 November 2007].

contradiction between the fictive reality occupied by the performer and its actual reception by the audience.

Causey also considers how particular scenographic devices are used in contemporary performance to disrupt an immersive theatrical illusion. He discusses Richard Foreman's disruption of the 'fourth wall' plane of the performance space: "He emphasises the frames, the always-already proscenium arched theatre space, with lines, strings and borders, drawing attention to the objects of the stage and to the functions of the theatre itself."²⁸ This use of a scenographic element to disrupt the creation of an immersive fictive space is present in other contemporary performance: the Wooster Group's use of lowered lighting bars within the performance space, Societas Raffaello Sanzio's use of white gauze across the proscenium and Forced Entertainment's use of a straight line of chairs facing the auditorium. This tradition of disrupting the theatrical illusion can be traced back to Brecht's notion of *verfremdungseffekt*. Foreman's articulation of how he uses set design reveals a somewhat different approach than that taken in modern theatre:

Most directors think of the stage as a platform to display action, whereas I consider it a reverberation chamber which amplifies and projects the music of the action so it can reveal the full range of its overtones.²⁹

He identifies a function for scenic representation which is not driven by the representation of singular literal places, but instead creates a resonant, evocative place to amplify the thematic and discursive notions of the work. Much contemporary performance is interested in creating resonant environments that can evoke multiple places through a more abstract aesthetic. Richard Foreman talks about this doubling within the work that he writes, directs and designs: "I wanted scenery that was in many places at once, like the mind. The spectator should ask: Am I in a living room, or in a bizarre factory where art (this play) is being produced?"³⁰

My journey through the thinking on place and performance has added a range of concepts that relate to my larger interest in spatial transference between the artist and their place. Site-specificity has revealed a practice that has two particular relationships to place for the performance maker: as physical location and as subject that is excavated and reimagined by the artist drawing upon its histories and qualities. Site-specificity doesn't

²⁸ Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, p. 100

²⁹ Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theater*, ed. by Ken Jordan (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992), p. 57

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62

reveal much about the relationships with the places that the artist lives in, or the theatre spaces they create work in.

Moving into the theatre as a place has revealed a very different dynamic in the artists' relationship with place. In modern theatre the 'blankness' of the theatre place allows artists to represent and imagine other places. McAuley's taxonomy provides a tool for delineating how place functions to create the fictional place within the narrative. Contemporary performance invites the audience to witness the deconstructive and representative mechanics of the theatre space itself, as Etchells and Glendinning and Causey have explored. In order to elaborate the role of place in the creative work of the artist it is necessary to delve further into the concept of place itself, and how it is defined, understood and separated from space.

2 *Place and Contemporary Theory*

What is the difference between space and place? Early on in my fascination with spatial transference in performance, I realised that I needed to understand more about the relationship between space and place, and how the concepts were delineated and distinguished from each other. The answer to this question proved much more complex, intricate and contradictory than I had anticipated. What exactly is the difference between space and place? What does the concept of place embrace that space does not? How does human experience and activity relate to both?

At the beginning of this thesis I provided a delineation between space and place. This was a ‘teaser’ of the journey that I am about to take through a range of theorists who have engaged with place, in what, since the mid-twentieth century onwards, has been called the resurgence of interest in place.¹ From these theorists I will draw out some key concepts and terminology that I wish to employ in my study of performance and place. I will deal with two theorists who look at lived experience and its relationship to place — Gaston Bachelard and Edward S. Casey — and three theorists who are looking at place and its relationship to culture and production — Henri Lefebvre, Michel De Certeau and Marc Augé. I am seeking to draw together a series of concepts and terms from each of these theorists, identifying similarities in their thinking to create a framework for analysing the workings of place within contemporary performance.

Gaston Bachelard

Gaston Bachelard’s application of phenomenology and aspects of psychoanalysis to space and architecture in *The Poetics of Space* in 1958 initiated an interest in place in the mid-to-late twentieth century amongst philosophers, geographers, architects and sociologists.² His work has influenced a range of theorists examining space and place, particularly Edward S. Casey.

¹ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the PlaceWorld* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. xv

² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964); Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the PlaceWorld*, p. xv

Bachelard's phenomenological conception of space introduces an experiential emphasis in understanding space (and place). Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the experience of consciousness. First associated with the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl, phenomenology examines consciousness through a lived subjective perspective on existence. Phenomenology seeks to understand consciousness through lived perception that precedes conscious conceptualisation. A number of philosophers are associated with phenomenology, such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

As described by Elizabeth Grosz, phenomenology suggests that perception is “a phenomenon experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible.”³ In this experience of perception, our body (in its inhabitation of space and place) conceives of the world around it in conjunction with the perceptions of the mind. Phenomenology sees the mind and body as interwoven; they are not separate in the process of perception. “My body is my being-to-the-world and as such is the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated.”⁴

Phenomenology positions the body's presence in space and place as the primary mode of consciousness. Bachelard in this work initiates a way of thinking about space through the lived experience in a space or architectural setting, and it is this aspect of Bachelard's thinking that Edward S. Casey later pursues. I am fascinated in following the idea of the body being central to experiencing space and place in all of the theorists I investigate.

I wish to consider another aspect of Bachelard's work, his notion of topoanalysis. Topoanalysis is “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives”, as Bachelard describes, a mapping of the topography of the self.⁵ An extension of the key precepts of psychoanalysis, Bachelard's topoanalysis posits that the psyche can be understood as a place, and that its place-like qualities can be read through the notion of the house. Bachelard argues that the house has an intimate connection to the notion of self, and he sets out to “show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind.”⁶

³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), p. 86

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87

⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 8

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6

Bachelard maps the psychic topography of the house, analysing the vertical polarity of cellar and attic, and the psychic implications of those two spaces (the cellar is dark and subterranean, beneath the surface, the attic shelters and allows for clarity, is 'heightened').⁷ Bachelard is also interested in the spatialisation of memory, with spaces within houses such as drawers, chests and wardrobes imbued with an ability to store and conceal.

Bachelard's topoanalysis draws a relationship between space and the psyche that is relevant to my notion of spatial transference. He suggests that the cultural experience of the house as a space and place is absorbed into our psyche. Bachelard identifies space as an important influence on the workings of the psyche; that there is a mirroring between our psyche and one of the most intimate places in our lives, the house. Bachelard lays a foundation for a notion of spatial transference. If space can be strong enough to influence our psychic life, then it follows the spaces we experience day to day can be absorbed and transferred in the creative act. Bachelard's topoanalysis is the first example of a common thread in the theorists I discuss. This thread articulates in different ways the psychic dimensions of place and its relationship either to the individual, or to a society or culture.

Edward S. Casey

Edward S. Casey significantly builds upon the phenomenological relationship to place that Bachelard establishes. Casey's body of work includes an extensive investigation into the experiential workings and philosophical history of place. Casey has written a phenomenological study, *Getting Back into Place* (1993), a work examining the history of place within western philosophy, *The Fate of Place* (1999), and a more recent book examining the representation of place within painting and maps.⁸

Casey acknowledges that his thinking is indebted to Bachelard's analysis of the lived experience of space. Casey places Bachelard near the beginning of the resurging interest in place in the mid-twentieth century along with Heidegger. Casey also follows a wave of thought on place in the 1970s and early 1980s "composed of ecologically minded geographers who attempted to reinstate place as a central category within their own

⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-26

⁸ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 1st edn (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1997); Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

discipline.”⁹ These include Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Topophilia* and *Space and Place*,¹⁰ and other authors such as Edward Relph, Joshua Meyrowitz, D.W. Meinig, Anne Buttimer and David Seamon.¹¹

Casey achieves a number of significant things in his inquiries into the nature of place which I wish to explore. He provides a bold, articulate distinction between space and place as concepts; he posits that place has a philosophical primacy to space and time; and he explores the mechanics of how our body brings us into places.

Casey clearly delineates the definition of *place* from *space*, and part of his project has been to distinctly articulate a notion of place that is clearly removed from understandings of space. Casey identifies two features of place that make it distinct from space. The first is the notion that place *implaces* objects or events — in order for anything spatial or temporal to exist it must be implaced somewhere or ‘somewhen’. The notion of space in contrast to place is void-like and can be imagined in the absence of something implaced in it.¹² The second notion that distinguishes place from space is the generation of place through the process of dwelling. A place is developed and given meaning — be it a natural or built place — through the process of dwelling of beings who imbue the place with particular functions and values.¹³

Casey maps the dominance of place in early western thought in *The Fate of Place*, and its absence in a theoretical blind spot for centuries until its return in contemporary theories of philosophy.¹⁴ Casey returns to some of the earliest documented thoughts on the nature of place, including mythological stories and the early ruminations about the nature of place, space and time of the Greek philosophers.¹⁵ By returning to this early source material in western thought, Casey reconsiders some of western culture’s assumed intellectual assertions of place from a perspective that has fallen out of dominant discourse.

⁹ Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, p. xv

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974) and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota, 1977).

¹¹ Edward Relph, *Place and Placeness* (London: Pion, 1976); Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); D.W. Meinig, ed, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and Anne Buttimer and David Seamon, eds, *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

¹² Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, p. 13

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 146

¹⁴ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, 1st edn (Berkley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1997), p. xi

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7

Casey identifies a compelling concept from the Ancient Greek philosopher Archytas. He identifies a concept of place as prior to all things, a major idea that Casey pursues in his thinking:

Since everything that is in motion is moved in some place; it is obvious that one has to grant priority to place, in which that which causes motion or is acted upon will be. Perhaps thus it is the first of all things, since all existing things are either in place or not without place.¹⁶

Like Archytas, Casey suggests that place is prior to all things (including time and space) as in order for bodies or temporal events to exist, there is an implied implacement of either those objects or events. In order to exist at all, one needs a place to exist in. Casey asserts the conceptual primacy of place:

It is a striking fact, on which we do not often enough reflect, that while we can certainly *conceive* of entirely empty spaces and times—radical vacua in which no bodies (in space) or events (in time) exist—such spatio-temporal void are themselves placelike insofar as they *could be*, in principle, occupied by bodies and events. Moreover, once bodies are found or are even merely posited, they *require* places in which to exist.¹⁷

A body both necessitates the existence of a place for it to exist at all, and as Casey explores, the body or object in place is central to the way a place is perceived and cultivated.

The body is the vehicle through which we are within place, and with which we move through the dimensions of space in order to find other places. Our bodies take us into place through the different directions in which we are able to move: up/down, front/back and left/right. Casey examines how the notion of directions in many cultures is defined in some way as these three axes.¹⁸ The notions of ahead and behind encircle the body — the sphere of ahead is where we do the majority of activities with our body, reflecting the asymmetry of the human body where our face, arms, legs all face forward. Due to vision being a dominant sense for humans, we move into place on the whole through moving to places ahead of us. We can also “back” into place, for example when our behind contacts

¹⁶ As cited by Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Categoriae Commentarium*, cited in Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, p. 14 n. 48

¹⁷ Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, p. 13

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90

a chair. Ahead and behind are linked to the orientation of the body: when we rotate, what was once behind is now ahead, and vice versa.

Casey establishes how the experience of 'here' and 'there' brings us into place. In phenomenological terms an individual can only ever be embodied in the 'here': it is impossible to be 'there'. Casey suggests that complete disorientation for humans is linked to not having a 'here'.¹⁹ Casey explores the different variations of the experience of 'here' which I have summarised below:

- 1) *Here in part*. How we locate being 'here' in the body, for example being here located in the head, or torso or hip, or feet.
- 2) *Here of my body proper*. When we feel as our body here, i.e., here in a chair.
- 3) *Here of my by-body*. The 'here' that we experience as our body moves through space in a place.
- 4) *Regional here*. Being 'here' not just in the place that you move, but in a broader region, i.e., the house that you are in, block or neighbourhood, city.
- 5) *Interpersonal here*. When we have an experience of our 'there' as another person's 'here'.²⁰

The scale of being 'here' is greatly varied, from the micro place within the body to the macro place of a city or nation. If we are in a place (such as a living room), it is then implaced in a house, in a neighbourhood, in a city, in a country and so on. Place then becomes an integral part of our identity and our history. It defines not only *where* you are but *how* you are being there with others: "we tend to identify ourselves by—and with—the places in which we reside."²¹ Places not only create a network of lived experience through our bodies but create a network of meanings that construct our sense of self.

Casey offers an experiential way of understanding how we are within place — how we have a sense of being 'here', how our perception of being 'here' is placed against the notion of other places 'there', near or far from the experience of the place that we are within at that moment. The phenomenological suggestion is that we understand place (and cultivate it) through the way we are in it and perceive being in it.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 51

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 52-53

²¹ Ibid., p. 120

Dwelling is the process by which places are generated, shaped and maintained by humans. Casey identifies what qualities are essential for a three-dimensional space to take on features that make it a place: places must be able to be reoccupied, as well as have a felt familiarity for those who dwell in them.²² Places are developed and shaped through different patterns of inhabitation, and which generate many forms of places. Built sites and cultivated places range from buildings, houses, gardens, cities and regions and natural outdoor spaces, all which serve different dwelling functions as places in our lives. Human activity is key to cultivating the dwelling experience of a place. From building materials to personal objects, these things cultivate the place; the home is identified by Casey as one of people's most cultivated spaces.²³ He also explores how cities have a series of cultivated external places that draw us out of our internal homes that we experience (post offices, churches, libraries, schools, shopping malls). We create countless kinds of places, and their forms of inhabitation, construction, location and histories are incredibly varied.

Casey identifies two forms of places: built places and unbuilt natural environments. Gardens are an example of built places made up of nature; they bridge a traditional built place with an uncultivated wild landscape. They are constructed out of the 'media' of the natural world (ground, wood, water, rocks, plant life) and offer a unique experience of being at the edge of dwelling, between a stable and transient state.²⁴

Casey describes implacement as an ongoing cultural process that is a combination of natural activity and the human reshaping of those places. As places are mainly communal, they are created and defined collectively. The creation of buildings is a way that we condense an aspect of our culture in one place (a place of worship, sport, entertainment).²⁵ Time is also an important element as to *when* we are culturally implaced, as well as the duration of time experienced when we are implaced.

Casey develops the notion that place is understood (and created) through lived experience. Humans' dwelling in a particular space converts it into a place. The dwelling activity imbues the place with its function and cultural value, and sometimes is physically built and sculpted as part of this process. A built place is inscribed with its dwelling, and this 'inscription' is then read back by others who dwell in a particular place. Casey's phenomenological model creates a localised, experiential notion of place. Place is built

²² Ibid., p. 116

²³ Ibid., p. 120

²⁴ Ibid., p. 154

²⁵ Ibid., p. 32

and understood through dwelling and occupation, attached to its materiality. It can't be generated or understood without actually being in the place, and occupying the space in time.

Bachelard and Casey provide a sense of how place is experienced and generated through human perception and activity. They offer a clear delineation as to the difference between place and space and assert the conceptual primacy to house bodies in space and events in time. But how does place function in relation to the workings of our culture, and its social and political production? I now want to move into an account of works by Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé in order to examine the operations of place outside of the phenomenological.

Henri Lefebvre

Lefebvre's work *The Production of Space* synthesises a long-term interest in Marxism and materialism with theories on space in everyday life. Lefebvre introduces a Marxist analysis of place and space, and examines the role of place as a product of social and cultural forces and structures. I wish to align what I see as the parallels between the phenomenological perspectives on place (in Bachelard and Casey) with the Marxist materialist perspectives on space (and place) and its relationship to cultural production, in order to explore the cultural and social implications of place beyond the actuality of perceiving it.

A move into Lefebvre's thinking introduces a terminological confusion as the term space is constantly employed, without the term place being utilised at all. While the differences between space and place are not explicitly addressed in Lefebvre's project, I argue that Lefebvre's major interest in space equate with the features and social functions that make it *place* by Casey's definition. Lefebvre establishes a triad that analyses space in terms of its connection to social production. Lefebvre's three concepts are 'spatial practice', 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces'.

The first concept I want to examine is Lefebvre's notion of 'social space', which is the product of 'spatial practice'. Lefebvre asserts that there is a complex spatiality which is socially produced, that space is a product of social and cultural activity, and that this (social) production of space is hard to delineate from other physical and mental notions of

space.²⁶ Lefebvre separates ‘social space’ from two other notions of space, ‘physical space’ (which deals with the three dimensional actuality of space) and ‘mental space’ (mathematical and cultural conceptions of what space is).²⁷

Lefebvre’s concept of ‘social space’ can be aligned to Edward Casey’s definition of place. From a phenomenological perspective, Casey argues that place is generated by dwelling, and by the social functions ascribed to particular spaces that make them *places*. Lefebvre asserts a very similar notion of a ‘spatiality’ which is generated as a social product — through human activity and social deployment of ‘physical space’. In this respect, I regard Lefebvre as addressing the production of *place* when he writes:

Everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a ‘room’ in an apartment, the ‘corner’ of the street, a ‘marketplace’, a shopping or culture ‘centre’, a public ‘place’ and so on. These terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish, but not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general to describe a social space. They correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice they express and constitute.²⁸

Lefebvre’s notion of ‘social space’ generated by a ‘spatial practice’ strongly aligns with Casey’s definitions of place as a result of human dwelling. Connected to ‘social space’ is the aforementioned term of ‘spatial practice’. ‘Spatial practice’ is the means by which ‘social space’ is generated, as Lefebvre describes:

The spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytical standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.²⁹

Lefebvre’s ‘spatial practice’ parallels the notion of Casey’s dwelling — ‘social space’ (or *place*) is generated through the activities of the culture within physical space. Lefebvre introduces a materialist dimension in this thinking which is not present in the phenomenological perspective. Here space (or *place*) is connected to the socio-economic

²⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1991), p. 26

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38

base of the culture; it is a by-product of the mode of production (spatial practice) employed by the society.

Lefebvre's other two concepts, 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces', also have implications for a notion of place in this study. Both concepts relate to a notion of the 'conceived' aspect of space. As two kinds of representations, they sit outside of material reality; they are psychic structures which our culture animates. 'Representations of space' relates to the conceived space of the social rulers of our culture, an official space which is animated by "scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers."³⁰ 'Representational spaces' on the other hand relates to a lived space by inhabitants and users "which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate."³¹ Later I wish to argue that the socially 'conceived' dimension of space can be related to the Lacanian notion of the 'imaginary' of place. Both Lefebvre's 'conceived' spaces and Lacan's 'imaginary' are psychic cultural structures which are shared imaginings of place and space that imbue it with particular values, and enable certain fantasies.

Michel de Certeau

Michel de Certeau also pursues a materialist understanding of place through notions of production and consumption. De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* was published in French in 1974 and published in English in 1984. De Certeau combines in this work phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and other thinking from anthropology and social history drawn from his eclectic past to consider the cultural function of space and place.

De Certeau employs a different interpretation of the terminology of space and place from Casey, although there is some overlapping thinking. De Certeau's definition of place, like Casey's, has an emphasis on the *implacement* offered by place:

The elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.³²

³⁰ Ibid., p. 38

³¹ Ibid., p. 39

³² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117

De Certeau's definition starts to depart from Casey's toward the end of this description with a suggestion of positioning and stability. De Certeau's definition suggests a notion of place as a balanced, organised topography. De Certeau's definition of space is even more distinct, space "occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities."³³ Like Lefebvre, space is a kind of production, but in de Certeau's version space is actualised by the mobile elements and movements within it. De Certeau then identifies the relationship between place and space as the following:

In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs.

De Certeau's proposition is almost an inversion of Casey's definition of these terms. For Casey, places are cultivated through the practices within physical space. De Certeau instead defines space as a kind of operational activity that happens within place. De Certeau expands on this notion through his discussion of the opposition between the 'map' and the 'tour' — the 'map' provides a schematic overview (which is associated with place) as in "the girl's room is next to the kitchen"; and the tour gives an experiential understanding (associated with his definition of space), as in "you turn right and come into the living room."³⁴ While de Certeau inverts Casey's use of the terms place and space, there is a similar interest in what Casey defines as place. De Certeau's operational space, where a dwelled knowledge is accrued as described in the 'tour', is comparable to Casey's notion of place, where dwelling generates the cultural reality of place.

I now want to move into a discussion of de Certeau's chapter 'Walking in the City' from *The Practice of Everyday Life*, describing New York, and examine his concepts of 'strategy' and 'tactic'. Here de Certeau brings to the fore a notion of the official conceptualisation of place versus the lived operation of actually inhabiting it by individuals. De Certeau's influential chapter 'Walking in the City' takes as its starting point the experience of viewing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center. Looking down on the grid-like layout of the city de Certeau suggests that this is a rare visual understanding of the city (and one, in particular, that is no longer possible to

³³ Ibid., p. 117

³⁴ Ibid., p. 119

view) as it provides an almost omnipotent, map-like view of the city. De Certeau argues that this understanding of the city is completely different from the experience of being a pedestrian within the streets of the city, that their paths and trajectories are very different from the map-like concept of the city.

Underpinning de Certeau's reading of the city in these two different ways are his concepts of 'strategy' and 'tactic'. De Certeau associates his map-like view of the city from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center with the notion of the 'strategy', a unified concept of the city that is held by the government, institutions, corporations and bodies of power. De Certeau asserts that the notion of the 'map' offers place as organised and hierarchical, a 'strategy' by those in power. He defines the term in more detail:

I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed.³⁵

In contrast, de Certeau believes that the pedestrian on the street does not move adhering to the exact plans of the 'strategy', but instead 'tactically' navigates place and space beyond the restrictive imaginings of the 'strategic'. The pedestrian's experiential operations means they find shortcuts, window shop, wander aimlessly, and do not conform to the 'strategic'. De Certeau defines it as follows:

A *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus...the space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.³⁶

The tactical pedestrian can work against the wishes of the strategic, with a guerrilla-like approach to the desires of the 'strategy'. It is, as de Certeau describes, "the art of the weak",³⁷ as the tactic is working against the prevailing power structures of the 'strategy'.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 36

³⁶ Ibid., p. 37

³⁷ Ibid., p. 37

There is a notion here which is consistent with other theories: that place has an imagined or conceived dimension, and a lived experiential understanding of place which tactically works inside and against the constricting limitations imposed by the conceptual or imaginary of place. The imagined or conceived dimension of place for de Certeau is expressed as part of the ‘strategy’ held by the systems of power within late-capitalist societies.

The dweller’s lived experience accumulates both knowledge and a definition of place, but also for de Certeau generates tactics to manage the manipulative or oppressive social forces at play. City dwellers are imbued with a guerrilla-like potential, they can refuse to conform to the conceptual ‘strategic’ vision of place, and author a new kind of map of the city through their operations within that space. De Certeau’s ‘tactic’ provides a concept of resistance within the ‘strategy’ of the place, which I will examine later in my discussion of the Wooster Group (Chapter 3).

Marc Augé

The final theorist of place I wish to discuss is Marc Augé and his work around the term ‘non-place’. Along with de Certeau, Augé’s ideas have been used by theorists such as Nick Kaye to consider how place influences contemporary performance.³⁸ Marc Augé builds on de Certeau’s investigation of place and space through social and cultural practices, and introduces the notion of the ‘non-place’ in his book, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* published in English in 1995. I wish to introduce Augé’s two key interconnected concepts, the notions of supermodernity and the non-place.

Augé posits that the condition of supermodernity creates non-places. Supermodernity for Augé is the result of three kinds of cultural excess. The first kind of excess is one of time (and history) where we experience “an overabundance of events in the contemporary world”³⁹ such that we cannot process them all (and the information about them). According to Augé, this leads to a difficulty in processing a notion of time and relating the events of the past with now. The second kind of excess is that of space. Augé argues this excess of space is the result of the virtual extensions into physical spaces across the

³⁸ Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)

³⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London, New York: Verso, 1995), p. 30

globe due to satellite (and now internet) technologies which enable us to witness events on the other side of the planet. This virtual excess of space is paradoxically coupled with the contraction of physical space, as Augé argues with the notion that “our first steps in outer space reduce our own space to an infinitesimal point.”⁴⁰ The final excess is one of ego (or notions of personal identity). Augé believes that we are within a western culture with heavy emphasis on the individual, where “the individual wants to be a world in himself; he intends to interpret the information delivered to him by himself and for himself.”⁴¹ Our identity is also more and more quantified and represented within our culture (through passports, ATM cards, drivers licenses).

Non-places manifest as a product of Augé’s supermodernity. They are a kind of temporary space to which the dweller has a transient relationship, and whose function is for travel, communication or consumption. Augé defines the non-place:

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space not defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places [...] A world where people are born in the clinic and die in the hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral.⁴²

Augé’s non-place is characterised by ‘places’ that lack an ability to be cultivated as identity spaces for those who dwell within them. Augé argues that spaces that are constructed to enable transience or consumption lack an ability to be inscribed into place. It is possible to group Augé’s non-places into two: those associated with passage and travel (highways, airport lounges, public transport) and those associated with consumption (supermarkets, hotels, petrol stations.) Augé also addresses non-places that

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 78

relate to communication in supermodernity. These spaces are associated with the virtual and are dwelled in the in-between of communication (the internet spaces of Facebook and Myspace demonstrate Augé's communicative non-place). Augé therefore posits that transience leads to a kind of placelessness, or indeed as his very concept implies, a non-place, a kind of place that is commonly utilised in society but lacks the important qualities that make place a place. There is a notion that when one is mobilised in Augé's supermodernity, one loses the lived relation to place, a new kind of place (a non-place) emerges.

Augé's notion of the non-place both works with and against Casey's phenomenological definition of place. Augé suggests that dwelling does not necessarily transform space into place — that there are certain spaces in which dwelling does not generate the meanings and values associated with place. The transitory nature of Augé's non-place is of interest to me when analysing contemporary performance created for the touring international performing arts market, which I examine in detail with Societas Raffaello Sanzio's multi-part performance *Tragedia Endogonidia*.

The writings by Gaston Bachelard, Edward S. Casey, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé provide a diverse and detailed understanding of place. I would like to draw attention to two commonalities in the thinking of these theorists. The first is that they each suggest, in various ways, that place is the product of human dwelling and social activity: place is generated and experienced through human activity and is a product of social and cultural workings.

The second common notion is that place has a conceived or imagined dimension, be it Bachelard's house as psyche or Lefebvre's 'representations of space'. This conceived or imagined dimension enables shared (or contested) visions of place. In the second part of this thesis I will explore the notion of the 'imaginary' of place. I use the concept of the imaginary from Lacanian psychoanalysis to interrogate the formation of a national identity within Australia as part of making performance linked to my own place.

However, before embarking on this analysis of Australia as place, I am going to ask my readers to travel with me on a physical journey to explore more about contemporary performance and place in New York with the Wooster Group, and Sheffield with Forced Entertainment.

3 *The Wooster Group*

New York City 2002: Interning with the Wooster Group

In 2002 I travelled to New York City to spend nine weeks as an intern with the Wooster Group. During this time I observed rehearsals and worked as a stage manager on the New York premiere of *To You, The Birdie!*, the group's version of Racine's *Phèdre*. I also watched the entire video archive of all of the company's work, spanning over twenty five years. Being in New York City to observe the company's creative process gave me a unique insight into their performance making processes. It presented me with an opportunity to consider how place and space figured in their creative process compared to my own.

In the time that I was with the Wooster Group, I learnt that their creative process begins with the set design; this was actualised far beyond my own process or, for that matter, any other processes that I have encountered. All of the designs of the Wooster Group's work have been derived and framed out of the particular dimensions of the Performing Garage, a converted trucking garage which has served as the company's home for its entire history. The set for a Wooster Group work is built and installed in the company's performance space before the performers and director begin devising any material. The performers together with director Elizabeth LeCompte commence the creative process within this fully realised set. The space of the design becomes the physical container for all of the generated actions, activities and events of the work. Jim Clayburgh co-designs The Wooster Group's sets in collaboration with Elizabeth LeCompte:

We normally design and build the set before we start work on the piece [...] So already the frame is there and the canvas is stretched and the rough outlines of the shape are in front of you. You can add elements to different parts of the canvas, but you cannot decide to work in a new format, like going from a canvas that's 4' x 6' to one that's 1' x 1'.¹

¹ Tish Dace, "Plywood and Electronics: Designer Jim Clayburgh of the Wooster Group", *Theatre Crafts* (1984), p. 25

Space is the 'canvas' for the Wooster Group's creations, the frame within which all other ideas are generated and composed. In the case of *To You, The Birdie!*, the company worked on and off over three years within the design, with new elements and objects being introduced into this space during this time.

When I was working with the company on *To You, The Birdie!* I was told that it was the first new set that the company had created in fifteen years. Each new show by the Wooster Group had reconfigured the same layout and aspects of the set's scenic elements since *LSD... Just the High Points* (1984), which itself employed part of a reversed floor plan of the company's work *Nayatt School*, created in 1978. The *Nayatt School* set in turn reconfigured the design layouts of some of the first Wooster Group performances. Jim Clayburgh describes the evolution of the company's early set designs that led to the design of *LSD... Just the High Points*:

The house was wood in *Rumstick Road*. When it fell downstairs in *Nayatt School* (much of the piece was staged on the floor, although the audience sat on a raised, raked platform 10' off the ground), it became tape and wood, with one side of the plan taped out. The ground plan for *Rumstick Road*, in effect, became the ground plan for *Nayatt School*, only reversed in the space and lowered [...] it's a constant evolution of the same ground plan, with just a transfer to another space or the change of an angle. Even when I designed *LSD*, the ground plans for all the other shows were on the stage as my reference for working it out.²

Elizabeth LeCompte has explored the particular elements of this set, which have been reconfigured again and again in various shows. When I watched the video archives of the company's work I was fascinated by this mutation of the same design and its reconfiguration, and roughly sketched the variations of these changes.

² Ibid., p. 28

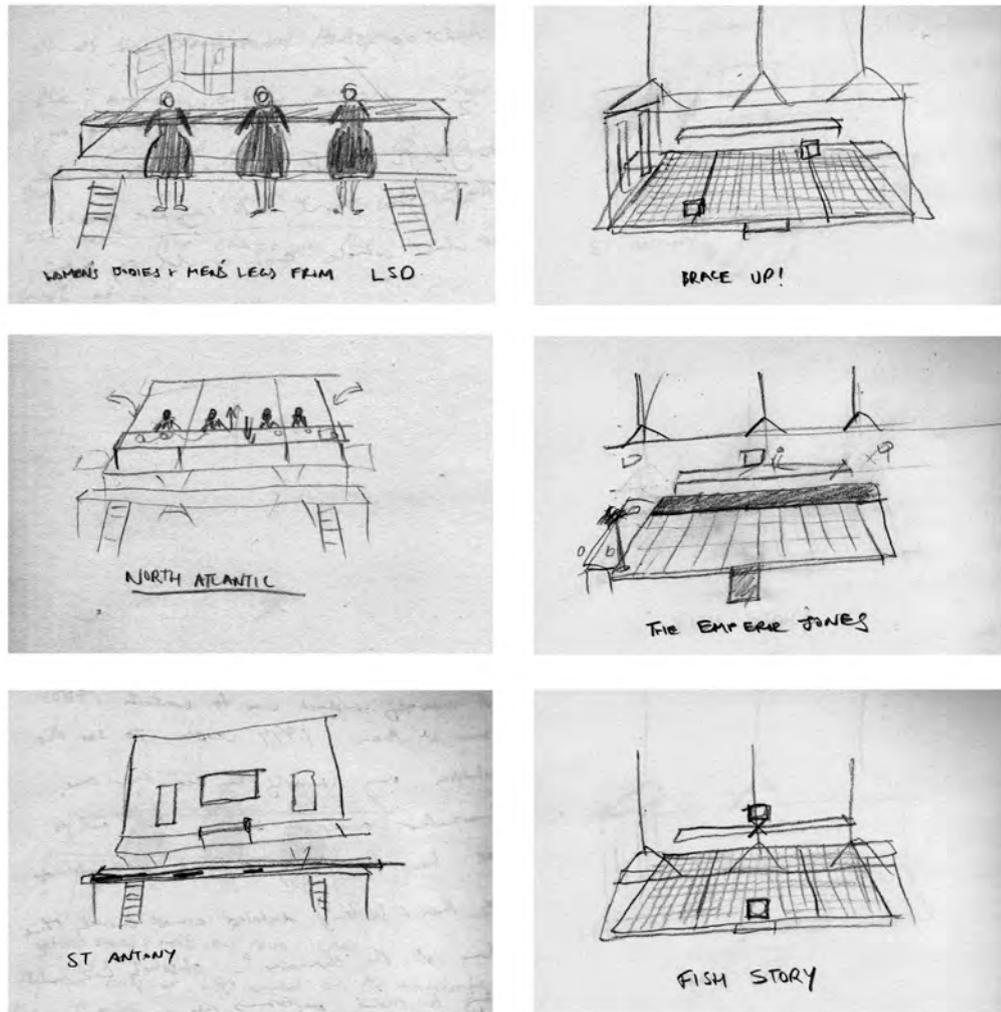


FIGURE 1. Sketches of the Wooster Group set from *L.S.D... Just the High Points* (1984), *North Atlantic* (1984), *Frank Dell's The Temptation of St. Antony* (1987), *Brace Up!* (1991), *The Emperor Jones* (1993) and *Fish Story* (1994).

There are a number of scenic elements that have been reconfigured across these diagrams: a long thin rectangular table is at the back or front of the central stage space, ramps are positioned stage left and stage right, low hanging lighting bars are positioned at various heights, and television monitors are placed on the floor, or rigged higher in the background.

The Wooster Group's set is a constant element in their body of work. This physical container that their performance work is conceived and realised within has a creative lineage, and a spatial history that the group builds upon and creates variations within. In this regard, the set carries the history of the company's work; it is possible to see traces of past works by looking at the current Wooster Group show.

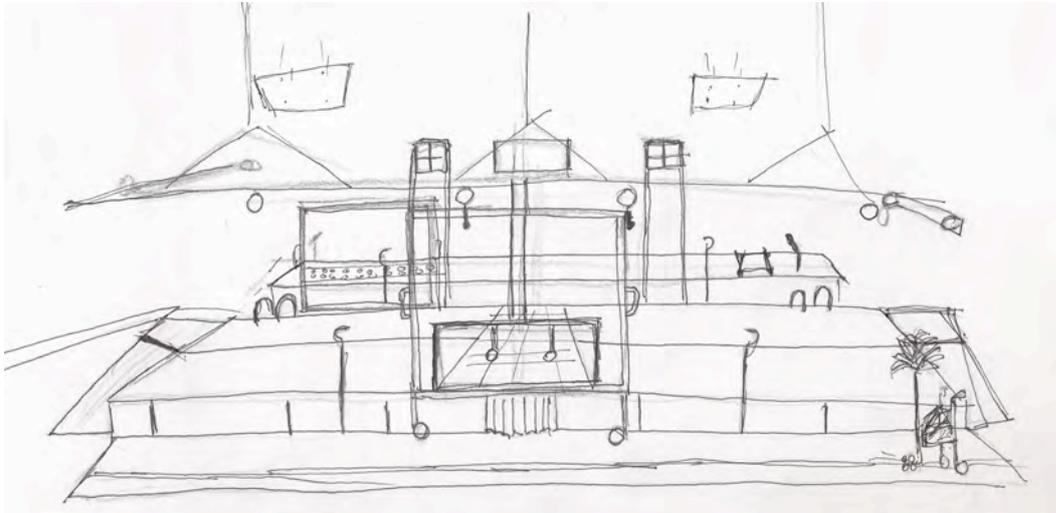


FIGURE 2. Sketch of the *To You, The Birdie!* set (2002)

The new set that was built for *To You, The Birdie!* carries all of the key spatial markers of the old set. It includes two ramps either side of the central performance space, a long sunken rectangular ‘table’ (the surface of which is at the same height as the elevated performance space), and a series of lowered lighting bars which hang as an aesthetic element. The major change in the *To You, The Birdie!* set was a use of the different audience configuration within the Performing Garage, which means that the set is much wider and shallower, creating a panoramic, ‘cinemascope’ aesthetic.

Space is the first stage in the Wooster Group’s creative process, and the ‘canvas’ upon which all other materials in the work (sound, actions, text) are placed within. This space is also a palimpsest for the Wooster Group; it carries traces of previous design elements and is imbued with the meanings and aesthetics of its previous body of work. Space as a starting point in the Wooster Group’s process was comparable to my own. In what way, however, could there be a spatial transference operating in their work? In what ways are the places they are experiencing manifesting within the work we see onstage? Prior to beginning my internship with the company in New York, I had the opportunity to see their work live in Australia. My first encounter with the Wooster Group was at the 2001 Melbourne Festival.

Melbourne Festival 2001: The Hairy Ape

I have arrived in Melbourne to see *The Hairy Ape* and I'm slightly nervous. The year before I had set up a three month internship with the Wooster Group to be attached to the new show they were making, and I received a scholarship to be with them in New York City. By chance, shortly after my plans had been organised the company informed me that they would be coming to the Melbourne Festival. It is only the company's second visit to Australia. The other occasion was to the Adelaide Festival in 1986 with their most well-known work, *L.S.D... Just the High Points*.

Prior to travelling to Melbourne I had known of the company through what I had read: their work in the past such as *L.S.D... Just the High Points*, the controversies surrounding their use of copyrighted material and blackface, and their interest in working with new technologies to create a unique theatrical style.³ But I had never seen their work before... and suddenly I thought: I've just assumed that I will like this company's work. What if I hate it? What if I really dislike it and have to spend three months in New York working with this company?

Fortunately for me, *The Hairy Ape* did not disappoint. I was completely enthralled by the work and it remains as one of the most distinct and compelling performances that I have ever seen. I felt that this company's approach to creating performance was completely different from others I had encountered. From my understanding at the time it seemed that the style of this work had grown outside of performance approaches or traditions that I was aware of.

I was captivated by the performance style of this company. They found a performance energy through an approach to text that wasn't psychological, that worked with its musicality rather than its psychological truth. Director Elizabeth LeCompte talked about this in the programme for the show:

When I'm dealing with any text I'm dealing with sounds and the rhythm, so I get working with words on a number of levels. I don't primarily use them to carry the meaning of the piece — even though I feel they do — they're not used the way a traditional theatre person might. I don't have a psychological structure in mind and then go about illustrating it. I tend to have a physical structure in mind (or in place), which I then want to

³ Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*.

animate with the performers. In the United States I have been accused of trying to destroy dramatic structure and obliterate the text. I think I'm just listening to the text differently. I treat the words like music and the sounds like words.⁴

But I was perhaps most captivated by the visual world of this production. The design was a metal architectural structure with hydraulics, built-in television monitors and low-hanging theatre lighting bars. This space was used in an abstract way to represent the places of Eugene O'Neill's text, which follows the character Yank (played by Willem Dafoe) who is the chief coal stoker on a liner and becomes intrigued with a rich society girl Mildred. Once the liner arrives at its destination of New York, Yank tries to search for Mildred in the city, spiralling into jail, meeting an anarchic union gang and is strangled by an ape that he tries to free from the zoo.⁵

The set represented the inside and outside of a ship, exterior and interior spaces in New York and the Zoo of Central Park. Multiple television monitors displayed a moving circular shape that was perhaps the portal of the ship. Later a moving hydraulic frame platform lowers and closes Dafoe 'below' deck. Sitting on 'stools' (a bicycle seat attached to a walking stick) Dafoe and another performer sit still, a monitor behind them showing footage of Fifth Avenue out the window of a taxi. Later an office clubroom is created with small tables which rest diagonally on a theatre lighting bar, a real object suspended in a surreal way. At the end of the performance, the hydraulic platform raises upright to become the cage of the Ape that crushes Dafoe's Yank.

I left the performance of *The Hairy Ape* feeling elated and inspired — I couldn't wait to get to the Wooster Group in its home in SoHo in New York to find out more about how the company creates its work. A few months after seeing *The Hairy Ape*, and just before I was about to travel to New York, I read David Savran's book about the company, *Breaking the Rules*. His description of his experience of first seeing the company's work (*Nayatt School* in May 1982) resonated with my own:⁶

⁴ *The Hairy Ape*, theatre programme, The Wooster Group, The Merlyn Theatre, The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, November 2001.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Nayatt School* (created in 1978) was one of the first pieces in which the Wooster Group utilised an assortment of texts, including two excerpts from T.S. Elliot's *The Cocktail Party*, a scene written by Jim Strahs, and fifteen records including and Alec Guinness recording of *The Cocktail Party* from the 1950s. Many of the strategies in this work became signature features of *L.S.D.... Just the High Points*. Savran describes it as "a celebration that is unique among the Wooster Group's work, embodying the thrill of discovery, of coming upon a world alternately sublime and horrific". See Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, p. 102

I was enraptured, and remained so until the end of the piece, carried away by a whirlwind the like of which I had never seen before in the theatre. When the performance ended I walked—or floated—out onto Wooster Street and, in an state of exultation, started running up the street. For me, the act of writing this book has been an attempt to recapture the thrill and the breathlessness of that run.⁷

What is of interest to me is the place of Savran's elation — which not in the audience of the Wooster Group's show but on Wooster Street in SoHo. There is something intriguing about this moment of emotional elevation for Savran occurring not in the performance venue during the show — the place of Wooster Street is intrinsically connected to Savran's memory of the company's work.

There has not been any specific analysis of the Wooster Group's relation to place. Interviews with LeCompte and other members of the company often refer to the history of the Performing Garage and their relationship to it, as well as the company's self referential visual aesthetic that has reused props, costumes and set design elements utilised from other works.⁸ But the Wooster Group, New York, and its district SoHo are not explored in these discussions. There has however been extensive academic analysis of the Wooster Group's work,⁹ particularly during its time of international prominence in the 1980s with its works such as *Route 1&9* and *LSD... Just the High Points* which marked the company's deconstructive relationship to American classic texts and American culture itself.

Postmodernity, intellectual property, and representations of race have been the major areas of discussion around the company's work. This is very much related to the associated controversies in the Wooster Group's work which first brought them into the public eye, including Spalding Gray's use of personal interviews relating to his mother's suicide,¹⁰ the use of blackface in *Route 1&9* in the early 1980s that resulted in a funding

⁷ Ibid., p. 7

⁸ Ibid., p. 50

⁹ Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, p. 39

¹⁰ *Rumstick Road* was largely generated from a series of recorded interviews made by Spalding Gray with members of his family as he was dealing with his mother's suicide. Later Spalding and Elizabeth LeCompte used this material as a starting point to create a work. See Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, pp. 90-94

cut,¹¹ and most famously the cease and desist order placed on the company for using excerpts of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in *L.S.D... Just the High Points*.¹²

L.S.D... Just the High Points generated a cluster of writing: Gerald Rabkin examined the controversial notions of authorship and ownership connected to Arthur Miller's text¹³, Arnold Aronson analysed the performance and interviewed LeCompte.¹⁴ Around the same time Philip Auslander focused on the Group's notions of acting in an interview with Willem Dafoe called "Task and Vision" (and recently followed up by "Task and Vision Revisited");¹⁵ Auslander later examined how the political functions in postmodern theatre and The Wooster Group's work.¹⁶

Brace Up! generated two articles giving insight into Elizabeth LeCompte and the Group's process. Euridice Arriata talks to both LeCompte and Valk about the conceptualisation of the work, and details aspects of the creative process and LeCompte's 'authoring' of the group's work.¹⁷ Paul Schmidt wrote about musicality of his translation process of *Three Sisters*; and both Nick Kaye and Susie Mee examined the unusual parallels between Chekhov and the Wooster Group, again in discussion with LeCompte, Valk and Marianne Weems.¹⁸

The first book on the Wooster Group was Savran's *Breaking the Rules* from 1986, which covers the company's work from its first performance through to *L.S.D... Just the High*

¹¹ One of the Wooster Group's major funding bodies at the time, the New York State Council on the Arts cut the Group's funding by forty percent after deeming its use of Blackface "caricatured portrayals of a racial minority". See *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹² Arthur Miller denied the performance rights to *The Crucible* (or excerpts of it) to the Wooster Group, primarily that their production could preclude a "first-class" (or Broadway) production of the work, adding a concern that LeCompte's version may be seen by an audience as a parody of his text. Miller's 'cease and desist' order against the Group is somewhat ironic given the subject of *The Crucible* dealing with the censorship of the House of Un-American Activities. For a full account see *Ibid.*, pp. 188-195

¹³ Gerald Rabkin, "Is There a Text on This Stage: Theatre/Text/Interpretation", in *Re:direction: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, ed. by Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 319-331

¹⁴ Arnold Aronson, "The Wooster Group's LSD (...Just the High Points...)", *The Drama Review*, 29.2 (1985), pp. 65-77

¹⁵ Philip Auslander, "Task and Vision: Willem Dafoe in LSD", in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. by Phillip Zarilli, (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 305-311 and Philip Auslander, "Task and Vision Revisited: Two Conversations with Willem Dafoe (1984/2002)", in *The Wooster Group and Its Traditions*, ed. by Johan Callens (Bruxelles: Peter Lang Publishers, 2004), pp. 63-73

¹⁶ Philip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Euridice Arriata, "Island Hopping: Rehearsing The Wooster Group's "Brace Up!""", *The Drama Review*, 36.4 (1992), pp. 121-142

¹⁸ Paul Schmidt, "The Sounds of *Brace Up!* Translating the Music of Chekhov", *The Drama Review*, 36.4 (1992), pp. 154-157; *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. by Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (New York: Routledge, 1996) and Susie Mee, "Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and The Wooster Group's *Brace Up!*" *The Drama Review*, 36.4 (1992), p. 143-153

Points.¹⁹ There are also two more recent books about the company. *The Wooster Group and its Traditions*, an edited book by Johan Callens published in 2004, looks at the company's later works and other theatre companies that bare influences of the Group.²⁰ Andrew Quick's *The Wooster Group Work Book* published in 2007 studies a range of archival materials from the company's process of making work.²¹

But the Wooster Group's relationship to New York and its district SoHo has not figured in the body of academic work around the company. In what ways has the Wooster Group been influenced by New York City and SoHo, and does their work absorb and transfer their experiences of place?

New York City and the SoHo of the 1960s and 1970s

New York City is universally known as a high-paced frenetic city, 'the city that never sleeps' as the saying goes.²² Manhattan is a small, compressed area that houses a huge and diverse population, and in turn is made up of a range of diverse districts. It is a place of montage and collision—from its diverse cultural makeup, to its mixture of commerce and arts. Wall Street businessmen, experimental downtown artists and rich socialites simultaneously occupy the city, overlaying the same space.

These features of Manhattan are evident in The Wooster Group's style and aesthetic. Their work is referred to as frenetic and performed at breakneck speed.²³ It is made up of a collision of diverse materials that are overlaid into a performance score. These materials come from a variety of sources including found objects, improvised actions, architectural forms, film and television material and plays. There is not a desire to synthesise these various materials into a singular homogenous form. There is instead, as Wooster Group associate Marianne Weems describes, a desire to make a "contrapuntal reading [...] there's no didactic, polemical [...] connection being made. There's no attempt to connect them, really. I think there's a rhythmic attempt to make them relate, or perhaps to let them relate in the space."²⁴

¹⁹ Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*.

²⁰ *The Wooster Group and Its Traditions*, ed. by Johan Callens (Bruxelles: Peter Lang Publishers, 2004).

²¹ *The Wooster Group Work Book*, ed. by Andrew Quick (New York & London: Routledge, 2007).

²² See Murray Pomerance, *City that Never Sleeps: New York and the Filmic Imagination* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007) for an analysis of the various ways New York's culture and qualities is represented and imagined.

²³ Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 195

²⁴ Marianne Weems was Elizabeth LeCompte's assistant director beginning with *Frank Dell's the Temptation of St Antony* and on *Brace Up!* and later left the group creating her own work with The Builder's Association. See *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. by Huxley and Witts, p. 230

The Wooster Group possesses a New Yorker's attitude in addressing the ideology or purpose behind their work. New York City is a place where people mind their own business; there is a co-habitation of multiple ideologies. It's a city where it's hard to shock, even in public, and there's a sense of 'I don't care what you think' to those who might judge or criticise the choice of a fellow New York City dweller. The Wooster Group's use of controversial material, and its refusal to conform to the standard rules of making performance or offer a cogent singular meaning in its work, express this attitude.²⁵

LeCompte has referred directly to the notion that the Wooster Group's theatre is for an age "where we can talk on the phone, look out the window, watch TV, and be typing a letter at the same time".²⁶ LeCompte conjures a sense of the hectic-ness of New York City life and the work's parallel aesthetic. The Wooster Group can be seen to have a relationship to its city in this overall way through its aesthetic and approach, but it also has a much more specific relationship with the SoHo district it is located in and born out of.

The aesthetic of The Wooster Group's work has shifted in relation to the district of SoHo where it is based. This shift is apparent in the company's work from the late 1990s in which the upmarket fashion-centric SoHo is in dialogue with the company's work now. There is an ongoing dynamic relationship between the work of the company and the subculture of SoHo which is evident both in the past and in recent history.

SoHo is now regarded as an important historic district in New York City, mainly due to its unique concentration of Cast Iron architecture,²⁷ however this was not always the case. In fact, in the 1960s, the now district of SoHo was set to be demolished to make way for two massive overhead highways connecting to the Lower Manhattan Expressway, however this plan was eventually abandoned.²⁸ SoHo is an acronym of 'South of Houston Street', prior to its gentrification it was known as the Cast Iron District.

Originally a downtown manufacturing area, factories and businesses started abandoning the Cast Iron district in the 1960s and 1970s to find more suitable warehouse and factory

²⁵ Ibid., p. 230

²⁶ Richard M. Ravin, *The Wooster Group's Route 1 & 9 (The Last Act)*, 1999, Available: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/flashpoints/theater/wooster.html>>, [accessed 30 July 2007].

²⁷ Helene Zucker Seeman and Alanna Siegfried, *SoHo: A Guide* (New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 1978); cited in *History of SoHo*, Website, Available: <<http://www.artnyc.com/SoHoHistory.html>>, [accessed 17 November 2007].

²⁸ Seeman and Siegfried, *SoHo: A Guide*; cited in *History of SoHo*.

spaces. The vacating industry left behind many cheap ‘loft’ spaces that artists took over to convert into accommodation with studios and performance spaces for their work.²⁹ The wide spaces and tall ceilings were particularly appealing for artists to be able to create, present and store their work. The SoHo district became known as a cheap backwater with a thriving artistic community in the 1970s. The area was only zoned for light industrial and commercial purposes prior to the 1980s so the legality of this new residential-based artist community was questionable. In this way SoHo was regenerated through what Michel de Certeau calls the ‘tactical’, the non-conformist actions of individuals working against the prevailing power structures. At this time SoHo did not sit high on the socio-economic ladder of New York City; it was inhabited by poor artists and small factories.

The district of SoHo emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as place populated with radical and alternative artists. Robert Wilson took over a loft space at 147 Spring Street in SoHo, which formerly belonged to the Open Theatre (with whom he had worked as a prop maker), and began creating and presenting work there and running workshops as part of his Byrd Hoffman school.³⁰ A few months later Richard Foreman started presenting work at the Cinematheque on Wooster Street, literally around the corner from Wilson.³¹ Performance artist and filmmaker Jack Smith lived and performed work in his loft on Greene Street.³² The streets of the small district of SoHo began to fill with likeminded radical performance makers who were blowing apart conventional theatrical styles and approaches.

The Wooster Group was born out of a particular place and subculture of performance making that was happening in the late 1960s and 1970s in SoHo. The Wooster Group grew as a splinter collective to Richard Schechner’s Performance Group in the 1960s. Elizabeth LeCompte and Spalding Gray joined The Performance Group in 1970. This group, run by Richard Schechner, was heavily influenced by the work of Grotowski, who had visited the United States in the early 1960s. LeCompte was Schechner’s assistant, Gray a performer in the Group.

²⁹ Richard J. Roddewig, *Loft Conversions: Planning Issues, Problems and Prospects*, (Chicago: American Planning Association, Planning Advisory Service, 1981), pp. 5-6

³⁰ Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*, p. 108

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110

³² Jack Smith (1932-1989) was a filmmaker and performance artist best known for his film *Flaming Creatures*, whose graphic and surreal representations of sexuality led to it being banned. Smith performed in the early works of Robert Wilson and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company. Smith’s performances were marked by being seemingly chaotic and disordered, but were meticulously arranged and controlled by him. For more see *Ibid.*, pp. 116-122

Due to a teaching position he held at New York University in the late 1960s, Schechner was in a position where he could invest in his company through buying a space for their work in the dilapidated industrial area of SoHo.³³ He brought an old trucking garage in Wooster Street, where the company would rehearse and present their work. This space was (and still is) called The Performing Garage.

Schechner and The Performance Group pursued a kind of performance they called 'Environmental Theatre', in which the setting actually or implicitly surrounds the spectators, incorporating them into the same physical space as the performer. Schechner's main focus was to transform theatre from what he saw as an aesthetic event into a social event where the audience could 'enter' the performance.³⁴

Once one gives up fixed seating and the bifurcation of space, entirely new relationships are possible. Body contact can naturally occur between performers and audience; voice levels and acting intensities can be varied; a sense of shared experience can be engendered [...]. The action 'breathes' and the audience itself becomes a major scenic element.³⁵

The Performing Garage became known in the 1960s as a site where the normal parameters of space and structure in a performance were absent. During the 1970s, in particular in a period when Schechner was based in India for a year, LeCompte, Gray, and others started creating their own work together. Over time, LeCompte and Gray's interests started to diverge from those of Schechner and The Performance Group. They found his approach to performing "dangerously psychoanalytical",³⁶ wanting actors to really feel what they were experiencing on stage. They also felt that the work lacked the kind of intellectual and aesthetic rigour that they wanted to develop.³⁷

The Wooster Group's process evolved from the newly emerging processes of its SoHo colleagues. Gray had been involved in Robert Wilson's Byrd Hoffman School which had developed improvisational techniques that worked on performers' impulses and used their responses to the space that they were in.³⁸ LeCompte was strongly influenced by the work of Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and his Byrd Hoffman school in SoHo, and other

³³ Ibid., p. 101

³⁴ Richard Schechner, "6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre", *The Drama Review*, 12.3 (1968), pp. 41-64

³⁵ Ibid., p. 49

³⁶ Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, p. 3

³⁷ Ibid., p. 3

³⁸ Ibid., p. 57

New York artists such as the conceptual performance artist Stuart Sherman and the performance maker Meredith Monk.³⁹

In the late 1970s Schechner's group had dispersed, and at the point the company was to fold, LeCompte and her group negotiated to take ownership of The Performing Garage in exchange for taking over The Performance Group's debt.⁴⁰ This cunning move left LeCompte and Gray broke, but allowed them to secure a home for the company which has proved crucial to their success.

The Performing Garage became an important place within SoHo for the group. The work itself was generated in response to the environment and dimensions of the Garage, and (at the beginning of their collaboration) Spalding Gray and Elizabeth LeCompte lived there, as LeCompte describes:

We had very little to work with and we wanted to show that you don't need much to work with. If you worked with objects and things, then they took on a special meaning which they didn't have before you handled and dealt with them. The red tent was something that was here in the Garage because we were living in it. We took it downstairs. I saw it as a beautiful hovering red bell.⁴¹

The red tent that LeCompte refers to appeared in The Wooster Group's first four works. The form and colour of this tent was later referenced and 'shrunk' into a lampshade that appeared in *Brace Up!*⁴² This object from the lived life of the Garage became a still life object used again and again in the company's work. LeCompte discusses further how as a place the Performing Garage is saturated with significant material for the Group:

I could pick anything in this room [the upstairs space of the Performing Garage] and make a piece that's just as complete as *L.S.D.* I could take three props here: the printing on the back of that picture, this book, and whatever's in that pile of papers, and make something that would mean as much, no more or less, than what I've constructed in the performance space downstairs [...] you don't have to worry about meaning, it's all

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4

⁴⁰ Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*, p. 156

⁴¹ Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, p. 53

⁴² *Brace Up!* was a version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* created by the Wooster Group in 1991. See Arriata, "Island Hopping: Rehearsing The Wooster Group's "Brace Up!"".

here. It's like the space is an extension of our lives. I think we've been very lucky to be able to work this way because most people are dislocated and have to choose their props.⁴³

LeCompte describes here a process which I recognise as an articulation of spatial transference. She is conscious that the experiences of living and working in the Performing Garage as a place are reconfigured into the Wooster Group's performances. This spatial transference results in a level of personal meaning for the Group. The material from this space has an idiosyncratic meaning for the Group itself, as an element from their life it carries an inherent value for the artists.

Spatial transference is described by LeCompte as a direct (and somewhat literal) process. The lived experience within the upper level of The Performing Garage is absorbed by LeCompte and the group and transferred into representation in the downstairs performance space. The red tent, which was the 'home' of Gray and LeCompte finds itself reconfigured as an abstract object within a performance, and later is further abstracted into a lampshade.

LeCompte's absorption of The Performing Garage is transferred into the work of the Wooster Group. But what about the spaces outside of the Garage on Wooster Street and beyond in SoHo today?

The Prada Store and *To You, The Birdie!*: SoHo in the 1990s and 2000s

I would now like to move into an analysis of The Wooster Group's more recent work which has been created in the context of an extremely different SoHo. I will firstly describe the gentrification of SoHo and the new socio-economic and cultural emphasis of this place, and look at the company's 'dialogue' with this emergent new place. I am interested in examining the relationship between The Wooster Group's production *To You, The Birdie!* (2002) and Prada's flagship store which opened in 2001, and looking at the aesthetic influences between Prada's exclusive architectural designed space, and the particular architectonic aesthetic of the group's work on this project. In particular, I want to examine the similarities between the new store's changerooms and a particular sequence in *To You, The Birdie!* I would like to demonstrate how The Wooster Group's relation to place is not simply a historical one to SoHo's artistic past but a current and ongoing one with the subculture of SoHo.

⁴³ Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, p. 50

Ironically, the presence of the poor thriving artistic community in SoHo seeded the gentrification of the district, and eventually the demise of it as a place affordable to artists. In fact, this pattern of gentrification involving artists has been called the ‘SoHo effect’.⁴⁴ I view the ‘SoHo effect’ as what de Certeau deems a ‘strategy’ in response to the ‘tactical’ artistic practices that were operational at the time. The ‘strategy’ of gentrification in SoHo brings it back into the fold of the commercial powers within the city.

The gentrification pattern emerged in the 1980s in SoHo, capitalising on the impact the community of artists had on the district. The artists’ presence began to establish a range of art gallery spaces, cafes and other stores regarded as ‘hip’. Ironically as the ‘hip’ reputation of the district developed, it became appealing to young urban professionals. The artist run galleries were succeeded by much more affluent art collector run spaces, and the ‘artistic’ focus of the district attracted fashion boutiques and upmarket restaurants. As the property prices rose there was an exodus of the artists themselves who could no longer afford the rental, leaving this neighbourhood renowned for its artistic community bereft of all but a very few artists. The resulting ‘SoHo effect’ developed the district into a ‘cool’ area and increased its market value as a place. The artistic credibility of the place provided an invaluable quality that appealed to the real estate developers. The gentrification process was also significantly enabled by the districts’ location and its appealing spacious architecture.

When I was in New York City in 2002, members of The Wooster Group told me how this same ‘strategy’ was being employed in the new district of DUMBO (Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass) in Brooklyn. DUMBO is home to Arts at St Anns which has become an alternative New York presentation venue for The Wooster Group as it offers triple the capacity of the Performing Garage. The developers of DUMBO had given free short term leases of space to artists in the district in order to enhance it culturally and increase the value of residential property. The success of this ‘strategy’ in SoHo means it is now a tried and tested approach, and a managed presence of artists is key to its operation. This ‘strategy’ has transformed the kinds of businesses found within SoHo, a typical example is the Prada SoHo store.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Evitts, *The Urbanite Magazine – Baltimore Observed: The SoHo Effect*, 2007, Available: <<http://www.urbanitebaltimore.com/sub.cfm?issueID=50§ionID=4&articleID=699>>, [accessed 17 November 2007].

The opening of the Prada SoHo store was a much anticipated event in 2001.⁴⁵ Prada commissioned award winning architect Rem Koolhaas to design an unusual and experimental ‘epicenter’ (called so rather than flagship store) for the company in SoHo.⁴⁶

Linda Hales from *The Washington Post* describes the store in detail:

[...] the bi-level emporium is dominated by the Dutch architect’s abstract floor. Koolhaas calls it the Wave. From the sidewalk at Broadway and Prince Street, the 23,000-square-foot space looks like any chic industrial loft. But inside, the floor — a broad sweep of exotic zebrawood — drops off like a stair-stepped cliff. Here and there on a dozen descending terraces, dainty shoes have been strewn to signal an avant-garde shoe department. The floor flattens out for a few yards in the basement (23 precarious aluminum and zebrawood steps down) before curving back up to crest at sidewalk level. That’s where a glass fence defines a sort of scenic overlook. It also prevents inattentive shoppers from sliding over the edge. ‘I tried to inject instability,’ says Koolhaas, ‘to make a radical space. You never know what you are going to get here.’⁴⁷

The radical, unpredictable space that Koolhaas describes mirrors the nature of the Performing Garage and other artist-run spaces in SoHo’s history. Audiences could never anticipate the artistic experience or predict their relationship to the performance. Koolhaas’ space aspires to this radical, unpredictable quality.

The notion that this ‘epicenter’ would meld with the world of art and culture was articulated at the time of the opening. As *The Washington Post* described, “He also gave the boutique a higher calling: The epicenter was designed as a place where commerce and culture can coexist.”⁴⁸ Perhaps this is exemplified by the presence of a ‘theatre’ space that is built into the store itself:

[...] a chunk of the Wave flips down to become a stage. Sweep away the merchandise, and the shoe terrace will seat 200. The architect has turned the sales arena into theater. ‘It works like a shop,’ explains Miuccia Prada, as hanging industrial cages display her fashions like autobodies on

⁴⁵ Philip Nobel, “Waiting for Prada”, *Interior Design*, 72.4 (2001), p. 82

⁴⁶ Rem Koolhaas (born 1944) is a Dutch architect, urban designer and architectural theorist. See Arthur Lubow, “Rem Koolhaas Builds”, *The New York Times*, 16 November 2000, p. 12

⁴⁷ Linda Hales, “Surprises in Store: Architect Rem Koolhaas Redefined the Fashion Boutique for Prada”, *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2001, p. C01

⁴⁸ Ibid.

an assembly line. ‘Even more important,’ she says, is the potential to attract young people through cultural happenings. She plans to launch movie screenings and music events next month.⁴⁹

The notion of cultural happenings occurring in this place again harks back to the legacies of SoHo housing exciting underground arts and cultural gathering sites. Koolhaas has engaged with the subculture of SoHo through this integration of a ‘theatre’ space into the expensive boutique. Koolhaas had also designed a theatre space in New York in 1999, converting an old bank building from 1929 in uptown New York into a modern theatre venue for theatre company Second Stage.⁵⁰ Already the site for Koolhaas’ Prada store was imbued with a cultural legacy—it was the former site of MOMA in SoHo. When the site was being renovated for the Prada store, the museum signs were not removed—maintaining a sense that this site was akin to a cultural institute.⁵¹

The design of the store resisted what would be its traditional retail form. The store has much more space than content. The warehouse-like expanse has been privileged over displaying products. The products are presented like installation objects, and the store is able to capitalise on the extensive use of screens and monitors to present the individual with products virtually rather than through a physical retail display.

The SoHo store has integrated new technologies into its design to an extent that has not been done before in a boutique fashion store. Video monitors are placed with racks of clothing and provide a range of production information, and radio tags keep track of who has tried on what items of clothing and where they have gone.⁵² Perhaps the most impressive technology lies in the stores’ change rooms, which have been the ‘hit’ of the store for tourists. In the anticipated lead-up to the opening of the store, its features were already being discussed, as described by *Interior Design*:

One feature of the Soho store’s dressing rooms will be a plasma screen video system that will allow customers to, yes, check out their butts without craning their necks. Some report that the hook-up will let this

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Second Stage Theatre, *Second Stage Theatre | About 2st Stage*, Website, Available: <<http://2st.com/about.php?menuItem=7>>, [accessed 16 November 2007].

⁵¹ Anette Baldauf, “Branded”, *UmBau 21: Learning from Calvin Klein*, (Vienna: ÖGFA, Institut für Architekturtheorie, 2004), pp. 93-109

⁵² Hales, “Surprises in Store: Architect Rem Koolhaas Redefined the Fashion Boutique for Prada”.

next generation of happy devotees e-mail screen captures or make short ‘action’ movies.⁵³

After the store opened, Hales described her viewing of them:

IDEO’s research found that Prada customers reserve dressing rooms in advance and spend an average of two hours trying on gear. In SoHo, they will find changing rooms with glass doors that open and close at the touch of a toe. (Tap the black ball to lock, white to make the glass opaque.) A ‘smart’ screen enables shoppers to hunt electronically for a different size or color, or view another collection. (A human being is still required to fetch.) A ‘magic’ video mirror is programmed to capture the rear view. A shopper can spin around, then watch for a slightly fuzzy replay.⁵⁴

The aesthetic and functionality of plasma screens in the Prada SoHo store are almost identical to a particular section of *To You, The Birdie!* that is set in a change room like setting.⁵⁵ The Group provides an overview of the production and its elements on their website:

Based on Paul Schmidt’s translation of Racine’s *Phèdre*, The Group’s theater piece is a soap opera of windows and reflections, confessions and confrontations set in a modernist landscape of aluminum tracks, sliding plexiglass panels, omnipresent monitors and hidden cameras that thrust private moments into the public spotlight. The show fuses elements of the 17th century French Catholic court and Greek mythology with movement based on the sport of badminton and the dance vocabularies of Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham.⁵⁶

⁵³ Nobel, “Waiting for Prada”.

⁵⁴ Hales, “Surprises in Store: Architect Rem Koolhaas Redefined the Fashion Boutique for Prada”.

⁵⁵ *To You, The Birdie!* largely consists of a translation of Racine’s *Phèdre* by Paul Schmidt. The narrative revolves around a taboo love that Phaedra has for her stepson Hippolytus, in the absence of his father and her husband Theseus. When Theseus is believed dead, she declares her love for Hippolytus in hope that he will take his father’s throne. Phaedra is wracked by guilt when Theseus is discovered alive and returns. Phaedra’s handmaiden Oenone claims that Hippolytus tried to seduce Phaedra and Theseus banishes him, asking the god Neptune to kill his son. Hippolytus later dies, and after taking poison to end her life, Phaedra confesses Hippolytus’ innocence before dying.

⁵⁶ The Wooster Group, *To You, The Birdie!* Available: <http://www.thewoostergroup.org/The_Wooster_Group/projects/birdie/index.html>, [accessed March 15 2007].

The plasma screens are used in three different ways in the performance: as a video 'frame' of the same space where we see pre-recorded versions of the same elements in the live space; as a video 'mirror' illusion where performers work in relation to a pre-recorded versions of themselves; or as a portal to show us other performers or images that do not occupy the stage world.

While I was with the company in 2002 a number of people mentioned the similarities between the newly opened Prada store and the visual aesthetic of *To You, The Birdie!* The Wooster Group has had an association with Prada which began with Willem Dafoe briefly modelling in a series of print advertisements for the company in 1990. Since this time, Prada has provided support to The Wooster Group by donating clothing for productions (such as suits for the men in *House/Lights*)⁵⁷ and has been one of the few company's corporate sponsors.⁵⁸ In fact, Prada had provided direct sponsorship to The Wooster Group for *To You, The Birdie!* A series of Prada handbags, given in kind to the company, are used as props by Phaedra (Kate Valk) and Oenone (Frances McDormand) in one of the scenes of the work.⁵⁹

There is a sequence in *To You, The Birdie!* where Phaedra (Kate Valk) has her feet washed and tries on a series of shoes and purses that are brought to her by Oenone (Frances McDormand). In front of Valk is a plasma screen which is on an aluminium track that goes up and down, in this scene the plasma screen is on the floor. During this scene Valk engages in, as the group describes, a *pas de deux*, with her own pre-recorded image.⁶⁰ The way this works is as follows: a pre-recorded shot of Valk's feet, which is to scale with her live body has been filmed on the set so it appears as the same space. This pre-recorded footage is played through being 'scratched' forward and backward by the video operator. Valk's task is to 'dance' with her own pre-recorded image as controlled by the operator; she can view what the operator is doing through a display monitor for the performers. Phaedra's voice is performed on microphone by Scott Shepard, with Kate Valk loosely lip-syncing to his text, except the unamplified text she calls out is as indicated below.

⁵⁷ Les Gutman, *A CurtainUp Review: House/Lights*, 1999, *CurtainUp: The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings*, Available: <<http://www.curtainup.com/houselig.html>>, [accessed 15 March 2007].

⁵⁸ The Wooster Group, website, Available: <<http://www.thewoostergroup.org/twg/funders.html>>, [accessed 21 March 2007].

⁵⁹ Members of The Wooster Group told me this during my internship with the company in 2002.

⁶⁰ *To You, The Birdie!*, theatre programme, The Wooster Group, Arts at St. Anns, New York City, March 2002.

The mirror-like functionality of the plasma screen is used on a number of occasions in the performance as a high-tech way of being able to observe oneself. The plasma screen 'mirrors' the individual and can be played back. The temporal quality of this is similar to the 'scratching' effect that generates a jumping back and forth through time. This scratching back in the video parallels Hales' description of the plasma screen in the change room, which will reverse back in time to show the customer their rear view.

In *To You, The Birdie!*, the plasma screen mediates the process of the audience watching the Prada shoes being placed on and off. This high-tech mediated form of self observation echoes what the customer 'audience' of SoHo Prada shop experience.

In addition to this particular section and its relationship to Prada, the overall design of *To You, The Birdie!* also carries other spatial associations with upmarket New York. The set echoes a modern indoor badminton court, with plexiglass screens and a white floor; badminton is played during the show. The characters of this world at times seem to occupy a day spa or an elite New York City gym. There are assistants who aid Willem Dafoe in a series of yoga poses, while plasma screens display a series of Grecian statue poses that Dafoe narcissistically matches. Simultaneously, the space is filled with items associated with a hospital or aged-care facility. There is a potty-enabled wheelchair that Phaedra travels in and a series of enema devices (the character receives an enema in the performance). The design engages with the narcissistic pursuits of the gym and the inevitability of ageing.⁶²

Time-lapse Photography

As SoHo has been gentrified, The Wooster Group has positioned itself differently from its neighbours in its place. The company's experimental work has a high art prestige for the current SoHo subculture, its performances viewed almost as a couture event. In fact, a local SoHo fashion designer created a couture dress inspired by a costume worn by Kate Valk in *House/Lights*, which had a horizontal zip across the bust to reveal cleavage. Valk later saw the couture dress in the store and the designer revealed how The Wooster Group's work had been the inspiration for the creation.⁶³

⁶² The group has also explored reflections to its own life. Dafoe's character in the text is Theseus, who in the Phèdre myth carries a hero-like 'celebrity', and in the text returns from afar halfway through the narrative. This was mirrored in 2002 by Dafoe's return from Los Angeles after finishing work on the feature film of *Spider-Man*, and was explicitly referred to in a rehearsal (when voicing Dafoe a section of *To You, The Birdie!* in 2002, Scott Shepard made mention that Theseus had just returned from LA).

⁶³ As told to me in conversation by Kate Valk during my internship with the company in 2002.

The Wooster Group have assumed a relationship to the gentrified place of SoHo which is like de Certeau's 'tactic'. They have tactically navigated the upmarket consumerism of SoHo while maintaining an independence from the consumer 'strategy' that now dominates the denizens of this place. They have been able to assume a tactical relationship to its well-off fashion neighbour Prada, gaining financial support for its experimental pursuits, and serving as inspiration for other couture designers. The Wooster Group have managed to tactically engage with the new SoHo, while operating outside of the commercial 'strategy' that dominates its place.

The coincidence of Willem Dafoe's rising film celebrity in the mid to late 1980s running parallel to SoHo's gentrification has aided this tactic. The movie star involved in experimental art (or perceived couture) only increases their appeal in the fashion and art culture; and the unpredictable, complex and difficult nature of the work enhances its 'high art' appeal. Other celebrities such as Madonna, when living in New York City in the mid to late 1990s, regularly attended the company's performances, snowballing the appeal in participating in this work. The Prada store's programming of performances and launches has generated a similar 'A-list' invitation base. When indie rock band The Raconteurs⁶⁴ (known as The Saboteurs in Australia) performed at the Prada SoHo store for a fashion week, Liv Tyler,⁶⁵ Orlando Bloom,⁶⁶ Iggy Pop⁶⁷ and Wolfmother frontman Andrew Stockdale⁶⁸ were among the crowd.

As SoHo has changed, the group has consciously referred to and acknowledged the fashion industry's presence. In the early 1990s when The Wooster Group created *Brace Up!* there was a conscious doubling of the new features found in their place with their artistic investigations. When discussing a Kimono like costume from *Brace Up!*, Marianne Weems explained: "That's definitely from Noh. But it also is a reference to Yamamoto, that famous fashion store around the corner from the Garage."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ The Raconteurs is a Grammy-nominated rock band that consists of five members, four from other musical projects: Jack White (The White Stripes), Jack Lawrence (The Greenhornes, Blanche), Patrick Keeler (The Greenhornes), Dean Fertita (The Waxwings) and vocalist Brendan Benson.

⁶⁵ Liv Tyler (born 1977) is a Hollywood actor who has starred in blockbuster films such as *Armageddon* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

⁶⁶ Orlando Bloom (born 1977) is an English actor who has starred in a number of Hollywood films including *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Troy*.

⁶⁷ Iggy Pop (born 1947) is a rock singer and songwriter. He was the lead singer in the band The Stooges in the late 1960s and is associated with the inception of punk rock.

⁶⁸ Andrew Stockdale (born 1976) is the lead singer of Australian band Wolfmother.

⁶⁹ Arriata, "Island Hopping: Rehearsing The Wooster Group's "Brace Up!"", p. 123

Despite the massive changes to SoHo from the 1970s to its present, Elizabeth LeCompte articulates a sense of constancy that remains in the place:

When I go to Europe, they're always saying, "How can you live in the commercialism of SoHo?" But I've never noticed it because I'm in my head. I walk out and I see the same things. It's like different decorations in the shop windows. It's just, you know, funny new people are inhabiting it. It would be like one of those fast-motion films where the architecture stays the same and the people—you see the change in the curtain and lights go on and off and everyone's moving in, they're moving out, they're going up, they're going down. To me, it's just there. And oddly enough, Canal Street is still—besides everything being Chinese—it's still that crazy mixture of junk that always excites me.⁷⁰

LeCompte's filmic analogy of the time-lapse photography reveals a doubling in SoHo, a sameness and a perpetual change. The Wooster Group have continually engaged with this change in their work. Despite LeCompte's suggestion she is "in her head", she is highly aware of the new decorations and residents of SoHo and how to acknowledge and absorb them without shifting the Wooster Group's intentions.

The Wooster Group's relationship to its place is one that is organic and ongoing. While it could be assumed that the Wooster Group's relation to SoHo is only a relationship to its past, to the experimental and bohemian origins of the district, we can also observe that it has an equally relevant relationship to SoHo as a place now. LeCompte articulates the Group's own version of spatial transference. The Performing Garage is inhabited with objects and materials that are interconnected with the Wooster Group's life and practice, and are absorbed and re-expressed directly within their work.

My time with the Wooster Group revealed three key notions about this company's relationship to place. The first was a recognition of spatial transference within their process. The place that they live and work in, The Performing Garage, has been directly transferred into representation in the work of the Wooster Group. The place of the Performing Garage is "an extension of their lives",⁷¹ a 'container' for their lived experience that is rearticulated in the company's work. Building on this is a second notion, that the Wooster Group have an osmotic relationship to the district SoHo and

⁷⁰ David Savran, "The Death of the Avantgarde", *The Drama Review*, 49.3 (2005), p. 25

⁷¹ LeCompte quoted in Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group*, p. 50

New York City. By osmotic I suggest that the artist absorbs the place and space in which they inhabit — like a process of osmosis — and this absorption is re-expressed in their work. This notion of osmosis supports the notion of spatial transference, where lived experience is also absorbed and re-expressed. As artists, they have absorbed the change in the place they live, and the now upmarket SoHo is visible in the company's work. This osmosis suggests that the process of transference goes beyond the immediate lived experience of the Performing Garage, and encompasses the dynamic changes within the surrounding district of SoHo. Finally the Wooster Group have adopted a 'tactical' relationship to the gentrification of their place, gaining financial support and artistic credibility from its new upmarket neighbours. The Wooster Group have maintained their artistic experimentations outside of the new commercial 'strategy' of SoHo.

After nine weeks with the Wooster Group, I had another exceptional internship opportunity awaiting me: to fly to the United Kingdom to travel to Sheffield to spend four weeks with Forced Entertainment. Forced Entertainment were another contemporary performance ensemble, they had cited the work of the Wooster Group and its member Ron Vawter as an initial influence on the company.⁷² As I concluded my time with the Wooster Group, I wondered if this osmotic relationship to place was a shared experience amongst other contemporary performance companies? Could spatial transference be observed so clearly in other processes? Spatial transference had been evident in relation to the lived reality of place, but what about its conceived aspects? I was fascinated to know how similar or different Forced Entertainment's relationship to place would be.

⁷² Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 84

4 *Forced Entertainment*

Sheffield, April 2002

The image of Sheffield that was being painted in my mind was looking pretty grim. Tim Etchells's *Certain Fragments* had generated a fairly bleak image of what the town was like: dilapidated, impoverished, bleak. This was coupled with my other reference — Sheffield's representation in the *The Full Monty* — so I was anticipating plenty of decayed warehouses and disused steel factories.¹ I came to Sheffield having spent three months with the Wooster Group in New York City. In that time I had become friends with a guy from London who said, "God, you're going to Sheffield...it's an industrial nightmare..." I was prepared for the worst.

I was therefore somewhat shocked on my arrival in Sheffield to find almost none of the industrial bleakness that had been painted for me. There were beautiful converted industrial warehouses alongside contemporary architecture, sprinkled with galleries, cafes and other arts spaces. There were very few signs of the working class poverty that I understood marked Sheffield's character and identity. I sensed that the decay that may have once afflicted this city centre was being erased. This incongruity in Sheffield's appearance reminded me of SoHo, and the changes that it had gone through over the years. A description of SoHo from the Wooster Group's earlier days would certainly bear no resemblance to the district's reality today. Was the case perhaps the same with Sheffield?

I began to wonder how much Sheffield may have changed in the past ten years, and how this may have impacted on the work of Forced Entertainment. From my understanding of the company, it was clear that Sheffield as a place was an intrinsic part of Forced Entertainment's identity,² but I was now wondering how the Sheffield I saw today may have changed its sway on their work.

¹ *The Full Monty*. Dir. Peter Calleano. 20th Century Fox. 1997.

² Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, p. 19

Place, Theatre and Site-specificity

The distinctive sense of place in Forced Entertainment's work has been recognised as one of the company's unique features in the international festival market, as Etchells recounts:

Jurg Woodtli (a theatre programmer in Switzerland with whom we worked for several years) once said that he liked our work because it came so clearly from a particular place. In a world where too much contemporary art, dance and performance looks like it was born on the floor of a nameless, faceless Euro-Novotel, his comment was a real compliment. And if we sometimes laughed at the number of reviews beginning with lines like 'Forced Entertainment are from Sheffield and it shows' or 'Britain breeds football hooligans and theatre like this', we knew at least that the connection was tangible.³

Place has always been an influence upon Forced Entertainment. In fact, the place where the company would be based was one of the first creative decisions taken by the collective of artists.⁴ After training at the University of Exeter, the group decided to start a theatre company and from the outset were interested in relocating to a particular (new) place to establish themselves at a time "during Thatcherism when you could hide amongst 3-4 million unemployed and quietly get on with your work and being poor."⁵ The choice for the group's collective re-implacement was deliberate, as Etchells describes:

We wanted to move to a city, and we didn't want to move to London. I knew Sheffield a bit because I had friends there, but by the time we arrived they'd all gone. It was a bit mad, moving with 6 other people on the same day. We had two houses about 200 yards from each other, and we didn't know anybody else in the city, so the first two years were this incredibly incestuous, closed community doing its work and trying to find out about the city, and trying to meet other people outside of the

³ Ibid., p. 18

⁴ Forced Entertainment was founded in 1984 by Tim Etchells, Robin Arthur, Cathy Naden, Richard Lowden, Susie Williams, Huw Chadbourn and Deborah Chadbourn. Subsequent members to the group were Terry O'Conner (1986) and Claire Marshall (1989). Huw Chadbourn departed the group in 1986 and Susie Williams in 1987. See Ibid., p. 21

⁵ Ibid.

context of university or a job. That in itself was quite a weird experience, and quite good fun.⁶

Sheffield developed into a kind of shelter and breeding ground for artists during the height of Thatcherism in the mid-1980s. A number of popular and alternative musicians and bands were emerging in Sheffield at this time, including Jarvis Cocker (of UK band Pulp) and Stephen Jones (later forming band Babybird).⁷ In a way, these musicians were Forced Entertainment's creative neighbours in a place where it was easy for artists to live on the dole and which had potential to harbour creativity within a socially and politically hostile climate towards the arts.

Place has operated at times as an explicit subject for the company, and this is particularly visible in their site-specific work. Outside their large body of works created for theatre spaces, Forced Entertainment have also created a handful of works that are specific to particular sites, including libraries, buses, warehouses and public areas of the city itself. *Dream's Winter* (1994) was a site-specific work performed inside the Manchester Central Library and *Nights in this City* (1995) 'toured' its audience on a bus to different suburban and city places, finally arriving inside a large warehouse. In these works site-specific processes generated a very clear relationship to location and subject, particularly visible in the text and other content serving as the materials of these performances.

Nick Kaye specifically deals with this aspect of Forced Entertainment's work in *Site-Specific Art*. He identifies a tension in the work between the drawing of information from the site in the process of creation, and the act of authorship over a site by artist and audience witnessing it. He refers to de Certeau's notion of spatial practice in relation to Forced Entertainment playing out "the need to construct, build or state connections with a site or place."⁸

In *Nights in this City* the audience was placed on a bus and taken on an alternative tour of the city. This work explored the opposition between the local knowledge of place and the constructed representation of place offered in the guise of guided tourism. Liz Tomlin gives a detailed account of the performance itself and discusses how its recapitulation of

⁶ "Addicted to Real Time", *Entropy*, No 3 (1997) contained in *The Forced Entertainment Educational Resource Pack*, Forced Entertainment, Sheffield, 2002.

⁷ *Pulp*, Available: <<http://www.sputnikmusic.com/bands.php?full=1&bandid=2004>>, [accessed 4 November 2007].

⁸ Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*, p. 8

place functions in relation to the role of the tourist.⁹ Kaye deals more specifically with the way the performance drew from its place, or as Kaye argues, drew *over* the place making it like a palimpsest.¹⁰ Fiona Wilkie discusses *Nights in this City* and *A Winter Dream* in relation to the notion of ‘rules’ that function in the creation and reception of site-specific work—involving the rules connected to the site itself, the performance, and the spectators.¹¹

Locating Place in Aesthetic and Structure

Tomlin, Kaye and Wilkie understand how the notion of the site operates as a source and a palimpsest-like surface in Forced Entertainment’s site-specific, installation and CD-ROM mediums. However, Forced Entertainment’s most extensive body of work is in the medium of theatre. Theatre is viewed by the company as its primary medium, although over time it has explored projects within other media.¹² The content of this theatrical body of work is extremely varied, with a collection of projects explicitly addressing place, but many where traces of place are not immediately present as the subject of the work.

I am therefore interested in examining Forced Entertainment’s theatre-based work to explore how place and its encultured features have affected it. I focus on recent projects that have emerged within the revitalised Sheffield, like the one that I encountered in 2002. I will consider how the place of Sheffield is visible in the varied aesthetics, structures and narratives in two works: *First Night* (2001) and *The Travels* (2002).

The company has acknowledged the influence of place on the aesthetic and structure of their work. In *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*, a pseudo-fictional retrospective of ten years of the company’s work, Forced Entertainment discuss the way that the place of Sheffield has shaped the aesthetic of their work. Richard Lowdon describes the relationship between the growing globalised aesthetic of Sheffield and their work:

⁹ Liz Tomlin, “Transgressing Boundaries: Postmodern Performance and the Tourist Trap”, *The Drama Review*, 43.2 (1999), p. 136-149

¹⁰ Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. Kaye draws upon Augé’s notion of non-place in his articulation of how a palimpsest-like process is operational, arguing that the non-place of the tour bus encourages a gaze that writes over the place they view. Like Kaye, Anke Schleper deals with Forced Entertainment’s relationship to space, drawing on de Certeau’s notion of spatial practice where a place is written on through the dwelling within it. Schleper deals with the site-specific and installation projects dealt with thus far as well as some of their more recent theatrical works and CD-ROM based projects. See Anke Schleper, “Off the Route: Strategies and Approaches to the Appropriation of Space”, in *Not Even A Game Anymore: The Theatre of Forced Entertainment*, ed. by Judith Helmer and Florian Malzacher, (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2005), pp. 185-202

¹¹ Wilkie, “Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour”.

¹² “Addicted to Real Time”.

When did the streets fill up with beggars? When did the great programmes of building, rebuilding and demolition begin? When exactly did the shopping malls and the 10-screen cinemas arrive? When did our city get its lift shaped like a rocket? [...] As time went on we got more and more sure that the work should look thrown together — chaotic, out of control, unintended — so that, perhaps, when it did pull something out of the bag, one simply wasn't prepared. The chaos of the work was always running to catch up with the chaos and confusion of the times it came out of.¹³

Tim Etchells also observes the influence of place on the aesthetic and structure of the work:

We always loved the incomplete — from the building site to the demolition site, from the building that was used once and is no longer to the building that will be used. [...] No surprise that the sets that we made always looked half-finished. No surprise either that in recent works we always began the performance by building the sets, or ended by dismantling them. Always now this work of construction and deconstruction — letting no thing simply 'be' — seeing everything instead as a product, as the fruit of some labour, some desire, some ideology.¹⁴

Both Lowdon and Etchells identify an aesthetic arising from the company's relation to its place, manifesting itself visually in the look of the design and structurally in assembly, deconstruction, and an arrangement of materials based on collision.

Much like LeCompte, Lowdon and Etchells articulate what I suggest is spatial transference. The spatial features within Sheffield as a place, such as the collision of its redevelopment with its dilapidation, manifest within the structure and aesthetic of the performance they create. Like LeCompte, Lowdon and Etchells are conscious of this relationship to place, and track how they have an osmotic relationship to it. They reflect back on how they have absorbed and transferred the spatial qualities of their place that is part of their lived experience.

¹³ Richard Lowden cited in Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, p. 32

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78

I now turn to *First Night*, the first work to be performed by Forced Entertainment in Australia (at the 2004 Adelaide Festival), and analyse its aesthetic and structural traces of place.

First Night (2001)

First Night began with the performers smiling — an exaggerated showbiz entertainer smile that is simultaneously amusing, absurd and disturbing. Etchells talks about the smile being more than just a surface:

Deep in the heart of *First Night* is a brutal and basic confusion called the smile. Ludicrous. Strained. And under it pain. In rehearsals they smile. They smile fixed. They smile big. They smile 50s game-show hosts, delirious happy, fake-tan, Miss World craziness. They smile Everything is Going to be Great. They smile This IS Great. They smile it and they smile it and they smile it and in the first rehearsals I have them stand in a line and smile at me for hours like this, in awe somewhat at the terrible nervous, twitching, awful scene. I can't think of anything for them to do and I don't like it when they speak. I just want to see them smile.¹⁵

I would like to consider the smile in *First Night* as a form about veneers, and its relationship to the place of Sheffield in the process of its gentrification. The forced exaggerated smile covers the pained struggle of the personas trying to entertain. As Etchells discusses, *First Night* deals with these personas struggling to put on a show when things keep on failing. In a way, this work engages with the surface of mass popular entertainment, referencing the aesthetics of vaudeville and early television, and eroding the function of the pleasant, enthusiastic smile until it transgresses into the disturbing and painful. This strategy in *First Night* feels distinct from their previous work; it feels like Forced Entertainment is deciding to play someone else's game, but play it their way.

The other veneer that *First Night* breaks down is the 'fourth wall' act of the audience sitting in a space observing performers, with its supposed contract of entertainment. Etchells explains how this comes into play when discussing the work of French choreographer Jérôme Bel, who has been influential on the company adopting such strategies:

¹⁵ Tim Etchells, *First Night Web Archive*, 2003, [accessed 15 December 2005], p. 3

The broad move of the performance [is] a direct relation to the audience [as] its major architecture, an architecture that slowly but surely pushes those watching into an encounter — not just with the stage and what they desire on it, but with themselves. The returned gaze asserts that the auditorium, like a stage, is a void, a blank screen for projection, that our bodies and faces (like theirs) are also screens with a soundtrack, signifying spaces, clues for the fantasies, dreams and narratives of others.¹⁶

What Etchells identifies in Bel's work *The Show Must Go On* (2001) is precisely the mode deployed in *First Night* where the theatrical experience is structured around the audience engaging with their act of watching. The extreme simplicity (or absence) of performance activities places an emphasis on the audience as spectator: their own responses as the spectator become the focus of the performance.

This minimalist aesthetic described by Etchells in Bel's work becomes a new mode of performance for Forced Entertainment in *First Night*. *First Night's* veneer can be viewed through the company's relationship to Sheffield and its changes from mid-1980s to early 2000s. Forced Entertainment's early work has been discussed by the company itself in relation to Sheffield's visible industrial aesthetic and economic depression.¹⁷ The decay of the industrial environment of Sheffield has both a visual and textual visibility in these earlier works. We can equally see this relationship to place shift as Sheffield does. As its industrial production stops and its dilapidated buildings begin to be 'dressed up' with a hip, gentrified, arts-centric aesthetic, I suggest there is a parallel internalisation of Sheffield's roughness under the veneer of the smile in Forced Entertainment's work.

First Night is part of a significant departure in the style, form and approach in Forced Entertainment's work. It represents a movement away from the multi-layered collision of genres, styles and materials to a stripped back minimalism that is interested primarily in the process of the audience watching the performer. The simplicity and absence of performance activity within *First Night* greatly contrasts with some of Forced Entertainment's other frenetic, collaged work. Etchells discusses this shift with Adrian Heathfield:

¹⁶ Tim Etchells, "More and More Clever Watching More and More Stupid", in *Live: Art and Performance*, ed. by Adrian Heathfield, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p. 196

¹⁷ Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*

In the end I think we tired of this mega-mix method, or reached a limit with it, and in response we became interested in a more focused approach; taking one thing, one language, one element, and then pursuing it to its ultimate end logic. The shift is also about time and depth — we need time to pursue ideas and forms now, to investigate, to get to the bottom of a particular idea. We're not so ready to set something up quickly and then move on.¹⁸

I am interested in plotting how the shift in form and style in the company's work mirrors Sheffield's transformation from a steel-producing industrial town to a partially rejuvenated consumer services-focused economy. In the nineteenth century Sheffield was the United Kingdom's largest producer of steel, providing 90 per cent of the country's steel, and half of Europe's by 1850.¹⁹ During the 1970s there was a demise in Sheffield's steel industry due to a combination of factors including less domestic demand, competitive national and international production. The decline in steel production resulted in a sharp rise in unemployment and a need for the city to readdress its economy.

Sheffield's rejuvenation began in 1981 with the formation of the Employment Department in its City Council and later the Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee.²⁰ The economic development strategy was focused on consumer services, including sport, cultural industries and retailing. Two events in 1986 have been indicated as crystallising this focus: the planning permission for the construction of a large shopping centre in the city, and the invitation in that year to host the 1991 World Student Games.²¹ Cultural industries were a large focus in the rejuvenation in the 1980s. In the mid-1980s the Cultural Industries Quarter was created within a former cutlery manufacturing area of the city centre which focused on recording studios, independent record labels and film and television production.²² Forced Entertainment became enfolded in this rejuvenation process itself, when in 1992 it became a resident company in the Workstation, a multi-arts workspace also housing radio, film, sound and graphic design companies.²³

¹⁸ Adrian Heathfield, "As if Things Got More Real: A Conversation with Tim Etchells", in *Not Even A Game Anymore: The Theatre of Forced Entertainment*, ed. by Judith Helmer and Florian Malzacher, (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2005), p. 78

¹⁹ Colin C. Williams, *Consumer Services and Economic Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 164

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168

²² *Ibid.*, p. 174

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 175

The shift in Forced Entertainment's work becomes visible at the point the company investigates durational performance forms. The performance *Speak Bitterness* (1994) is an acknowledged turning point in the company's style.²⁴ Its structure grew out of its first incarnation as a durational performance where the performers, at a long table covered with papers, spoke a series of confessions, encompassing the most intimate and personal to the most collective and culturally shared, in the collective voice of 'we'. A number of works of extended duration created by the company since the mid-1990s have drawn upon similar simplicity:²⁵ "the rules of *Quizoola!* or *And on the Thousandth Night* [...] or of certain sections of *First Night* can really be written on a postcard. But in performative terms the possibilities are endless."²⁶ These works represent a radical departure from the company's body of work which in its first decade had consisted of a structural collision of narratives, genres and performance modes.

The new veneer of Sheffield is perhaps deceptive of the reality of the city. Does the new appearance reflect an actual rejuvenation from the economic depression that Forced Entertainment lived through when they first moved to Sheffield? Or has the shift in the city's economic base and superstructure eventually been reflected in its physical appearance? Perhaps a process of covering this previous version of Sheffield to present a more palatable version can be seen reflected in *First Night*. The chaos and postmodern bile that was once externally displayed in Forced Entertainment's work has now been contained behind the smiles of the performers, inside the bare, minimal structure of performers standing onstage, staring at the audience. In the world of *First Night* the veneer of palatable entertainment soon disintegrates. Would peering under Sheffield's rejuvenation similarly reveal another reality?

The Travels (2002)

When viewing *The Travels*, you are unlikely to see any references to slapstick comedy, improvised porn films or amateur theatre murder mysteries. However all these ideas served as surrogate content for Forced Entertainment when I observed the company's first stages of development of *The Travels* in Sheffield in April 2002 (the work at that point was called *In the Think Tank at Dawn*). It is common for Forced Entertainment to begin in this way when creating work, with an investigation of form, aesthetic and structure,

²⁴ Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, p. 180

²⁵ Other durational works such as *12 am : Awake & Looking Down*, *Quizoola!*, *And on the thousandth night...* were equally based on a simple structure, often governed by a small set of rules which allows the 'game' of the durational performance to unfold.

²⁶ Heathfield, "As if Things Got More Real: A Conversation with Tim Etchells", p. 81

and a use of costumes, props, sounds and other objects as a starting point, without prescribed thematic, narrative, or discursive interests.²⁷ The company talks about how their creative process operates at this early stage in their Information Pack:

Typically the first month or two of work will tend to be quite free — we try out ideas in improvisation using fragments of writing, ideas for costumes, set and soundtrack. At this stage we're often selecting performance material by intuition — so if we think a story about a death might be interesting, we tell one and if we think the soundtracks of fighting in kungfu movies sound 'good' we play them in rehearsals.²⁸

At this stage in Forced Entertainment's process there is a primacy given to doing things — with objects, costumes, sounds and spatial ideas. The generative process for the group does not involve a pre-determined theme or concept, but arises later through creating physical and spatial structures and actualised activities and analysing the results. Also at this stage there is an emphasis on setting up physical and spatial structures as a starting point for their creation. While I was with the company a series of their improvisations involved everyone sitting at a long rectangular table, or everyone standing in a line in front of a red velvet curtain. The physical and spatial parameters were the frame for these improvisations.

Forced Entertainment, not unlike the Wooster Group, place an emphasis on actualising spatial and visual ideas at the very beginning of their process. In order to experiment with the idea, it would be actualised in some way; if the company were interested in the idea of them standing in front of a stage curtain in a line, they will hang a curtain in the rehearsal room before fully exploring this idea.

There is a more technically simple exploration of space at the beginning of Forced Entertainment's process than with the Wooster Group. The set for the work would not already exist, but simpler physical environments would be created using trestle tables, curtains, chairs and kitsch costumes. This 'lo-fi' aesthetic, visible in the rehearsal room, is indeed the aesthetic of the company. In the past Forced Entertainment had been criticised by the Arts Council of England for being of poor quality and of low production

²⁷ Forced Entertainment, *Forced Entertainment Information Pack*, Available: <www.forcedentertainment.com>, [accessed 19 September 2007].

²⁸ Ibid.

values.²⁹ This early generative work will eventually define what the space and set will be, it is often very similar to the ‘lo-fi’ aesthetic used in the rehearsal room.

Like the Wooster Group, Forced Entertainment also draw heavily on referencing their previously used spatial structures. For example, the line-up in front of the curtain was first utilised by the company as part of *First Night*. The reuse of structures such as this from previous works is a conscious activity within the process, enfolding a spatial history into the new work.

Place beyond the rehearsal room is equally present as a creative starting point for Forced Entertainment. Etchells discusses the way that the place outside the rehearsal room enters the process in their video, *Making Performance*:

Sometimes when we’re working, we’ll get stuck, and very often when we do that we end up walking around the city talking, working out what we could do next. And very often in that situation we end up looking around asking why all the things we see there in the city are not in the performance. A drunk running out of a pub. A tree with cassette tape caught in the branches. Or a cross road where there are three nightclubs, and the music spilling out of them mixes to make a noise. Or maybe it’s just a kid, walking slowly on a parapet of a bridge.³⁰

Forced Entertainment’s work and its place are strongly aligned: aesthetic ideas, actions and events can as equally be found outside the rehearsal room as they can within. Sampling the day to day activities within the place of Sheffield is just as likely to result in a creative solution than material created in the space of the rehearsal room.

While the subject of the work radically changed from the early development of *The Travels* that I observed, the form of the work pursued a consistent interest: the lack of ‘acting out’ events in the performance, which places an emphasis on the imaginative space of the performance created for the audience. In the work that I observed in 2002, this manifested in a variety of ways: an improvised porn film that involved the performers sitting at a table recounting what their characters were doing, at times referring to cinematic elements such as framing and shot size; an improvised slapstick film using the same convention with the performers wearing smudged clown make-up; and an

²⁹ Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, p. 22

³⁰ Forced Entertainment, *Making Performance*, 1999, VHS video.

improvised amateur theatre production of an Agatha Christie style murder mystery also at the table (with a map of the set behind the performers discussed as a possibility). All of these experiments involved the performers reporting on physical actions or events. The ‘staging’ of these events occurred in both the imagination of the performer and audience.

After the period of time in which I observed work on *The Travels*, the work took a major turn towards dealing with place in explicit terms. Following their early explorations, a key task eventually developed which was as follows. Each member of the company selected (at random) 30 street names in the United Kingdom collated by Etchells. The street names carried ironic or evocative associations (Rape Lane, Harmony Street, Love Lane). The company members individually travelled to those places with a set of tasks to execute in these places partially determined. They then reported back on their discoveries. In this work, the company’s attention turned to places and sites outside of Sheffield, resulting in a haphazard ‘mapping’ of the United Kingdom. The visited places were ‘elsewhere’, defined in terms of their distance from what is their home-place Sheffield.³¹

In *The Travels*, Forced Entertainment generated a process of (re)mapping places within their country, not to create a literal mapping but instead “a landscape of ideas, narratives and bad dreams”.³² The company itself positions this work in a strand of projects that have explicitly dealt with places and their remapping by employing a pseudo-documentary mode of performance.³³ Forced Entertainment are dealing with the conceived dimension of place. Like Lefebvre’s ‘representational spaces’, this project addresses the psychic structure of place as animated by the imagination.

The development of *The Travels* arrived at a very similar form to that of the work I originally observed: six performers behind a table with microphones, recounting events and activities that occurred to them, generating an imagined ‘performance’ in the audience’s mind of these events. The fact or fiction of the details the performers tell us is unknown. Forced Entertainment acknowledge that *The Travels* fits into a strand of their work which is “that of distorted, intimate and even fictional documentary”.³⁴ This strand includes *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* (1994) and *Instructions for Forgetting* (2001) as lecture-demonstration style performances, and the previously mentioned *Nights*

³¹ Rebecca Nesvet, *Self-obsessed, patronising reactions to the world*, 2002, Online review, Available: <http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews_details.asp?reviewID=354>, [accessed 22 December 2005].

³² Forced Entertainment, *The Travels- Project Archive*, Internet page, Available: <<http://www.forcedentertainment.com/archive/travels.html>>, [accessed 12 December 2005].

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

in this City where the audience travels through the city on a bus. As the company describes, “in its unique way, each of these projects has been a kind of mapping of a world or a moment in time — an off-balance mapping that has an eye both for the facts of time and place and for ripples of stories and ghosts that are at work in it.”³⁵ This description recalls de Certeau’s map and tour — there is a ‘mapping’ of place that reflects its official, canonical history, juxtaposed with the idiosyncratic and experiential knowledge accumulated through ‘touring’. There is a doubling in this work that ‘re-maps’ the real and the imagined aspects of place. This is a broader theme that I investigate in relation to Australia and Adelaide in the second part of this thesis. Forced Entertainment have pursued this notion of ‘re-mapping’ place in their site-specific and installation work, such as placing the audience in relation to a model representation of the city in *Ground Plans for Paradise* (1994) or viewing the actual city itself in *Nights in this City. The Travels*, however, works with an absence of representational conventions to reveal place.

If *First Night* works with a notion of veneer, *The Travels* works with a notion of absence. The countless places of the performance are not given any visual or spatial representation, or any embodiment by the actions of the performers. Anke Schleper describes that “photographs, videos, recordings of phone conversations and notes — all gathered during this process — have been left in the rehearsal room and transformed into text. We are presented with an interpreted, qualitative landscape.”³⁶ The performance actively solicits the audience’s imagined representation of the places and the associated narratives and events that occur within them, as reviewer Jackie Fletcher describes:

I felt I was witnessing a stage in their devising process, something that was a starting point in creating a finished performance. They have denied my desire for a performance. The creative burden was shifted to me. I could no longer sit back and enjoy a performance, however challenging, I had to create the finished performance, a plethora of potential performances, in my own imagination, based on their input.³⁷

There is no theatrical representation or abstraction, but a blankness which is animated by the performers’ words and the audience’s imagination. This move in Forced Entertainment’s theatre work is a shift from the visibility of place in the company’s earlier work. This ‘re-mapping’ of place operates through representational absence in *The*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Schleper, “Off the Route: Strategies and Approaches to the Appropriation of Space”.

³⁷ Jackie Fletcher, *The Travels*, 2002, Online review, Available: <<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/thetravels-rev.htm>>, [accessed 22 December 2005].

Travels. Place has become a palimpsest where the particular imaginary of Forced Entertainment (and the audience) is written on top of the real. An imaginary of a place and its representation in performance is the focus of the second part of this thesis.

Following my time in Sheffield, place felt very evident in the creative process of Forced Entertainment. Space and spatial structures were a foundation for their devising processes, in a different yet comparable way to the Wooster Group. The influence of the place beyond the rehearsal room was strikingly evident, the company directly absorbing and drawing upon their local environment as a creative resource. Forced Entertainment articulate their own version of spatial transference, and are conscious of the ways they have drawn on their place in the aesthetic and structure of the company's work. Forced Entertainment also explore the conceived dimensions of place within their work, overlaying personal and cultural imaginings with lived experiences. In addition to drawing on what they experience within place, their performances remap place with their memories, fantasies and fears.

Both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment have an osmotic relationship to their place. Physical space figures as starting points in their creative processes, and there is a dynamic, osmotic relationship to their local place traces of which appear as an aesthetic, structure and content in their work. My observations led me to feel that there were some similarities between my notion of spatial transference in my own process, and the processes of these companies. The lived experiences that the companies had with their places were being drawn upon in their creative processes.

In addition to my time in New York and Sheffield, I also encountered both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment in Australia; the Wooster Group at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, and Forced Entertainment at the Adelaide Festival of Arts. Both companies are large players in the international performing arts market and are programmed in numerous arts festivals across the world each year. For companies whose work is a product of the distinct relationship it has to the local, what is the impact of being on tour all the time? These contradictory relationships to place start to reveal themselves when I encounter another contemporary performance company at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, Societas Raffaello Sanzio. I came across two works by the company there, *Genesi* (2002) and *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2006), and I was part of a workshop in 2006 with its director Romeo Castellucci. This workshop with Castellucci would allow me to learn more about Societas Raffaello Sanzio, its relationship to place, and its intriguing home city Cesena.

5 *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*

Of the three companies I encountered, Romeo Castellucci and his company Societas Raffaello Sanzio were the most mysterious and tantalising. Societas Raffaello Sanzio is based in a small Italian town called Cesena, and there, outside of the chaos and rigmarole of modern city life, they have created some of the most unique and captivating contemporary performance to tour the world. I have never been to Cesena, nor had a chance to observe or work with Societas Raffaello Sanzio. And I certainly wish I had. The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment have been great influences on my work and my interest in creating performance, and Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio have been equally so.

After my time with The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment I was starting to get a sense of the importance of place in the practice of creating performance. The lived realities of New York City and Sheffield were absorbed by the artists through an osmotic relationship to place and transferred into the work they created. Surely with Castellucci this would be even more so. The company had seemingly isolated itself from mainstream culture to build a new kind of theatre from scratch, without influence from established traditions or methodologies. This is what I found so exciting about this company: its place had really allowed for the cultivation of something new, or so it seemed.

I first witnessed Castellucci's work when I saw *Genesi: from the museum of Sleep* at the 2002 Melbourne Festival. I instantly found the work compelling and unlike anything I had seen before. The work had a huge visual scale, with massive scrimms used throughout the set, suspended tanks of water, live and taxidermied animals, and robotic objects and machines. The experience of watching the work was like being within a strange dream, and at times like being within a terrifying nightmare. The performance was largely without spoken language, and yet completely informed by ancient and classic texts. The performers themselves — ranging from a group of children to a wiry man cast in the role of Lucifer — were compelling, unsettling and utterly fascinating.

Until recently there has been very little writing in English about Societas Raffaello Sanzio's work. When I began this research I could locate only a few articles in English,

although there was an abundance of material written in Italian about the company's work, including a number of works written by Romeo Castellucci, Chiada Guidi and Claudia Castellucci.¹ However, within the past five years, many more English publications have emerged. The journal *Performance Research* provided some of the first articles in English about Castellucci's work, including some writing by Castellucci himself. Romeo Castellucci discusses the use of animals in his work,² and Guidi and Claudia Castellucci discuss the role of voice.³ Societas Raffaello Sanzio created their own publication, *Idioma Clima Crono*, a 'travel journal' that collected a range of writing connected to *Tragedia Endogonia*, with a series of articles originally written in English by Nicholas Ridout and Joe Kelleher, and a wealth of translated material written by Celiné Astrié, Diego Donna, Simone Menegoi, Francesco Raffaelli, Paolo Tonti, Savino Paradiso and others, much of which had not been available in English previously.⁴ In Australia, *RealTime* provided discussions and reviews of Societas Raffaello Sanzio's work and interviews with Castellucci,⁵ and sound designer and director Max Lyandvert recently completed a Masters thesis on Castellucci's work following Lyandvert's time working with Societas Raffaello Sanzio and observing their processes.⁶

There is also a recent book about Castellucci's work in English, *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio* written by Claudia Castellucci, Joe Kelleher, Nicholas Ridout and Chiara Guidi.⁷ But as with the other two companies, there has not been any specific analysis of Societas Raffaello Sanzio and its relationship to place.

If anything were to shed some light on Societas Raffaello Sanzio's approaches to place then it would be *Tragedia Endogonia*, an eleven part performance cycle, created by the company over three years. The project examines the impossibility of tragedy, with each episode of the cycle created in a different city and named according to that city. Place is central to the concept of this project, and for a company that has a seemingly significant

¹ Romeo Castellucci, *Il Teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio* (Milan: Ubulibri, 1992); Romeo Castellucci, *Rhetorica. Mene Tekel Peres* (Rome: Edizioni Aldo Miguel Grompon, 2000); Romeo Castellucci, *Epopèa della Polvere* (Milan: Ubulibri, 2001); Romeo Castellucci, Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi, *Epopèa della Polvere il Teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio di Romeo Castellucci 1992-1999* (Milan: Ubulibri, 2001).

² Romeo Castellucci, "The Animal Being on Stage", *Performance Research*, 5.2 (2000).

³ Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi, "Ethics of Voice: Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi in conversation with Joe Kelleher", *Performance Research*, 9 (2004), pp. 111-15.

⁴ All of the writing in *Idioma Clima Crono* is provided in English, French and Italian.

⁵ Max Lyandvert, "Castellucci: Theatre of Remnants", *RealTime*, 66 (2005), p. 37; Keith Gallasch, "Castellucci on Film, in Person", *RealTime*, 74 (2006), <http://www.realtimearts.net/artide/issue74/8326> [accessed 23 July 2008]; Jonathan Marshall, "The Castellucci interview: The Angel of Art is Lucifer", *RealTime*, 52 (2002) and "Dramaturgies: The Artist as 'Agent Provocateur' and Cultural Interventionist", Melbourne Festival forum edited transcript, *RealTime*, 1 November 2002.

⁶ Max Lyandvert, "Origins and Destinations: Representations in the Theatre of Romeo Castellucci" (Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of New South Wales, 2006).

⁷ Claudia Castellucci, and others, *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio* (Routledge, 2007).

relationship to an unusual remote place, this project could reveal how the company works with and relates to place.

To appreciate the role of place in this cycle of works, it is necessary to get a sense of what differences and continuities exist thematically, structurally and visually between the individual episodes of the cycle. Max Lyandvert has a unique understanding of these relationships from his time observing Societas Raffaello Sanzio create three of the eleven episodes. Lyandvert considers the connections and through lines within this mammoth project:

In Cesena and Avignon there is a gold box, a child, blood and milk, core elements. In Berlin, the front rows of the auditorium are filled with life-size rabbits, and the stage 3-dimensionally transformed from black to white. In Brussels, the space is a marble cube with fluorescent lights, where the head of a robot tirelessly recites the letters of the alphabet to a newborn baby, to begin the show. In Paris, Carravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* is recreated over 2 washing machines; Jesus *breaks into* the space (which by now has become a kind of museum) through a window; and 2 cars are dropped from the ceiling. In Rome, there is again a cube room — the same as in Brussels — but this time white and, instead of a baby, a chimpanzee. Here Catholic priests force the confession of Mussolini, and while they play basketball, the whole set comes apart and is flown off as an Italian clown *breaks into* the theatre through the floor. In Strasbourg, the back of the stage is left open, exposing the real European Parliament; a group of actors arrive by bus and watch Hitchcock's *Psycho*; and a tank drives into the theatre through the exposed back stage. In London, a variety of spectacular stage transformations and extraordinary figures includes scores of cats, while in Marseilles there are 2 parts at 2 separate theatres. One is a strange representation of a banquet as a photographic still life with extreme stage mechanics representing the photographic revolution, while the other is a sensational sequence of huge screens with macro-projections, a refined music score and opera singer performing towards the end.

The final episode, *C.#11*, back at the company's home town is also made up of 2 parts, but in the same building. One is a bedroom with a cleaner, a boy, a cat, 7 men dressed in 1940s suits (including Castellucci himself)

and a solid flat which descends and blocks the action to the point where only the feet are visible and pre-recorded voices heard. The audience is then led to the second, larger space veiled by a screen onto which a film of sperm is projected. The raised screen reveals a huge, real forest. Men with torches (very little is visible) find and appear to behead a boy who has been hiding from them, but then present the head of a cat.⁸

The 2006 Melbourne Festival presented one episode from the *Tragedia Endogonidia* cycle *B#04 Brussels*, and this was preceded in Sydney by a series of screenings of eleven ‘video memories’ created for each episode of the cycle — which were part documentation, part new video creations.

Melbourne Festival, 2006

I am a participant in a ‘masterclass’ with Romeo Castellucci as part of the 2006 Melbourne Festival. It is not a masterclass in the traditional sense, but a session where Castellucci will show some excerpts of his work on video and talk about his process. Castellucci reveals a highly visual and spatialised creative process. Perhaps even more so than the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment, Castellucci collects, generates and dramaturgically arranges imagery and space in his creative process. He considered that his process is almost like a painter, but instead using a three dimensional canvas.

After talking for an hour or so, Castellucci invites the masterclass participants to ask questions. This gives me the perfect opportunity to ask Castellucci directly about place, and how it figured in this project and his work. Someone beats me to a question about place and the various cities in *Tragedia Endogonidia*, asking how each city had figured in the creation of the episodes. Castellucci’s response is that the company hadn’t worked in any of the cities to create the various episodes—the company had remained in Cesena the whole time creating the city-based episodes, only spending a few days to a week in each city prior to the performance being implaced and performed. I am stunned at this revelation that there had not been any lived experience in relation to the cities that were central to this project. This entire project was seemingly about a set of places, and yet a lived experience of the places in question had not figured in the process. Place definitely was not unimportant in the company’s work — and in this particular project — but there was obviously a very different relationship to place at play here than I had assumed.

⁸ Lyandvert, “Castellucci: Theatre of Remnants”.

Regardless of Castellucci's very clear and frank explanation that living in the cities was not part of creating the work, the programme at the Melbourne Festival reveals some confusion around the role of place in creating the work:

Tragedia Endogonia approaches the tragedy by trying to return to its ancient link with the polis — the city. Each of the 11 parts of *Tragedia Endogonia* was created in a different city: not before arriving there, but in the very city itself, just prior to its premiere performance. But a city is not formed by a community which shares the same vision of the world; rather it has to become an agglomerate of individuals who are spiritually separated. Therefore in *Tragedia Endogonia*, the link with each city was experienced through a long journey reaching the city and then leaving it; and also through the uncertainty of each experience being rooted in a particular soil.⁹

There is a desire to hold up an understanding of the creative process as osmotic in relation to place — how each episode has been made “in a different city” and “in the very city itself” and through “each experience being rooted in a particular soil”. This contradicts the information about the lack of dwelling in the place, where the episode is made “just prior to its premiere performance” and that the link to place is located more on the journey to it than being in it.

The notion of an osmotic process provides a certain legitimacy to our relationship to place — that in order to honestly describe a place we need to have a lived experience of it. The lived experience in the place has a validity that we prioritise over a conceptual or virtual understanding of place. The programme notes written by Castellucci for *C#01*, the first episode of the *Tragedia Endogonia* project, provide some clues for Societas Raffaello Sanzio's different relationship to place:

The working cycle includes a first base in Cesena, with the auto-generation of a chain of images (tragoedia endo-gonia) from which a series of spores will depart in order to be collected by other “bases”.

⁹ *B.#04 Tragedia Endogonia*, theatre programme, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, The Merlyn Theatre, The C.U.B. Malthouse, October 2006

These spores in their turn will give rise to individual tragic units. These units (which will be identified with the name of the city hosting them: Roma 09, Madrid 12) will have an impact on the following “base”.

This will not be a process of accumulation, but rather of living transformation.

A + B shall not equal AB

A + B shall equal C

The general structure is a sequence which includes a transmigration of forms inside itself.

It will be a process of evolution. There will not be many performances, there will not be one large performance. The final result will be an organism which is on the run.

The shape’s reacting and changing speed becomes a necessary strategy in order to support the scope of this age.¹⁰

The relationship to place that Castellucci is describing is not premised on osmosis. Instead, Castellucci uses the analogy of a spore for his creative relationship with place. Like a spore, its strategy is to implant for asexual reproduction. Societas Raffaello Sanzio generates creative spores, that are released and implant themselves into a series of ‘base’ places. The spores are hosted and incubated by the bases to produce a new entity, much in the way that a spore has a motility that allows it to become implanted in a given place and use the resources it finds there to incubate and grow.

This use of place is different from the strategies adopted by the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment. Both have identified and demonstrated an osmotic relationship to place — the dwelling of the company in its particular place enables its aspects to permeate the artistic processes of the artists, which then becomes evident in the representations they create. The spore model suggested by Castellucci is the opposite of the osmotic process — instead of the place permeating the artist, the artist ‘implants’ into the place. The place becomes an incubator for the artist’s intent, rather than a saturating agency that permeates an artist as a creative cell. The lack of accumulation described by Castellucci in this model is also important — the base and spore are erased in the creation

¹⁰ *C.#01 Tragedia Endogonia*, theatre programme, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Teatro Commandini, Cesena, January 2002.

of the new artistic artefact (A+B=C), rather than the base and spore growing together to represent a combination of their features (A+B=AB). Castellucci proposes an ‘erasure’ of place in the creation of an entirely new representational form. Castellucci’s description of this place-based project as “an organism on the run” and a “necessary strategy in order to support the scope of this age” are important ideas. They are a reflection of how the company engages with and deals with place as a touring international performing arts company. I now want to examine Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s mobile, tourable nature starting with the point where they became recognised by the international festival market, and discuss the features in the company’s work that made it a controversial and radical ‘hit’ in this market. What is the relationship at play between the company’s international reception and its articulation of place?

Cesena

Castellucci’s work was first seen in Australia at the 2000 Perth Festival, shortly followed by the 2000 Adelaide Festival, with Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s production of *Giulio Cesare*, a radical response to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. *Giulio Cesare* consists of text drawn from an Italian translation of Shakespeare’s play, but also from Latin sources including Tacitus, Cicero and Caesar himself. The piece was particularly marked with controversy over the use of ‘extreme’ bodies in the performance: Mark Anthony was played by a man who has had a laryngotomy, anorexic female twins played conspirators Cassius and Brutus, and Cicero was played by a morbidly obese man.¹¹

This presentation of *Giulio Cesare* in Australia followed the rise in popularity of Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s work in the late 1990s in Europe, with its productions of *Oresteia* and *Hamlet*, offering a similarly radical approach to classic texts.¹² This rise in popularity is evident in an eventual rise in writing and analysis of the company’s work in English language publications. The appeal of Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s work is connected to its location in a small town and use of non-actors. The 2000 Adelaide Festival website addresses these intriguing aspects of this company:

[...] Italian director Romeo Castellucci presents a view of Julius Caesar unlike any you will have experienced before [...] Working from a small town in Italy, Castellucci often uses local non-actors for these

¹¹ Xenia Hanusiak, “Prepare for Shock”, *The Advertiser*, 23 February 2000, p. 33

¹² Adelaide Festival, *giulio cesare | Adelaide Festival Event*, 2000, Available: <<http://www.adelaidefestival.com.au/archives/2000/program/evenorm01b2.html>>, [accessed 27 March 2007].

performances, and the company also runs workshops and productions for children. The results of the adult works are gripping and shocking, but at the same time artful in dealing with raw emotion and big themes.¹³

There is a curiosity at play in the notion that this radical and controversial work is coming from a small town. Cesena seems to be positioned as an ‘elsewhere’ or a ‘nowhere’. Unlike New York City and Sheffield which have a particular representation and presence in the discussions of the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment, Cesena has an absence, almost a non-descript quality. It is the place to which no one has been. It is like any other small Italian town. These notions position Cesena as a featureless place. In terms of the reality of Cesena, it is a city in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy, with a population of 94,772.¹⁴

The reception of Castellucci’s early work, and particularly *Giulio Cesare* in the international festival market, has an appeal for audiences that relates to the tradition of the touring ‘freak show’ of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is not to say that this was Castellucci’s intent or desire in creating the work — in fact, Castellucci strongly argues otherwise¹⁵ — but this cultural referent informs the reception of the work and discussion of its appeal and controversy.

Castellucci’s work has, in fact, been labeled a ‘freak show’ when *Giulio Cesare* was criticised. *The West Australian* noted that “such bizarre theatricality led to allegations that Castellucci exploited actors to produce a freak show”.¹⁶ When it was performed in New Zealand shortly after its Australian tour, a reviewer for the *Sunday Star-Times* was “fascinat[ed] to observe how few people walked out despite the nauseating shock/horror parade of freaks and behaviour.”¹⁷ Prior to coming to Australia, Castellucci had been accused of having “turned the quest for theatrical impact into sheer freakishness.”¹⁸

The ‘freakish’ bodies that would be on display in the performance of *Giulio Cesare* were of central appeal and concern, as discussed by *The Advertiser* prior to the show opening:

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ This is Cesena’s population for 2007. See Ufficio Studi - Statistica Sistan, *Comune Di Cesena: Saldo naturale, migratorio e totale. Residenti a fine mese 2006-2007*, Available: <<http://www.comune.cesena.fc.it/statistiche/Periodiche/anno%202007/residenti.pdf>>, [accessed 17 November 2007].

¹⁵ Jonathan Marshall, “The Castellucci interview: The Angel of Art is Lucifer”, *RealTime* 2004.

¹⁶ Ron Banks, “Theatrical Shell-Shock”, *The West Australian*, 8 January 2003, p. 9

¹⁷ Jill Rivers, “Roman Freak Show”, *Sunday Star-Times*, 19 March 2000, p. 6

¹⁸ Comment by Will Hutton, an economics writer and a non-executive director of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT), which brought *Giulio Cesare* to Britain, cited in Rachel Halliburton, “Marlowe Murder Scene a Clue in Tragedy Search”, *Financial Times*, May 11 2004, p. 15

When Romeo Castellucci's highly controversial *Julius Caesar* opens at the Adelaide Festival, audiences may be shocked, disturbed or even appalled by the confronting human physicality on stage [...] *Julius Caesar* has divided audiences wherever it has played. When it comes to Adelaide, it is certain to create the same sort of division. It would be naive to say be prepared, because nothing will prepare you for it.¹⁹

Like a 'freak show', there is a taboo pleasure in witnessing the shocking or disturbing body which is at once appalling yet tantalising. The rhetoric that nothing can prepare the audience for what they will see has resonances with the catch-cries that promote side-show performance. In addition to the bodies on display, *The Advertiser* describes other theatrical 'oddities' that make up the performance:

While the actors attempt to commit themselves to an ultimate vulnerability, the stage is littered with curiosities [...] a stuffed cat makes an appearance, spinning his head at a million miles an hour, light bulbs explode, whips are cracked.²⁰

The West Australian reported that audiences would witness Mark Antony's famous speech via an image of his vocal folds using an endoscopic camera, Brutus talking through inhaling helium, and a live horse on stage.²¹ The combination of the 'freakish' body with the 'oddity' of gadgets and animals associates *Giulio Cesare* with the 'freak show'.

The tradition of the 'freak show' in western culture is based on the display of the abnormal human body. 'Freak shows' were a popular entertainment form in the nineteenth century in the United States and were associated with travelling circuses and carnivals.²² 'Freak shows' were prevalent before western medicine repositioned the abnormal body as an object of scientific study, with concepts of disease and genetic mutation that could explain the previous mystery of the 'freak'.²³

Interestingly, acts that were much closer to the actuality of a 'freak show' had been presented in Adelaide at festival time, but were not discussed in this horrified way—in

¹⁹ Hanusiak, "Prepare for Shock".

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Banks, "Theatrical Shell-Shock".

²² *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. by Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 97-107

²³ Ibid., [accessed].

fact, they were popular hits with audiences. The Jim Rose Circus and the Toyko Shock Boys were part of the Adelaide Fringe in 1998. The Jim Rose Circus featured acts such as Mr Lifto who lifted weights using rings pierced through his genitals, a man who would swallow tubing and pump fluid into and out of his stomach, and a performer who would be vacuum sealed in a large plastic bag.²⁴ These performances were not described in the horrific or exploitative framework that *Giulio Cesare* was. This variation in critical response is also linked to the norms of the performance venue as a place. McAuley's notion of 'The Social Reality' within her taxonomy of spatial function is clearly at play — the particular cultural function of the site of entertainment frames the response. The Playhouse of the Adelaide Festival Centre has a dedication to aesthetic ideals which are radically different from the historicised sideshow aesthetic. The Jim Rose Circus was positioned literally at the fringe in a tent, and given a kind of 'distance' from the Festival Centre, temporally and spatially, that Castellucci's work did not have.

This variation in response suggests that *Giulio Cesare* was abject in a way that the Jim Rose Circus was not — yet the Jim Rose Circus is much closer to showing the 'freaks' that *The Advertiser* and others report in Castellucci's work. *Giulio Cesare* engages with abject bodies that are familiar to the lived experience of a western audience (obesity, anorexia, tracheotomies) and that are not normally objectified or fetishised for an audience. The horror arises as the audience confronts abject bodies that they understand rather than merely a 'freakish other' which does not relate to their lived experience.

In this way *Giulio Cesare* is significantly different from the 'freak show'. It is not objectifying the strange or 'freakish' body as a pleasurable oddity in a spectacle, but it is confronting the audience with kinds of bodies that fall completely outside of those that are conventionally placed on stage or represented to an audience. The supposed 'freaks' are, in fact, variations on bodies that occupy our world but are denied representation as performing bodies.

Castellucci has often been attacked for his choice of performers. In an interview in *RealTime* Castellucci is asked about his interest in the unusual body on stage:

In truth, every body is worthy of being on stage. For me there are no deformed bodies, but only bodies with different forms and different beauties, often with a type of beauty that we have forgotten. I believe that

²⁴ Bronwyn Hurrell, "Locals Get in On the Act as Freak Show Hits Town", *The Advertiser*, 25 February 1998, p. 7

each body expresses something — any form of body. The age of an actor is important, as is how much actors weigh, how they twist their neck one way or the other, what their hands are like: these are all fundamental elements, much more interesting than the actor's profession or professionalism. Actors, in the moment when they let themselves be truly seen, are always the worthiest beings, and in this respect they represent the only possible form of performance. So, it is no longer a question of graceful or unpleasant, of professional or not, of fat or thin, of being a child or an old person. It is about sharing problems of art with these people. It is about **interpretation**, and not the **presentation** of reality. When one attempts to **represent** 'reality' on the stage, this always transforms the spectator into a voyeur. But here, in my theatre, performance is not about making a 'theatre of truth' or 'social-theatre', in the older sense.²⁵

Castellucci wants the audience to encounter a certain reality of the performer, and he searches for performers who can allow themselves to be 'truly seen'. From his perspective his interest in the performer is about their unique kind of presence as a non-actor and is not connected to their so-called 'freak show' qualities.

Another aspect in this analogy of *Giulio Cesare* as a 'freak show' is the notion of a touring event. The 'freak show' of the nineteenth century in the United States was often a touring show, connected to a circus or carnival that would travel to different cities to display its 'freaks' as part of their performances or displays.²⁶ The spectacle of the 'freak' would travel from its place of origin across the country, or in some cases such as co-joined twins Chang and Eng, travel across the world to show the oddities from little known towns to audiences around the world.²⁷

The touring aspect of the 'freak show' is important to its reception. It relates to the notion of the 'freakish' or 'odd' originating from the distant or obscure place. There is a need to have the 'curiosities' of the world toured to an audience. The 'freak show' is therefore engaged in a process of representing its other-place-ness as part of its touring process. It implants the notion of elsewhere through its theatrical representation into another place.

²⁵ Marshall, "The Castellucci interview: The Angel of Art is Lucifer". Original emphasis.

²⁶ *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. by Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 23

²⁷ Chang and Eng were toured around the world as a curiosity after being discovered by British merchant Robert Hunter in 1829. See *Ibid.*, p. 62

There is a relationship to be observed between the portability of place for the travelling ‘freak show’ and Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s strategies involving the placing of portable ‘spores’ in *Tragedia Endogonia*.

Tragedia Endogonia (2002-2004)

Tragedia Endogonia is described by Castellucci in the programme notes for the first episode as an “organism on the run”.²⁸ It has been made “through a long journey reaching the city and then leaving it” as described in the Melbourne Festival programme.²⁹ There is a transitory quality in this description of the work. It is constantly moving its place, and being made in between places, on the “journey” to it.

The model of the *Tragedia Endogonia* project reflects how the international festival market operates. The international festival market mobilises performing arts companies to travel and ‘infect’ cities around the world and offer the ‘reality’ of other places. International arts festivals allow us to see other places in our own place. Instead of needing to travel across Europe, Asia or America to see the work of compelling artists, it is neatly transported and gathered into one centralised place. This concept has always had great currency in Australia. As a western nation geographically remote from Europe, it is hard for us to travel from our place to theirs. Our desire to see elsewhere in Australia could arguably contribute to the significant success of the Adelaide Festival, and in recent years the Melbourne Festival, which have offered a smorgasboard of performing arts work from different places.

Since becoming a hit in the international festival market, Societas Raffaello Sanzio have needed to uplift and implant their work (and its associated notion of place) regularly. After the success of projects such as *Giulio Cesare*, international touring has become the second life of the company — perhaps arguably its first life. Like the touring show of the past, there is a between-ness of place — taking the performance, setting it up, entertaining foreign audiences, and then packing up to reach the next destination. The transitory quality of continual international touring is like Marc Augé’s non-place: the repetition and consumption of the same work in multiple locales, and dwelling within continual

²⁸ C.#01 *Tragedia Endogonia*, theatre programme, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Teatro Commandini, Cesena, January 2002.

²⁹ B.#04 *Tragedia Endogonia*, theatre programme, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, The Merlyn Theatre, The C.U.B. Malthouse, October 2006.

passage and travel. Augé argues that these kinds of transitory spaces and their associated activities lead to an absence of place.³⁰

Tragedia Endogonia embraces the notion of the company uplifting their working approaches and placing it elsewhere. Part of *Tragedia Endogonia*'s "necessary strategy in order to support the scope of this age" is for the company to emulate and engage with the workings of the international festival market, and to find a strategy to deal with the non-place that touring can generate.

Festivals become significant players for companies such as Forced Entertainment, the Wooster Group and Societas Raffaello Sanzio, as they often commission (and co-commission) new works, providing essential financial resources and large audiences. There is also a value placed on premieres and new works for festivals. Being engaged in international festivals is a "necessary strategy" for Castellucci to be able to make the work he and Societas Raffaello Sanzio are interested in.

Tragedia Endogonia cleverly meets many of the desires of the international festival market. It engages a number of festivals and cities as co-commissioning partners as part of one work, but offers each festival a unique work for their city and an event that is tailored to their place. At the same time Castellucci has cleverly framed these features within one large project with ideas that he is compelled to explore deeply, and *Tragedia Endogonia* presents him with the opportunity to explore those ideas in these connected, yet individually unique works.

Tragedia Endogonia sets out a very different model for touring. Instead of merely transporting the same performance and duplicating it, Castellucci has created a work that will mutate with its relationship and implantation within the local, whether that be through the conceptual or lived influence of place. Castellucci is disturbing the inherent globalisation of the international festival market, refusing merely to generate sterile duplicates — instead he has created an organic, malleable, shifting entity that evolves into a new mode with each place. What each city encounters is unique and unrepeatable, so that "in any particular episode then, one will neither be getting the 'whole thing' nor a fragment of a totality. It is useful, in this case, to think of a remnant",³¹ as Max Lyandvert

³⁰ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe, (London, New York: Verso, 1995), p. 30

³¹ Lyandvert, "Castellucci: Theatre of Remnants".

suggests. *Tragedia Endogonia* implants a vocabulary of materials which are re-expressed through each city:

[...] the episodes reveal the various stages of their evolution within the cycle, including the influences of the cities which host them. Likewise the actions, props and other objects which form the vocabulary of the cycle evolve and mutate as they reappear in numerous episodes. Like letters in an alphabet, they can be arranged to make sense or not, but they always belong.³²

Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio have, in this regard, succeeded in meeting and conforming to the desires of the international festival market, while subverting its inherent system of globalised repetition. He creates an artistic work that confronts and utilises the company's continual displacement as a structure for a project, and succeeds in creating a way that its repeated presentations can be unique rather than an identical product.³³

My journeys into the creative processes of the Wooster Group, Forced Entertainment and Societas Raffaello Sanzio have revealed a range of relationships that each company has with its place. In my time spent with both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment, I was able to observe and consider the notion of an osmotic relationship to place, where the dynamic nature of the surrounding place is absorbed by the artists, and can be observed manifesting in the aesthetic and form of their work. Three-dimensional space also figured as an important start in their process of creating work. Osmosis relates to the premise of spatial transference as a re-expression of a lived experience; the osmotic absorption of place is what manifests in performance. The importance of creating through actualising space again relates to the physical expression that is part of this transference.

My encounter with Societas Raffaello Sanzio revealed a different relationship to place at play in the project *Tragedia Endogonia*. The reality of the tour takes away from the regular experience of place. Its mobility results in one of Augé's 'non-places'. Perhaps being conscious of this, Societas Raffaello Sanzio and Castellucci create a portable relationship to place. They implant a suggestion of place and allow it to mutate. Societas

³² Ibid.

³³ Interestingly, this structure is somewhat weakened after the completion of the project when the work continues to tour — such as Melbourne viewing (or in a sense being) 'Brussels' for the 2006 Melbourne Festival. However, I would propose that the touring of 'Brussels' may be part of the ongoing 'necessary strategy' of Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio.

Raffaello Sanzio are arguably circumventing the negatives of an Augé-like ‘non-place’ experience in their creative process by approaching how they interact with a place in the international performing arts market in a new way.

I have accumulated an understanding of place through both theory and performance. I have developed an understanding of how space and place are differentiated, how place is a product of human dwelling and our cultural workings, and how place has a conceived notion that allows collective and individual imaginings to be shared and animated.

My time with these three companies has given me an understanding of how they engage with their places and of how the notion of spatial transference operates for contemporary performance makers. Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group are conscious of a transference of the lived reality of The Performing Garage in their work, and Forced Entertainment are aware of the transference of Sheffield into their performance’s aesthetic and structure. At the end of these journeys, I am poised to return to Australia with my theoretical and practical learnings about place and performance to see how they inform my own process of creating work from my own place.

PART II

It's always nice to return home

I remember being on the plane heading back to Adelaide in 2002. I was looking forward to returning to Australia and getting back to the place where I am from. My journeys abroad with the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment had been stimulating and inspirational, but had revealed the value of their own experiences of place have in the creation of their distinctive work. I was looking forward to getting back into my own place and seeing what would happen.

I had made a decision that I wasn't interested in upping and leaving Adelaide in favour of Sydney or Melbourne, as many emerging actors and directors from Adelaide have chosen to do. Instead I was interested in basing myself in Adelaide and pursuing a unique approach to creating performance informed by place, both as an independent artist and with my company The Border Project.¹ As an artist I have a desire to have a relationship with the place where I live, that equals the depth of connection I have observed in these companies.

In the second part of this thesis, I explore how I have attempted to create performance in a place of disappearance and erasure. I arrive at these notions of Adelaide and Australia through an investigation of the conceived aspects of my place, which I refer to as 'imaginaries'. These imaginaries reveal the unique and potent cultural resonances of place for both myself and an audience.

In the next two chapters the scope broadens beyond performance to comprehend and interrogate the underlying workings of place within Australia and Adelaide, my own nation and city. The discoveries made from this interrogation of place directly feed the performance laboratory of *The Rope Project*, and are revealed within the dossier on the laboratory that forms the final section in this part of the thesis. These discoveries also inform the development of another work, *Disappearance*, which The Border Project will present in November 2008.

¹ The Border Project is a contemporary performance ensemble committed to exploring the future language of live performance. The Border Project creates performance that engages and communicates with an audience that traditional theatre has left behind, using a language that reflects the time and place that we live in, where we are surrounded by the collision of sound and images from videos, pop music, film, television and other media. The company was officially founded in 2002, with its formation beginning in 2000 with a group of graduating students from the Flinders University Drama Centre. Its latest work *Trouble on Planet Earth* won the Advertiser Fringe Award and the Bank SA Support Act Fringe Award in 2008. In 2007 the company was one of three recipients of Arts SA's triennial Theatre Development Strategy funding.

6 *Imagined Nation: Terra Nullius and the Anxiety of Disappearance*

Performance as (Dis)appearance

Peggy Phelan posits that performance becomes itself through a process of disappearance:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.¹

Phelan's proposition is that this ephemeral quality distinguishes performance from other media, and makes performance what it is. The departure that a live performance makes from the present results in its disappearance. For Phelan, this quality of disappearance is part of the unique nature of performance and its power as a form.

Philip Auslander contests this emphasis on disappearance by suggesting that performance has entered into a culture where it is actively taking on the qualities of screen media. In doing so, performance becomes more like screen media, rather than being the ephemeral site of resistance that Phelan suggests.² Auslander proposes that performance is not defined by its ability to disappear, but by its desire to be mediated (and no longer completely ephemeral).

Rebecca Schneider also raises a question around performance and disappearance:

If we consider performance as a process of disappearance, of an ephemerality read as vanishment (versus material remains), are we

¹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 146

² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

limiting ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by our cultural habituation to the logic of the archive?³

While agreeing with Phelan's notion of disappearance and performance, Schneider suggests that performance can also succeed in remaining present in a culture across time. Schneider's thinking builds upon that of Joseph Roach, who suggests that performance, with its erasure and traces, becomes a vehicle for a culture to decide what it chooses to remember or forget across time:

Performance highlights a distinction between social memory and history as different forms of cultural transmission across time: memory requires collective participation, whether at theatrical events, shamanic rituals, or Olympic opening ceremonies; history entails the critical (and apparently solitary) interpretation of written records. Both also function as forms of forgetting: cultures select what they transmit through memory and history.⁴

Roach suggests that the disappearing quality of performance has a direct relationship to what a culture chooses to erase or make present. The collective nature of performance and theatre make them a social activity that relate to what a culture discusses and represents. Despite the ephemeral, disappearing quality of performance, Roach suggests that across time performance functions as a medium through which a culture selects to remember or forget aspects of itself.

It is Roach's notion of cultural forgetting and remembering that I wish to explore in relation to Australia's cultural sense of self. Within our history and cultural representations, disappearance figures as a particular anxiety to which Australian culture returns. Australia's conceived dimension of place animates a landscape populated with sites of disappearance. While Phelan's suggestion that performance is tied to a process of disappearance, it also (as Roach suggests) is about making things re-appear — performance conjures and makes things present.

What performance also does (along with its less ephemeral cultural artefacts) is make the event of disappearance re-appear. Performance and other cultural artefacts animate and

³ Rebecca Schneider, "Archives Performance Remains", *Performance Research*, 6 (2001), p. 100

⁴ Joseph Roach, "Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World", in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 45-63

make present the event of erasure. In this chapter, I consider a range of cultural artefacts — books, films, photographs, paintings and performance — which are evidence of what our culture has chosen to remember (and forget). I begin with the feature films *Wolf Creek* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the painting *Lost* by Frederick McCubbin, and a series of photographic works depicting the Beaumont Children. These cultural artefacts inform my own approaches to creating performance within a city and nation imbued with this anxiety.

In addition to the notion of Australia as a landscape populated with sites of disappearance, there is a second related concept that I explore. Each of these artworks are associated with (supposed) real events, but are ultimately imaginative fictional representations. I argue that these representations are working with an information vacuum which encourages audiences to read, imagine and at times fantasise them as depictions of reality. I begin with the formation of this conceived dimension of Australia's place, and its relationship to the concept of *terra nullius* in white settler culture.

National Imaginary and Lacan

Women and the Bush, written by Kay Schaffer in 1988, explores the notion of Australia's national identity and its construction through a discourse of masculinity and femininity in relation to the Australian landscape. Schaffer describes national identity as a cluster of representations that form a projected image of 'Australia' or 'Australian' that are perceived as a reality within our culture. Schaffer relates this projection to Jacques Lacan's theory of the imaginary and the symbolic:

National identity can be understood within the terms of the imaginary and symbolic. Like an ideal mirror image of the self, the idea of the national character is imaginary. It represents a construction of the self arising out of fantasies, memory or desire, and is given value within a particular culture through the symbolic order of language. It does not exist. But it is what Australians may want to believe is true.⁵

⁵ Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 10

Lacan's theory is useful in an investigation of place as it provides a way of differentiating our lived experience of place, our 'being-in-the-world' as phenomenologists would describe it, from our cultural, linguistic and psychological constructions of place.⁶

Lacan remains one of the most influential post-Freudian theorists in psychoanalysis.⁷ Lacan's developments upon the work of Freud continue to be explored and to inform contemporary theory, in fields such as feminism, post-structuralism, film theory, Marxism, nationalism and linguistics.⁸ Lacan shifted the application of psychoanalysis beyond notions of therapy into broader understandings of culture, perception and systems of creating meaning in our culture. Elizabeth Grosz, in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, describes Lacan's approach to the function of psychoanalysis:

Where Freud sought to ensure the status of psychoanalysis as a science, a therapeutic and an explanatory theory, Lacan sees it, not as a system of cure, explaining or guaranteeing knowledge, but as a series of techniques for listening to, and questioning desire — even those desires at work in the production of knowledge.⁹

Lacan's work is quite distinct from Freud's as he charts a developmental model which is based on a subject's entrance into language.¹⁰ The real is the starting point of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. The infant or subject begins its existence in a unity with the body of its mother, and does not comprehend boundaries between itself and anything else. This state of unity provides the subject with a sense of completeness and satisfaction. Lacan views this stage as the closest humans ever are to the pure materiality of existence (hence his definition of it as 'the real').¹¹ The real in Lacan's terms should be viewed as a psychic structure, and not confused with reality.¹² In Lacan's psychosexual development, we start in the real, which he views as a state of nature, which must be broken in order for

⁶ Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*.

⁷ Lacan was born in Paris 1901, and trained in psychiatry, graduating in 1927. Lacan's most significant development upon Freud's concept of psychoanalysis was to cross-pollinate Freud's biological and psychological based work with numerous other disciplines exploring the nature of human subjectivity, such as linguistics, semiotics, philosophy, literary theory, politics and anthropology.

⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), p. 3

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14

¹⁰ Freud established the notion of the psyche divided into three sections, the id, the ego and the superego. The superego is culturally inscribed, and informs what the ego aspires to and what it is prohibited from doing. The trajectory of Lacan's psychosexual development in some ways mirrors Freud's, with the subject dealing with nature of being a separate being from the outside world, and going through a process of being inducted into culture. See *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995).

¹¹ Dino Felluga, "Modules on Lacan: On Psychosexual Development", *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, November 28, 2003, Purdue University, Available: <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandevlop.htm>>, [accessed 20 April 2004].

¹² Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1977), p.

us to enter culture (through the processes of the imaginary and symbolic). In the realm of the real, the subject only seeks to satisfy its needs (which are satisfied unbeknownst to the subject by its mother) to create a sense of fulfilment and completeness.

Lacan views both the imaginary and symbolic orders as structures that we enter into during our development, removing ourselves from the psychic state of the real that we experience during early infancy. Lacan believes that we are severed from this state of the real from the point we enter into language (part of the symbolic), and we are never able to return to it, even though we always would like to.¹³ The real cannot be articulated through language, as Lacan argues that entry into language itself ends our experience of the real.¹⁴ The real “may only be supposed, it is an algebraic x ”,¹⁵ and is often referred to as impossible to know.

Lacan establishes the formation of the self through an examination of what he refers to as ‘the mirror stage’ for an infant. He builds upon the Freudian principles of an infant coming to terms with its separation from the rest of the world, but examines the cultural meanings and semiological processes of this phase.

Prior to the mirror stage, an infant is unable to distinguish boundaries between itself, its mother and the outside world. The mirror stage occurs between the ages of six and eighteen months for the infant, where the child sees a reflection of itself, and attaches a sense of identity or self to this image. A parallel relationship to this can be considered within place — culturally there is a reflected ‘image’ of place that is invested with a sense of identity. Lacan describes the nature of this identification for the infant:

We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image [...] But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction.¹⁶

¹³ Dino Felluga, *Terms Used by Psychoanalysis, Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*; Internet, Available: <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/psychterms.html>>, [accessed April 20 2004].

¹⁴ Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, p. x

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 2

Lacan approaches this reflection as ultimately being a social and cultural construction.¹⁷ It is inside this mirror phase that the child departs from the real and starts a process of entering the imaginary:

It is the founding moment of the imaginary mode, the belief in a projected image. It represents the first instance of what according to Lacan is the basic function of the ego, the classic gesture of the self: *méconnaissance*, misprision, misrecognition.¹⁸

The imaginary begins for the infant as it tries to reconcile a number of experiences triggered by viewing this reflection. The infant first becomes aware of the fact that there is a distinction between itself and its mother, and that it does not have autonomous control over forces outside itself. The infant recognises a lack or absence due to the mother no longer being part of itself, and it in part compensates for this lack by identifying with its own mirror image.

Prior to the mirror stage the child's felt self is fragmented and disjointed. At this early stage of development the child has very limited mobility and control over its body, and its awareness of its body is understood through the fragments it can perceive. It is yet to recognise its body as a whole.¹⁹ However its specular image, the image it sees in the mirror, appears complete and organised, a *gestalt* of the subject. The subject then misrecognises this image *as* itself, rather than as an image of itself. This misrecognition is often reinforced by people in the outside world, often the mother, affirming that this image is 'them'.²⁰ This specular image operates both as a literal image for the subject, of how the subject appears, but also operates as the foundation for the child's superego, an image derived from the outside world that the ego will try and live up to. In establishing the imaginary, the subject is inducted into a system in which it is dependent on identifying with imaginary images and representations in order to understand itself.²¹ The imaginary therefore forms a perception of the self that is constructed out of illusions, fantasies, desires and other external or cultural projections.

Lacan's suggestion of the imaginary connects to Bachelard's notion of topoanalysis, where the house and the places inside it are a specular image for the psyche. Instead of

¹⁷ Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, p. 9

¹⁸ Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 81

¹⁹ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, p. 45

²⁰ Mary Klage, *Jacques Lacan*, 2001, Internet, Available: <<http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/lacan.html>>, [accessed 20 April 2004].

²¹ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, p. 48

the human body, Bachelard argues that the house functions equally as a psychic ‘mirror’ of the self.²² Lacan’s imaginary also connects with Lefebvre’s notion of the ‘conceived’ of place. Within his term ‘representations of spaces’ our social rulers conceptualise and imagine space and place that we aspire to; his ‘representational spaces’ overlay real space and are composed of images and symbols that the imagination seeks to animate and change.²³ Both of these concepts suggest an ‘imagined’ dimension to place that is a cultural ideal we aspire to that is detached from what is real. The term ‘imaginary’ itself has been applied to other discourses that relate to comprehending identity collectively, such as national identity and place.²⁴

***Terra Nullius* as the Canvas for a National Imaginary**

Australia’s identity has been considered in relation to its landscape in a range of published works.²⁵ Joanne Tompkins’ book *Unsettling Space* looks at the relationship between space and cultural identity in Australian contemporary theatre.²⁶ The beach and the bush feature as important landscapes that Australian cultural production has focused on.²⁷ Tompkins organises her analysis thematically under the ‘topoi’ of monuments, contamination and borders, covering Australian theatre from 1979 including plays such as Andrew Bovell’s *Holy Day* (2001), Janis Balodis’s *The Ghosts Trilogy* (1997), Louis Nowra’s *Sunrise* (1983), Jenny Kemp’s contemporary performance work *Still Angela* (2002) and others.²⁸ I wish to build upon two notions that Tompkins pursues in *Unsettling Space*: the importance of the notion of *terra nullius* in Australian culture’s relationship to place and space, and her exploration of the Freudian notion of ‘the uncanny’ within Australian landscape as theorised by Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs in *Uncanny Australia*.²⁹ What distinguishes my analysis is an examination of Australian place and performance through Lacan’s notion of the imaginary.

²² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 6

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1991), p. 38

²⁴ Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, pp. 1-4

²⁵ A number of books examine a national imaginary and identity in relation to the Australian landscape. See Miriam Dixson, *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity 1788 to the Present* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999); Roslynn D. Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Changing Places: Re-imagining Australia*, ed. by John Cameron (Canberra: Longueville Books, 2003).

²⁶ Joanne Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

²⁷ This is also discussed in Jonathan Bollen, Adrian Kierlander and Bruce Parr, *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 2008).

²⁸ Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*.

²⁹ Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998).

In *Unsettling Space*, Tompkins explores how “theatre resists the practice of disremembering”³⁰ that has dominated Australian history as a result of *terra nullius*. Tompkins’ suggestion that theatre is able to remember what has been disremembered parallels the notion of theatre’s ability to make the disappeared reappear. Tompkins uses Freud’s notion of ‘the uncanny’ (and Gelder and Jacobs’ notion of the ‘postcolonial uncanny’) as a manifestation of the repression associated with *terra nullius* threatening to return.³¹ The premise of *terra nullius* and the notion of the ‘postcolonial uncanny’ is directly related to Australia’s anxiety around disappearance.

Kay Schaffer notes the importance of emptiness to Australia’s national imaginary since its inception.³² The first western concepts of Australia related to *terra australis*, an imagined vast southern continent that would ‘balance’ the northern continental landmasses. The representations of *terra australis* were built from small fragments of cartographical information. These fragments were connected into an imaginary vast land. There is an emptiness and unknown-ness in *terra australis* that informs Australia’s particular national imaginary: it is a blank canvas to be filled with projected ideas from a European colonial perspective. Later I redescribe this concept as a vacuum of information around so-called ‘real events’ in Australia’s history which is similarly filled with projected ideas.

There is an important link between *terra australis* and the notion of *terra nullius*. A Latin term that means ‘empty land’, *terra nullius* was the legal premise for land ownership in Australia until it was overturned by the High Court of Australia in 1992.³³ *Terra nullius* referred at the time of colonisation to the notion of ‘uncultivated land’, or a lack of agriculture, which equated to the land being vacant and available for ownership:

Under the so-called extended principle of *terra nullius*, inhabited land was considered open to settlement when the indigenous inhabitants were considered so uncivilised by European standards that they lacked the elementary forms of ‘political society’.³⁴

Paul Patton describes here the erasive qualities of *terra nullius*: it attempts to erase the presence of the indigenous inhabitants to make a blank canvas or emptiness that awaits

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

³² Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, p. 59

³³ Michael Connor, *The Invention of Terra Nullius: Historical and Legal Fictions on the Foundation of Australia* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2005), pp. 188-230

³⁴ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 125

inhabitation, ownership and enculturation. *Terra nullius* denies and eventually represses a material reality of occupation, supplementing it with a blank imagined space that can be populated by the fantasies and desires of the settler culture.

Joanne Tompkins examines the psychological implications of the concept of *terra nullius* on white settler culture:

The discourse that offered the excuse for white settlers to take over the land is *terra nullius*. The anxiety inherent in this spatial formation is the fear that maybe the empty land was not as empty of other inhabitants as settlers wished to believe. This anxiety arises from a 'will to forget' what is actually known.³⁵

The anxiety around the lack of emptiness in the *terra nullius* formation is crucial to Australia's cultural anxiety about disappearance and erasure. The white settlers' erasure of the Indigenous presence within the land of Australia created a shared repression that manifests in the form of a white settler cultural anxiety about a landscape that can erase the white body. Joanne Tompkins also notes that *terra nullius* was deployed retrospectively, and that "Aboriginal people who helped European settlers were subsequently 'absented' from the land, literally and discursively."³⁶

Gelder and Jacobs believe the anxiety connected to *terra nullius* results in what they refer to as the 'postcolonial uncanny', applying Freud's theory of the uncanny to postcolonial Australia. In their definition "an 'uncanny' experience may occur when one's home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience of being in place and 'out of place' simultaneously."³⁷ The paradox of being both in and out of place at the same time forms the psychic platform for the uncanny to manifest. Gelder and Jacobs posit that this notion of the uncanny can be applied to the anxiety around white settler culture undergoing a process of decolonisation whereby the land is no longer (or always has not) been 'theirs'. Gelder and Jacobs examine Australian ghost stories as a kind of manifestation of the uncanny connected to *terra nullius*, and they "think of this genre in terms of an entangled kind of haunting, which gives expression to a sense of (dis)possession for both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people alike."³⁸ The cultural anxiety about a landscape with supernatural-like powers to erase or disappear a

³⁵ Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, p. 24

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25

³⁷ Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998), p. 23

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42

white body is a similar manifestation of the uncanny, and that it has created a cluster of cultural production which figures the disappearance of the white body in the Australian landscape.

The Bush

Terra nullius has a strong connection to the basic white colonial premise of the bush, as it sets up the notion of the bush as an un-dwelled, people-less place:

The assumption of Australia as *terra nullius* (literally land of no person) lingers in painful ways. Europeans imagine a great Australian ‘wilderness’, the special virtue of which is its absence of humans and charming dedication to alternative flora and fauna. It is charmingly people-free. The way white people conceive of wilderness, there is actually no space for humans out there. They imagine the bush in ideal terms as untouched by humans.³⁹

In this way, the bush is both un-dwelled and un-dwellable. Its nature as an expansive wilderness designed to only harbour flora and fauna makes it immediately inhospitable to the (white) human body. While the wilderness has a romantic charm as an untouched landscape, it also is a hostile environment. The bush is a key antagonist to the settler and a site of unknowable exoticness, as Tompkins describes:

The anxiety of the tyrannous landscape [...] is perhaps most widely explored in depictions of the bush, across genres and art forms, particularly that landscape which ostensibly defies settlement. The difficulty in pinning down a specific definition for this cultural landscape is part of its appeal: it is both place (located in geography) and landscape (connected to the national identity).⁴⁰

The lack of specificity of the bush can be seen in the concept of the bush as ‘centre’. Uluru and the red centre are our strongest cultural and geographic symbols, but there is a notion that all bush has a centre-ness to it: a flat, featureless, expansive place. Perhaps this connects back to the early unknowable quality of the centre of the continent for the white settler and their inability to reach it. The unknowable quality of the centre created

³⁹ Robert Nelson, *Haunted Country*, 2006, <<http://www.polixenipapapetrou.net/>>, [accessed 16 June 2007].

⁴⁰ Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, p. 32

an imaginative vacuum for the fantasy of a giant inland sea within the continent, as Charles Sturt sought to find.⁴¹

The bush is imbued with an ominous, hostile quality when represented in relationship to the white body. This representation of the bush is a manifestation of the post-colonial uncanny and animates our anxiety of disappearance. I will begin with some of its most recent depictions within Australian cinema.

Chthonic Beasts

Wolf Creek struck a chord nationally and internationally with audiences as a terrifying and captivating story ‘based on true events’.⁴² The phrase ‘based on true events’ was used throughout the marketing for the film in posters and trailers. A trailer for the film posted at its American website begins with the phrase ‘based on true events’, and at the end quotes a critic’s review that “not since the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has horror felt this real”.⁴³ Director Robert Rodriguez is also quoted at the website as saying “as real as horror gets”.⁴⁴ The sense of the true and the real depicted was central to the success and terror of *Wolf Creek*. This invitation for a work of fiction to be deemed as truth in *Wolf Creek* and other works adds to the potency of the national imaginary.

The narrative depicted in *Wolf Creek* of the lost or brutalised white body in the Australian landscape resonates within the national imaginary because of its perceived reality:

If anything, the Australian version of this type of story is even more potent. Terrible things happening in our wilderness have occurred so frequently, both on film (*Japanese Story* (Sue Brooks, 2003), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975)) and in real life (the disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain, the Lonergans abandoned on the Barrier Reef) that it has become part of the national nightmare landscape.⁴⁵

The potency of these cinematic representations is the suggestion that they articulate an account of reality back to its audience, even if the supposed reality is, in fact, a speculative fantasy. The film *Open Water* (2003) has also billed as being ‘based on true

⁴¹ *Inland Sea*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004.

⁴² *Wolf Creek*. Dir. Greg McLean. Arclight Films. 2005.

⁴³ The trailer attributes this quote to Ken Fox from ‘TV Guide’.

⁴⁴ *Wolf Creek The Movie*, Website. Available: <www.wolfcreekthemovie.com>, [accessed 5 July 2007].

⁴⁵ Dave Hoskin, “Big Bad Wolf Creek”, *Metro Magazine*, 145 (2005), p. 21

events' connected to the disappearance of Tom and Eileen Lonergan.⁴⁶ The Lonergans were accidentally abandoned due to an incorrect head count during a scuba diving expedition off the Great Barrier Reef in 1997. The couple's absence was only noticed two days later when their possessions were found on the dive boat. The bodies of the couple were never found. *Open Water* is based on the imagined events of what happened to the couple once they were abandoned. In this regard, *Open Water* is a cinematic fantasy of what occurred rather than a representation of 'true events'.

Wolf Creek has an even looser relationship to the 'true events' on which it is supposedly based. In actuality, it is a work of fiction which is not based on any singular events. *Wolf Creek*'s events are reminiscent of the serial killings dubbed 'The Backpacker Murders' (where Ivan Milat abducted and murdered seven individuals, including five international travellers in New South Wales) and the disappearance of Peter Falconio (where Bradley Murdoch was convicted of shooting Peter Falconio and attempting to abduct Joanne Lees along the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory). However there are no particular 'true events' on which the film is based. Instead it is a fictional fantasy based on the trope of the vulnerable traveller in the Australian bush.

Picnic at Hanging Rock, made thirty years before *Wolf Creek* (and, incidentally, featuring a much younger John Jarratt, who played killer Mick Taylor in *Wolf Creek*), has equally suggested itself as a representation of true events.⁴⁷ *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was a reference point for *Wolf Creek*'s director, Greg McLean, in generating the representation of the Australian landscape.

During his publicity junkets Greg McLean spoke at length about wanting to use the landscape 'like another character in the film'. Admirably, he wanted it to be the source from which sprang the film's sense of fear and dread. To that purpose, he studied films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*; Peter Weir's lyric visual poem being the perfect example of an Australian film that manages to elicit a sense of menace and foreboding simply by showing a black rock crouched over the lush greenery, like a chthonic beast.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Open Water*. Dir. Chris Kentis. Lions Gate Films. 2003.

⁴⁷ In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, John Jarratt played the role of Albert Crundall, who befriends young aristocrat Michael Fitzhubert and becomes obsessed with what happened to the disappeared girls. The audience is given space to consider whether Jarratt's character and Fitzhubert were involved in their disappearance.

⁴⁸ Dmetri Kakmi, "The Hideous Blank at Wolf Creek", *Metro Magazine*, 148 (2005), p. 77

The notion of the landscape as “another character” immediately animates our concept of it. Does it, like its human character counterparts, have a personality, impulses, desires and motivations? Animating the landscape through the framework of the individual imbues it with an agency.

Peter Weir animates the landscape of Hanging Rock through a combination of cinematography and sound. Weir embraces the unique colour palette of the Australian bush in a way akin to painter Frederick McCubbin. Indeed, later in his career, McCubbin relocated to Mount Macedon, nearby Hanging Rock itself, where he was inspired by the local landscape and experimented light and its effect on colour in this landscape. McCubbin’s later visual vocabulary has a strong iconic link to the local environment of Hanging Rock.⁴⁹ In Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* sound plays an important role, imbuing the Rock with a sense of the uncanny, in addition to his use of light and colour:

Except for the occasional buzz of insects, or the rustle of leaves by animals, an ominous silence prevails. Its effect is to impart a strange quality, bordering on the horrific, to the superficially familiar, natural setting. It is also strikingly kinaesthetic: the heat and the languor it produces come not only from watching the sun drenched images on the screen, but also from the impending weight of near silence. Above all, there is a continuous and growing apprehension produced by the absence of sound.⁵⁰

Absence plays an important role in the creation of the uncanny and the ominous. As described by *Film Quarterly* reviewer Ed Roginski, the vacuum of sound creates the horrific; the vacuum of sound is filled with the uncanny imaginings of the landscape. As Kay Schaffer suggests, “in terms of an imaginary fantasy for Australian viewers, *Picnic* imagines the bush as the most powerful and mysterious object in the film. The bush obstructs man’s possession and mastery of the girls, of logical narrative meaning and coherent self-identity”.⁵¹

Both *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Wolf Creek* have blurred relationships to the notion of real events. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s origins as a true story still prevail.⁵² Encouraging

⁴⁹ Ann Galbally, *Frederick McCubbin* (Melbourne, Sydney, London: Hutchinson Group, 1981), p. 154 and Andrew Mackenzie, *Frederick McCubbin – The Macedon Years*, 2000, Available: <http://www.artistsfootsteps.com/html/mccubbin_macedonyears.htm>, [accessed 4 November 2007].

⁵⁰ Ed Roginski, “*Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Peter Weir”, *Film Quarterly*, 32 (1979), pp. 22-26.

⁵¹ Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, p. 55

⁵² Andrew Stephens, “Hanging Out For a Mystery”, *Sunday Age*, 21 January 2007, p. 8

the audience to fantasise on the realness of the events of *Wolf Creek* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* enhances their power as cinematic experiences. It connects the representation to something ‘true’ about Australia that is culturally feared — that the Australian landscape harbours forces that can abduct or erase individuals.

Simon Caterson discusses the elision of the distinction between fiction and fact that is at play here. This phenomenon is at its clearest with the international bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code*. Caterson describes that the book has “won countless converts to its version of history even though the book is clearly labelled a novel and carries the standard disclaimer as to imaginary characters and situations.”⁵³ Joan Lindsay, the author of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, is not so clear cut. She clearly encourages in her ‘disclaimer’ an ambiguity to the truth or fiction of her book’s narrative:

Whether *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is fact or fiction, my readers must decide for themselves. As the fateful picnic took place in the year nineteen hundred, and all the characters who appear in the book are long since dead, it hardly seems important.⁵⁴

Lindsay encourages us to fantasise the story as real by positioning us as the assumed sceptic who will never be convinced; she will leave it to our judgement rather than trying to make us believe her particular account. Her statement that the witnesses and oral historians of the event are all dead encourages us to fantasise about a factualness that Lindsay withholds from us. Caterson describes the unfolding phenomena of supposed truth of the work:

It is not just thrillers, or for that matter science fiction, that can alter our perception of reality [...] *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has sold millions of copies since publication in 1967. It is commonplace to assume that the story has some basis in fact, but it seems there is none. Writers who’ve combed the archives looking for traces of a real-life event have had no luck in finding one, yet tourists and literary pilgrims flock to the area convinced that the book speaks true. One literary detective, Yvonne Rousseau, claimed that *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is an elaborate code,

⁵³ Simon Caterson, “True Fakes”, *Eureka Street* 17.6 (2006). p. 34

⁵⁴ Joan Lindsay, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, (Melbourne and Canberra: F. W. Cheshire, 1967), p. iv

beginning with the revelation that the names of the four lost girls all began with anagrams of the same four letters.⁵⁵

In addition to Rousseau's suggestion of a hidden code, there are local myths that persist around the story and rock as a supernatural or uncanny place. There is a location near the rock supposedly where a car will go up a hill when placed into neutral, a story of an Irish man who posted back a fragment of the rock with a map showing where it had been taken from as it had only brought bad luck, and a Tasmanian woman who claims she took photographs at the Rock that contain ghostly images of Miranda.⁵⁶

In a recent article about Hanging Rock in the *Sunday Age*, Andrew Stephens talks about the absence of information about its Indigenous history:

Hanging Rock's indigenous history has been largely obscured. What the Rock's name was for the local Aboriginal tribes seems to have disappeared from oral or written record, despite various attempts by historians to find out. Even the precise tribe or clan that inhabited the Rock area is not certain, with historians mentioning the Woi Wurrung, Djadja Wurrung and, according to local historian Allan Maxwell, the Ediboligitoorong as likely candidates.⁵⁷

The notion that there is an Indigenous history of the rock that has 'disappeared' only enhances the scope to fantasise about its ominous or supernatural potential. The absence of Indigenous history of the rock creates a *terra nullius* canvas through which we can both mythologise its history in white settler culture and mythologise its Indigenous danger (that we are not aware of). Authors such as Yvonne Rousseau engage with a kind of new-age primitivism with Indigenous history and culture, redeploying Indigenous information about the landscape to reinforce its uncanny, supernatural quality.

One of *Picnic at Hanging Rock's* aesthetic influences is found in the painting of Frederick McCubbin, and his particular representations of the lost white body — specifically the lost white child — in the Australian bush. In this tracing I discover that the lost white child is not only one of the earliest representations of the national imaginary in postcolonial artmaking, but that it has a link to beginning of one of Adelaide's own imaginaries as a city.

⁵⁵ Caterson, "True Fakes".

⁵⁶ Stephens, 'Hanging Out For a Mystery'.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The Lost Child

The image of the lost white child in the Australian bush has received a lot of attention. Peter Pierce's *Country of Lost Children* (1999) and Kim Torney's *Babes in the Bush* (2005) explore tropes of the lost white child in Australian culture by looking at historical sources, cultural mythology and its representations.⁵⁸ Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day* is one of the more recent theatrical works to engage with this trope.⁵⁹ Partly inspired by the disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain, Bovell uses the trope of the lost white child as a device to examine the denial, blame and displacement of white actions in our cultural amnesia of Australia's history.⁶⁰

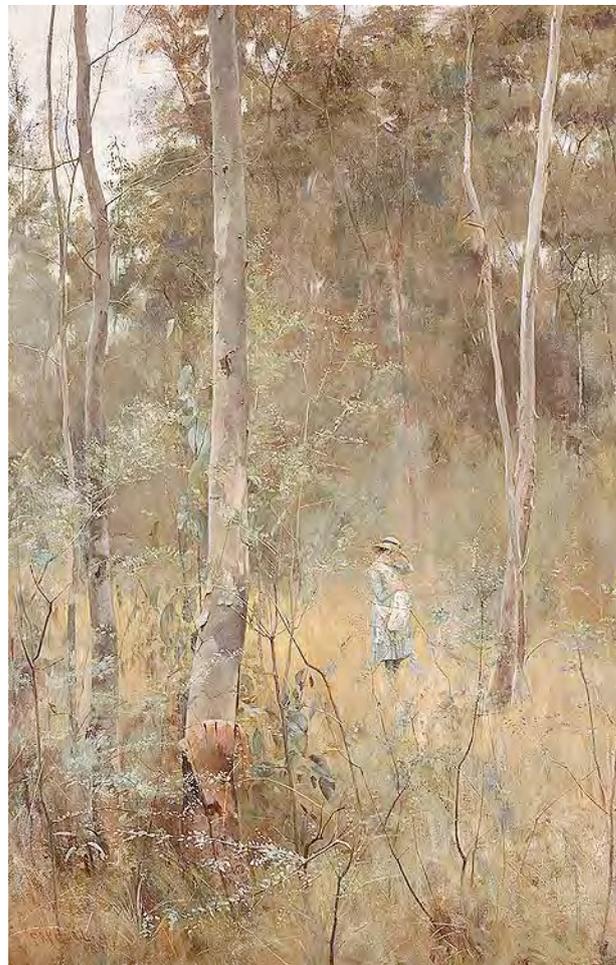


FIGURE 3. *Lost* (1886) by Frederick McCubbin

⁵⁸ Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Kim Torney, *Babes in the Bush: The Making of an Australian Image* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2005).

⁵⁹ Andrew Bovell, *Holy Day* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001)

⁶⁰ I observed the development of *Holy Day* at the 2000 Australian National Playwright Conference, and was later the Assistant Director of the first production. Bovell referred to the Azaria Chamberlain case as an inspiration when he wrote the first draft of *Holy Day* in the late 1980s.

Frederick McCubbin's painting *Lost* (1886) has become a pivotal representation of the lost white child in the bush. McCubbin's painting is believed to have been inspired by an incident in May 1885 when twelve year old girl Clara Crosbie was found alive after having been missing for three weeks in the bush near Lilydale in Victoria.⁶¹ McCubbin's painting has been read and re-read in different ways, and I am interested in interrogating the more recent readings of Peter Pierce and Kim Torney. Pierce observes:

The critic in *Table Talk* on 26 April 1889 enthused that McCubbin's picture was 'thoroughly Australian in spirit, and yet so poetic, that it is a veritable bush idyll — a sad one, it is true — but one to be seen every day'.⁶²

The *Table Talk* critic describes this image as a bush idyll. Idyll is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as an "extremely happy, peaceful, or picturesque episode or scene, typically an idealized or unsustainable one".⁶³ There is an 'unsustainable picturesque' in the nineteenth century reading of this image. While it is suggested that the scenario depicted is not inherently happy or peaceful, there is a sentimental beauty which is at play in the image. Pierce recognises an aspect of this idyll:

[McCubbin's painting] confirm[s] with what gentle seductiveness the Australian bush lures children from home. In 'Lost' (1886), the girl blends in with the soft, blue-green thicket from which she may never emerge...the child's way, once she moves again, will be into obscurity and legend.⁶⁴

Torney's reading is somewhat different. She suggests that an Australian audience instantly reads "implicit threat" in the scenario. Torney projects the cultural anxiety of disappearance; she reads the arguably benign place of the bush as hostile and threatening:

The young girl is standing in a relatively open area of bush, carrying flowers in her apron and she could be simply resting before heading home. The bush is neither dark nor overpowering but a soft, misty space,

⁶¹ National Gallery of Victoria, *Education Kit for Lost by Frederick McCubbin*, Available: <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/australian/painting/m/mccubbin_f/education_kit.html>, [accessed 26 June 2007].

⁶² Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*, p. 55

⁶³ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. by Erin McKean, Second edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*, p. 55

and the child does not seem distressed. Yet the subject of this painting is immediately obvious to most Australians without any reference to the title, our common cultural history renders the image quite clearly a depiction of a young girl lost in the bush. Australians immediately recognise the implicit threat contained in the scene. All of the elements of the painting — the child on her own, one hand up to her eyes, holding up an apron full of wildflowers for which she has searched deep into the bush, and the enveloping, obscuring nature of the bush itself — lead to the overriding interpretation that this is a lost child.⁶⁵

The absence of conventional semiological tropes to signify hostility in the image (darkness, shadow, contrast, asymmetry) heightens a notion that there is a cultural projection at play in Torney's reading. There is an uncanny threat that is projected into this image; Torney suggests that Australians can 'sense' this threat, like it is a hidden supernatural force which haunts the landscape. There is an inversion of *terra nullius*, the return of a repressed that is manifesting itself as a supernatural force of cultural and spatial erasure across the Australian landscape.

This repressed back-projection of erasure manifests in our representations of the landscape. The process of erasure involved in *terra nullius* — the emptying of the Australian continent of indigenous inhabitants to make an unpopulated land, coupled with the extensive physical erasure of native flora and fauna to emulate the landscape of the coloniser — has been projected into the landscape itself. We have animated the landscape with the fictional 'superpower' we assigned to it. It explicates the repressed events associated with *terra nullius*.

The bush is not the only environment in the Australian landscape to be animated as a site of disappearance. I would now like to consider the beach as the more recent site of disappearance in Australia's cultural production.

The Beach

Both *Unsettling Space* and *Men at Play* discuss the beach and the bush as important cultural sites represented within Australian theatre and broader cultural production.⁶⁶ Both

⁶⁵ Torney, *Babes in the Bush: The Making of an Australian Image*, p. 11

⁶⁶ Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre* and Jonathan Bollen, Adrian Kiermader and Bruce Parr, *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 2008).

the beach and the bush feature prominently as sites of disappearance within Australian history and mythology. Part of the resonance of the beach and bush as sites of disappearance is they are positioned at the spatial fringes of the Australian cultivated landscape—the deep centre and the periphery. The notion of beach and bush both engage with a departure from the cultivated sites of white settler culture.

Out of the two sites, the beach is the one that is much closer, geographically and metaphorically, to Australian culture. Australian culture's fascination with the beach grew in the mid-twentieth century following our interest in the bush as Bollen, Kiernander and Parr describe:

There was a time, in the first half of the twentieth century, when Australian drama turned to the bush [...] [Later] across the middle decades of the twentieth century—creators working in other areas of cultural production, in the visual arts and advertising, in television and film, were turning their attention to the beach. This turn to the beach is evident in the photography of Max Dupain, for instance, or in tourism advertising and campaigns to encourage migration to Australia...Indeed, the legacy of Australian cultural production and critique has itself been structured by such a turn to the beach.⁶⁷

The beach is symbolic of relaxation within Australian urban culture, and unlike the bush the beach itself is a cultivated site for a range of activities within settled white culture.⁶⁸ Part of the beach's threat is its positioning as a border, as Tompkins notes. Spatially, the sandy beach borders the ocean, which is the wild seascape that carries threat, in the form of sharks, rips, and other hostile forces. To venture into the ocean is to cross from the cultivated place into wild seascape, to borrow Edward S. Casey's delineation of places.⁶⁹ Surf lifesavers are emblematic of the beach's threat in Australian culture — they survey the wild landscape from the cultivated place, monitoring the threat on the other side of the border.

The disappearance of Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1966 clearly animates the beach as a site that can absorb or erase the white body. Holt disappeared after swimming at Cheviot Beach in Victoria, at the edge of where his companions on the day could see him. Holt's body was never found. This created a vacuum which was populated by a number of

⁶⁷ Bollen, Kiernander and Parr, *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s*, p. 165

⁶⁸ Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, p. 29

⁶⁹ Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, pp. 188-191

conspiracy theories—that Holt had committed suicide; that he had swum to escape and lead a separate life; or the most crystalline (and outlandish) that he had lived his life as a Chinese spy and he was collected by a Chinese submarine and taken to China.⁷⁰ The national anxiety around Holt’s disappearance reinforced the beach as a wild, potentially threatening site.

In the same year, another event, the disappearance of the Beaumont children in Adelaide, also animated the beach as a threatening site and an important historical manifestation of the lost child.

The Beaumont Children and a National Loss of Innocence

The disappearance of the three Beaumont children on Australia Day 1966 at the Glenelg Beach in Adelaide has been referred to as a “historical watershed”⁷¹ in Australian culture, and was perhaps the most significant event that animated the trope of the lost child in Australian history prior to the disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru in 1980.⁷²

The three Beaumont children, Jane, Arnna and Grant, disappeared at Glenelg Beach. They had gone to the beach in the morning, and were sighted traveling to the beach by bus and sitting on a section of lawn alongside the Holdfast Bay sailing club. Their last confirmed sighting was at a local cake store, buying food with money that had not been provided by their parents.⁷³

Most of the information about the Beaumont children comes from the print media, in particular from Adelaide newspapers, *The Advertiser* and *The News*. A recent book about the disappearance, *Searching for the Beaumont Children*, seeks to tell the history of the disappearance.⁷⁴ A recent resurgence of interest of the disappeared white child in this book was connected to the forty year anniversary of the children’s disappearance.

The disappearance of the Beaumont children is sometimes referred to as the point where Australia lost its innocence.⁷⁵ The notion that the main loss associated with the Beaumont

⁷⁰ Anthony Grey, *The Prime Minister Was a Spy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

⁷¹ Nelson, *Haunted Country*.

⁷² Paul Reynolds, *The Azaria Chamberlain Case: Reflections on Australian Identity* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1989).

⁷³ From police résumé document cited in Alan J. Whiticker, *Searching for the Beaumont Children: Australia’s Most Famous Unsolved Mystery* (Sydney and Melbourne: John Wiley & Sons Australia, 2006), pp. 248-52

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Alan J. Whiticker, “The Loss of Innocence”, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 January 2006, p. 26

children is of national innocence de-emphasises the criminological mystery of who abducted them; it focuses instead on the children as a timeless image:

The Beaumonts are the lost children who never grow up: disappearing off the map one day into a kind of Neverland. Still (presumably) within Australia but unable to be located by the usual means — by parents, police, journalists; not even the clairvoyants could find them. Permanently locked in a kind of Louisa M. Alcott *Little Women* world of notes left on kitchen tables; playing forever in the shadows at the back of old amusement park rides; trapped in a nation's memory vault, and desire for an innocent past.⁷⁶

Beth Spencer's description of the children's importance suggests a frozen, timeless, imagistic impression. Our cultural imagining is focused on the image of the children before they disappear rather than the fantasies attached to what happened to them after being abducted.

Two photographic representations of the Beaumont children: a series of photographs created by visual artist Polixeni Papapetrou, and the cover photograph of the book *Searching for the Beaumont Children* reveal how the event is being represented.

⁷⁶ Beth Spencer, "The Lost Children", *The Age*, 21 January 2006, p. 13



FIGURE 4. *She saw two girls and a boy 1966 1* (2006) by Polixeni Papapetrou



FIGURE 5. *She saw two girls and a boy 1966 2* (2006) by Polixeni Papapetrou



FIGURE 6. *She saw two girls and a boy 1966 3* (2006) by Polixeni Papapetrou

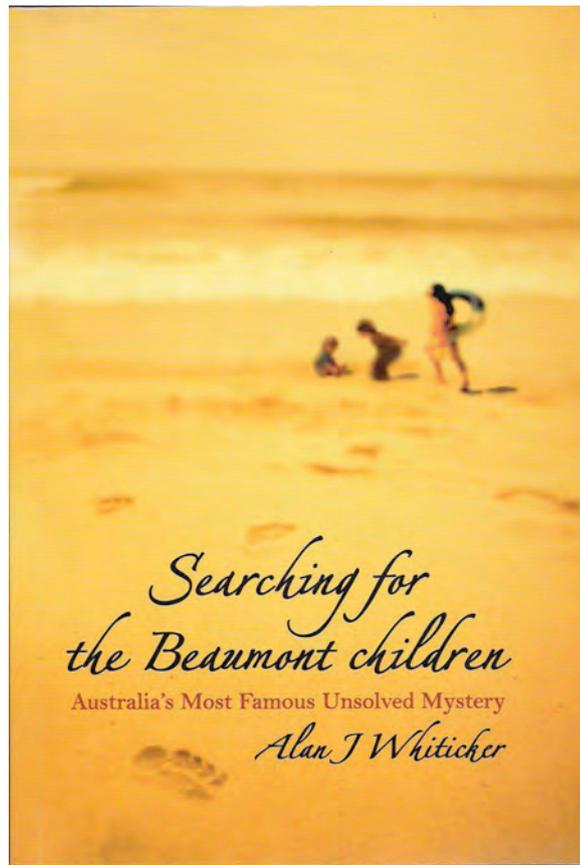


FIGURE 7. *Searching for the Beaumont Children* cover image by Wiley Art Studio

Both representations place the children on a vast empty beach. In Papapetrou's images, the children look out from the shore to the horizon of the ocean, and in the other images are seen on a more hostile rocky terrain, frozen in time. The cover image of *Searching for the Beaumont Children* places the children on a vast empty beach, blurred in the distance, with footprints in focus in the foreground. The images explore the children's relationship to a vast beach landscape. Yet both representations contradict the reality of the Beaumonts' disappearance. The day that they disappeared at Glenelg was Australia Day, when Glenelg was bustling with people.⁷⁷ In the reconstruction of the Beaumont's disappearance, the beach itself does not feature prominently. It is in fact a more urban landscape of a local cake store and a lawned area of a park that figure.⁷⁸ So while the reality of the Beaumont's disappearance was a landscape populated with people, and their site(s) of disappearance were the urban environment of Glenelg, these representations place the children on an empty beach. The absence of the public holiday crowd, or any other human figures transfers the hostility into the image of the beach landscape. The empty beach adopts the motivations of the human abductor: it carries the threatening or ominous force, and also heightens their sense of isolation.

⁷⁷ Whiticker, *Searching for the Beaumont Children: Australia's Most Famous Unsolved Mystery*, pp. 57-58

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 250

This particular representation of the Beaumont children makes the children vulnerable to the antagonist of the Australian landscape rather than a human abductor. It builds upon the cultural myth of the landscape having an ominous, erasive power. The displacement of the human motive for the children's disappearance is similar to *terra nullius*. These images strip back the colonial and urban fixtures that have been placed on top of the indigenous landscape (the suburb of Glenelg) to expose the *real* protagonist, the Australian landscape. Despite being colonised and having urban familiarity, it still belies a hostile power.

Papapetrou's images were part of a larger project which included other representations of white bodies lost in the Australian landscape, including a series of images with young girls in white dresses at Hanging Rock. Papapetrou describes her interest in this material:

The figure of the bush-lost child is one of the poignant themes in Australia's cultural remembering. My desire was to create photographs that embodied the harrowing psychological aspects of these stories. I wanted to somehow draw the viewer into this emotional space, experience the undercurrent of the psychological drama unfolding and make connections between past and present consciousness about land and country.⁷⁹

Papapetrou's images have a strong relationship to the representational mode of McCubbin. Much like McCubbin's *Lost*, the children are enclosed and enshrouded by landscape.

We have encountered a range of cultural production engaging with the trope of the lost white child in the bush: Polixeni Papapetrou's photography (2006), Whiticker's book on the Beaumont children (2006), Kim Torney's book *Babes in the Bush* (2005) and theatrical works such as Bovell's *Holy Day*, *Politely Savage* (2006) by performance group My Darling Patricia,⁸⁰ and new works in development such as *The Beaumont Project* by author Nicki Bloom.⁸¹ This cultural production reveals a return to the trope of

⁷⁹ Polixeni Papapetrou, *Haunted Country*, May 2006, <http://www.polixenipapapetrou.net/>, [accessed 16 June 2007].

⁸⁰ My Darling Patricia's *Politely Savage* was presented by Vitalstatistix for the Adelaide Fringe Festival in March 2007 at Waterside Workers Hall, Port Adelaide.

⁸¹ This new work was funded for creative development by the Australia Council's Theatre Board in 2006. See The Australia Council, *Assessment Meeting Report – Theatre Board – November 2006*, 2006, Available: <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/8403/theatre_amr_nov2006.pdf>, [accessed 21 July 2008].

the lost white child. Is this in response to a series of works such as Jane Harrison's play *Stolen* (1998) and the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) that have animated the loss of indigenous children to white settler culture within the stolen generation?⁸² It is fascinating to consider that after a series of cultural representations dealing with a disremembered past event of white settler culture stealing children, there is the return of a fascination of the white child lost to the bush. Is this a reassertion of the trope of the lost white child as a response to the animation of the stolen generation?

This analysis of Australia's national imaginary offers provocations for my practice as a performance maker. The anxiety of disappearance in Australia is a distinct cultural obsession that we return to — it is a resonant and continuing trope in our culture and art making, from early colonial visual art to contemporary Australian cinema. This anxiety is a unique manifestation of Australia as a place, and is a complex and evocative material for an audience tied to Australia.

The history of *terra nullius* as a blank canvas has created a slippage between what is real or projected within Australia's national imaginary. As a performance maker working with the anxiety of disappearance, it presents a problem: how can you manage the separation of the real from the imagined? If you want to encourage an audience to elide the real and the projected, the imaginary is naturally conducive to this. But if you want to be deconstructive, strategies are needed to expose the 'vacuum filling' that enables the slippage between the real and imagined.

I am now interested in examining a particular manifestation of the anxiety of disappearance that is tied to Adelaide, the city I am from. The disappearance of the Beaumont children marks the beginning of a local imaginary for Adelaide as a city, which I will call 'The Perfect Setting for a Horror Film'. The Beaumont children's disappearance is placed at the beginning of a chronology of disappearances and serial murders; followed by the disappearances of two young girls Joanne Ratcliffe and Kirstie Gordon (1973),⁸³ the 'Truro' Murders (1976-77),⁸⁴ the 'Family' Murders (1979-1983) and

⁸² Jane Harrison, *Stolen* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2000) and *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Dir. Phillip Noyce. Becker Entertainment. 2002.

⁸³ Eleven-year-old Ratcliffe and four-year Gordon disappeared from the Adelaide Oval after not returning from going to the toilet on the site. The girls were seen by four witnesses leaving the ground with a man. Similarly to the Beaumont children, despite extensive police investigation no evidence of the girls or their abductor were ever found.

⁸⁴ Seven young women aged between fifteen and twenty-six were raped and murdered by Christopher Worrell, aided by his accomplice James Miller. Miller, who was the lover of bi-sexual Worrell, confessed to the crimes and helped police locate the bodies, some of which were in a swamp in the town of Truro outside Adelaide. Miller was found guilty of six of the seven murders and received a life sentence, Worrell himself had died in car accident prior to Miller's confession.

most recently the ‘Snowtown’ Murders (1992-1999).⁸⁵ The “loss of innocence” attached to the Beaumont children very much intersects with Adelaide’s local imaginaries as a city. I now want to move to Adelaide to trace its two particular competing imaginaries and a local mythology of a group, the so-called ‘Family’, which becomes the central investigation of the performance laboratory of *The Rope Project*.

⁸⁵ The details of the so-called ‘Family’ and ‘Snowtown’ Murders are detailed in the Dossier of *The Rope Project*.

7 *Imagined City: 'The Family' and Contested Imaginaries of Adelaide*

The imaginary of Adelaide has been highly contested. Two opposing images of Adelaide have competed with each other in the second half of the twentieth century. They provide frameworks through which Adelaide is represented nationally and internationally. Adelaide writer and artist Barbara Hanrahan observes how these different imaginaries relate to each other:

Everybody has their own feelings about Adelaide, and they tend to be extreme. It's either Garden City of the South (where flourish the arts and sciences, and all things which spell the culture of twentieth century civilisation) or that ideal setting for a horror movie of Salman Rushdie's infamous *Tatler* piece in 1984 (exorcists, omens, shinings, poltergeists, things that go bump in the night). The Paradise version features the stock ingredients of well-watered plain, enchanted Hills, girdle of green, white-sand beaches, wattle-bird says goodnight, sun draws his curtain.¹

In this chapter, I examine these two differing imaginaries, starting with the utopian imaginary, the 'Athens of the South'; and then moving into the more recent history of its counter-imaginary, 'the ideal setting for a horror film'. I will then examine how the intersection of these two imaginaries has generated the mythology of the so-called 'Family' — a imaginary group of high-powered, deviant homosexual men who abduct, rape and mutilate young men. The myth of 'The Family', a manifestation of Australia's anxiety of disappearance within Adelaide, becomes the object of investigation in the performance laboratory of *The Rope Project*. The complexities of Adelaide's contested imaginaries directly inform the myth of the so-called 'Family', and my own strategies as a performance maker to animate it and deconstruct it.

¹ Barbara Hanrahan, "Weird Adelaide", *The Adelaide Review*, March 1988, p. 6

'Athens of the South'

It's Paradise. Adelaide is quite simply heaven on earth. There's nowhere else in the world that I've visited that I would rather live than here. It's got everything. We're forty minutes from McLaren Vale, which is like Tuscany with its soft light, its rolling hills, its wine and restaurants. We're twenty minutes from the Adelaide Hills, which I've eulogised in my latest novel, we're fifteen minutes from endless kilometres of the most beautiful beaches in the world, and I haven't even mentioned the Barossa and the glories of the Clare Valley. It's quite simply a paradise on earth. Why would I ever want to leave? The city has Australia's greatest cultural boulevard in North Terrace. There's not another mile in the country that has all those cultural resources side by side.

— Peter Goldsworthy, quoted in *All Things Bright & Beautiful*.²

During the 1970s under the State Labor government of Don Dunstan, South Australia was regarded by many as the most socially progressive and politically radical place in the country.³ The Dunstan era saw a range of social reform through its legislation, through abolishing corporal punishment, appointing women to juries, decriminalising homosexuality and leading reform for Aboriginal land rights.⁴ It was also a time when Adelaide's arts sector flourished, fostered by Dunstan as the Minister for the Arts. The Dunstan government's injection of financial resources saw the construction and completion of the Adelaide Festival Centre, the establishment of the State Theatre and Opera Companies and the South Australian Film Corporation.⁵ In this period, South Australia was viewed as a national leader of the arts, a hub of artistic creativity and innovation.⁶

This era in South Australia's history revived an expression of Adelaide as the 'Athens of the South'. The expression, 'Athens of the South', encompasses a vision of Adelaide which is progressive, radical, non-conformist, socially liberal, and where arts and culture activities flourish. 'Athens of the South' has functioned as a pivotal imaginary of Adelaide, from the envisioning of the city prior to settlement to the sense of its fulfilment

² Susan Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004), p. 201

³ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *ABC News Obituary — Don Dunstan*, 6 February 1999, Available: <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/features/obits/dunstan/default.htm>>, [accessed 22 October 2007].

⁴ Don Dunstan Foundation, *Don Dunstan Foundation | Biography*, 21 October 2007, Available: <<http://www.dunstan.org.au/don/biography.html>>, [accessed 22 October 2007].

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

during the Dunstan era. Arguably the point of decline for this imaginary coincides with the economic collapse of the State Bank in 1992, and the State Labor party's crushing defeat by the Liberal party in the following election.

While the notion of Adelaide as an 'Athens of the South' was a dominant trope in the 1970s, the term originates much earlier in South Australia's history. The expression dates back to the city's inception. It is attributed to Edward Gibbon Wakefield, whose theory of systematic colonisation informed South Australia's settlement.⁷ Wakefield set out to appeal to the middle classes through voluntary migration which excluded convicts. He envisaged colonies that were pre-planned; invitation for settlement was only initially offered to those who could afford to buy land, with labourers following when needed.⁸ A notion of social and spatial perfection informed Wakefield's vision; planned settlements of enlightened citizens would epitomise social democracy.⁹ The ideology for this new kind of settlement was drawn by Wakefield from the colonies of ancient Greece, as he describes in *Sketch of a Proposal for Colonizing Australasia* published in 1829:

The progress of many of the ancient Greek colonies towards wealth and greatness, seems accordingly to have been very rapid. In a course of a century or two, several of them appear to have rivalled, and even surpassed their mother cities. Syracuse and Agrigentum in Sicily, Tarentum and Locri in Italy, Ephesus and Miletus in Lesser Asia, appear by all accounts to have been at least equal to any of the cities in ancient Greece. Though posterior in their establishment, yet all the arts of refinement, philosophy, poetry, and eloquence, seem to have been cultivated as early, and to have been improved highly in them, as in any part of the mother country.¹⁰

Wakefield advanced the notion that, not only would the colony mirror the best features of its mother culture, it had the potential to supersede it. The colony would hold onto the core values and traditions that the mother culture embraced, and exceed them through a youthful, enthusiastic and progressive approach in a new land.¹¹ Identifying itself as the 'Athens of the South' suggests that Adelaide would have the potential to supersede the capital of the Empire.

⁷ Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857* (London and New York: Melbourne University Press, 1957), p. 83

⁸ Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*, p. 55

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56

¹⁰ Edward Gibbon Wakefield, *Sketch of a Proposal For Colonizing Australasia* (London: 1829), p. 12

¹¹ Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857*, p. 83

Beyond its ideology, Wakefield believed the colonies should have an aesthetic perfection, and offer a compact, geometrically ordered space in which cultural interaction could occur.¹² Although Wakefield's ideas set out a concept for the colony that would become Adelaide, he was not directly involved in planning and realising the colony. The person responsible for planning the city was Colonel William Light, who was appointed as Surveyor-General of the colony in 1835.¹³ The origin of the city's plan has been traced back to Greek and Roman colonies, which later influenced renaissance city planning.¹⁴

In particular, Greek and Roman military encampments and fortresses served as the reference point for Adelaide's design. The most accepted theory is that Adelaide's layout of the city is based on the grid of a Roman military camp,¹⁵ mirroring Wakefield's discussion of the starting point of a colony — “the first occupation of a Greek colony seems to have been to erect a fortress”¹⁶ — and from this protected point the colony was established. The notion of militaristic planning fulfils Wakefield's desire for an engineered spatial environment (rather than haphazard settlement) with empirical knowledge controlling its form. Geoffrey Dutton describes the layout of Adelaide's plan:

His sketch shows the town Adelaide in two rectangular blocks, the larger to the south and the smaller to the north of the Torrens, the whole surrounded by a belt of parklands about a half mile wide. In the heart of the open city, there was to be a large open space, Victoria Square.¹⁷

'Light's vision' provides the central city (the south block) in a compact one mile square, with a series of wide streets that would discourage crime and corruption associated with the narrow lanes of London.¹⁸ It also provides an idyllic parkland surrounding that would create a pleasant divide for a well planned residential area (the north block). Supposedly one rationale for the parkland encompassing the city's perimeter is that a cannon fired from outside the parklands would not reach the city mile, however I have not been able to

¹² Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*, p. 56

¹³ In official history, Colonel William Light was responsible for surveying and planning Adelaide, however Light's role as planner has been contested. Donald Johnson and Donald Langmead assembled evidence indicating that the Adelaide plan was created instead by his deputy George Kingston. See Donald Leslie Johnson and Donald Langmead, *The Adelaide City Plan: Fiction and Pact* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11

¹⁵ Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*, p. 59

¹⁶ Wakefield, *Sketch of a Proposal For Colonizing Australasia*, p. 14

¹⁷ Geoffrey Dutton, *Founder of a City* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1960) cited in Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*, p. 59

¹⁸ Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*, p. 60

find any evidence of this theory. The notion of Adelaide's 'perfect' planning, as the only pre-planned capital city in Australia, is a central ingredient in the 'Athens of the South' imaginary.

While the 'Athens of the South' imaginary began at the onset of Adelaide's history, it was the Dunstan era that both revived the term, and seemed to realise the utopian aspirations held in its concept. The notion of South Australia as a city-state, informed by social democracy has an interesting resonance with the ancient Greek colony having sovereignty from the ruling monarch.¹⁹ Dunstan as a city-state leader positioned himself from the outset within the imaginary of the 'Athens of the South'. The Dunstan era was marked by its significant social and legal reform. The response to the decriminalisation of homosexuality directly informs the myth of the so-called 'Family'.

The biennial Adelaide Festival of Arts in many ways realises the aspirations of the 'Athens of the South'. It displays the flourishing abundance of cultural activity generated and housed by the city, and the concentration provided by the festival as an event reveals to the rest of the world a sophisticated, progressive culture, where day-to-day life is surrounded by aesthetically beautiful parklands and excellent food and wine. Positing the Adelaide Festival as one of the best in the southern hemisphere echoes a superseding of the empire's capitals in the way Wakefield envisioned.

The Dunstan era converted the Adelaide Festival into an exemplar of the imaginary, allowing it to flourish outside of the much more socially restrictive and conservative environment into which it was born in 1960. From the late 1890s to the 1960s, South Australia had a number of laws restricting drinking (including legislation that closed pubs at 6pm), gambling and the activities of other community groups such as theatre groups.²⁰ The restrictive nature of social activity had its impact on the festival, as observed here by Whitelock in *Festival!*

In 1960 I. I. Kavan wrote in the *Australian Quarterly* that the infant festival could be spoiled by: "...the archaic laws and customs which prevail in South Australia. The dead Sundays, the 6 o'clock closing time on week days, the comparatively poor gastronomic achievements and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 159

²⁰ Derek Whitelock, *Festival! The Story of the Adelaide Festival of Arts* (Adelaide: published by the author, 1980), p. 14

notable shortage of good hotels, restaurants and nightclubs, makes the visitor's life at the festival difficult, at times, tedious".²¹

Beyond its reform of legislation, the Dunstan era was also associated with cultural changes to dining and drinking, with a growth of gourmet restaurants and cafes with a much more diverse multicultural cuisine, a proliferation of the state's fine wine, and later opening hours for bars and restaurants.²²

Colin Horne describes how the Festivals in the 1970s took on a completely new life. "[T]hose of 1970 and 1972 [...] are still nostalgically remembered by many people as most exciting cultural occasions Adelaide had experienced up until that time. They still rank as perhaps the best balanced of all the Festivals."²³ The Festivals also grew in size and resources. By 1978, the number of performances had multiplied six times since the inaugural Festival in 1960 and financial support from the State government rose to become fifty five to sixty percent of its budget, with the State taking over major financial liability for the event.²⁴ This 'fertilisation' of the event, making it resource rich, embeds the Festival within the Dunstan era and the imaginary of 'Athens of the South'.

The Dunstan era and the Adelaide Festival were instrumental in reviving and embodying the 'Athens of the South'. The Dunstan era was also the time when Adelaide's other imaginary began to form, crystallised in a quote by Salman Rushdie (during 1984 Adelaide Festival itself in Writers' Week) as 'The Perfect Setting for a Horror Film'.

'The Perfect Setting for a Horror Film'

In 2002, the BBC documentary *The Trial of Joanne Lees* referred to Adelaide as "the world's murder capital". The documentary was about British woman Joanne Lees, who was the girlfriend of disappeared (and presumed murdered) British backpacker Peter Falconio. Lees was a key witness in the prosecution of Bradley John Murdoch for the murder of Falconio. The documentary made this comment in passing about Adelaide.²⁵ The comment stirred outrage from Adelaide's politicians and public figures, and added the most recent layer to Adelaide's other imaginary. The Adelaide City Council and the

²¹ Ibid., p. 14

²² Ibid., p. 15

²³ Colin Horne, "The Arts", in *The Dunstan Decade: Social Democracy at the State Level*, ed. by Andrew Parkin and Allan Patience, (Sydney: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p. 211

²⁴ Ibid., p. 212

²⁵ "The Public Trial of Joanne Lees", *The Sun-Herald*, July 14 2002, p. 21 and Ben Knight, *Adelaide: "Worlds Murder Capital"*, 2002, ABC National/Local radio, 30 July 2002, Available: <<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/stories/s635701.htm>>, [accessed April 24 2006].

State government condemned the comment,²⁶ with Independent Member of State Parliament Nick Xenophon requesting a retraction:

This is something that has to be rectified in the world media. This is something that if we don't rectify and correct the record, it will affect our tourism industry, and that's why it's important that we deal with this, and in the next 48 hours stop the reference to Adelaide being broadcast again on the Channel 4 Network.²⁷

The comment was later retracted by the BBC.²⁸ Those outraged by the comment were justified. Adelaide's murder count per capita is well below the highest in the world; statistics show Adelaide's murder rate as 1.9 per 100,000 people. This is significantly underneath other cities such as Washington DC (50.2 per 100,000), Pretoria (27.47 per 100,000) Moscow (18.2 per 100,000) and London (2.36 per 100,000).²⁹ The statement, however, was somehow 'affirming' of a legacy that South Australians feel they know well. Aside from the potential impact on tourism or public image, the false comment triggered a 'raw nerve', revealing the potency of this imaginary.

Discussion of this imaginary often revolves around an infamous comment made by Salman Rushdie during Writers' Week at the Adelaide Festival in 1984. Rushdie referred to Adelaide as "the perfect setting for a horror film".³⁰ This singular phrase perhaps coined the identity of the imaginary. Rushdie's speech is quoted in an article for *The Advertiser* in which he describes his experiences of place:

[When I was there I was] afflicted by odd feelings of disorientation. I felt as though something were blurring my vision or preventing me from focusing my eyes properly [...] Then you notice the brothels and the winos. And one night a trail of blood along the pavement. Shoe prints in blood staggering along, ending up in a dark doorway. Another clue. And a couple of days later I heard about the vanishing youngsters. Sixteen-year-old girls and boys, disappearing into thin air. The police do nothing,

²⁶ Knight, *Adelaide: "Worlds Murder Capital"*

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Channel 4 Sorry for Adelaide 'Slur'*, 2002, BBC News, Available:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/2166789.stm>, [accessed April 24 2006].

²⁹ Gordon Barclay and Cynthia Tavares, "International Comparisons of Criminal Justice Statistics 2000", 02.05 (2002) Available: <<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb502.pdf>> [accessed 18 July 2008] and "Sorry: TV station apologises for murder capital slur", *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 1 2002,

Available: <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/08/01/1028157807780.html>>, [accessed 19 July 2008]

³⁰ Hanrahan, "Weird Adelaide", p. 6

shrug: teenagers are always leaving home. But they never turn up. I am told parents of these dematerialised children have formed their own search organisations. Adelaide seems more eerie by the minute.

Later in the evening a beautiful woman starts telling me about the weirdo murders. 'Adelaide's famous for them' she says, excitedly. 'Gay pair slay young girls. Parents axe children and inter them under lawn. Stuff like that. You know.' Now I begin to understand. Adelaide is the ideal setting for a Stephen King novel, or horror film. You know why those films and books are always set in sleepy, conservative towns? Because sleepy conservative towns are where those things happen. Exorcisms, omens, shinings, poltergeists, Adelaide is Amityville, or Salem, and things here go bump in the night.³¹

Rushdie's statement strongly refers to fictional genres, his position as a writer of fiction in one of the world's largest literary festival being a clear context for him deploying such a mode. His description alludes to the conventions of the thriller and horror genres, piecing together traces and clues, following the trail of an unwitnessed crime. He also evokes cinematic and literary references to the horror genre, beginning with Stephen King, one of the most prolific twentieth century novelists in this genre. His reference to Amityville conjures both the real events of the mass murder of the DeFeo family that occurred in 1974 in a suburban area of Long Island, New York, and *The Amityville Horror*, the best-selling book inspired by those events by Jay Anson written in 1977, with film adaptations in 1979 and 2005. Salem, the setting of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* which is based on the puritan witch hunt hysteria in 1692, offers us an image of a repressive society and an notion of its 'underbelly', an idea which I will explore in more detail later. Interestingly, Rushdie's statement is normally paraphrased as "perfect setting for a horror movie",³² rather than what he actually said: "Adelaide is the ideal setting for a Stephen King novel, or horror film."³³ This slippage of factual accuracy into a more convenient, dramatic phrase is in keeping with the genre he describes.

Rushdie's statement has fused much discourse about the thriller and horror genres to this imaginary. An example of this can be seen in an article about Adelaide in the *Gold Coast*

³¹ Patricia Morgan, "The Enigma of Adelaide — Australia's 'Amityville'", *The Advertiser*, 15 October 1984, p. 1

³² Hanrahan, "Weird Adelaide" and Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*.

³³ Morgan, 'The Enigma of Adelaide — Australia's 'Amityville'', p. 1

Bulletin, an outsider's recounting of the imaginary, triggered by the shooting of mental health services director Dr Margaret Tobin:

Agatha Christie would have loved Adelaide. The genteel city of churches, with its fine heritage buildings, ordered streets and manicured parks, also happens to be a city of intrigue...about murder [...] The characteristics of the crimes — multiple deaths, homosexuality, torture, weird cults and a series of abductions and murders — would have provided fertile ground for murder-mystery writer Christie.³⁴

The image of Adelaide is viewed through the lens of the thriller genre, encouraging the reader to engage with information about the city through the narrative and evoking visual imagery akin to the aesthetic of an Angela Lansbury tele-drama.³⁵

I now want to explore the features inside this 'setting for a horror film' and how it generates a dramatic quality or tension through the trope of 'veneer' and 'underbelly'. I also want to examine its relation to the factual and the speculative, and how the two are elided. Finally I will consider how it positions and associates homosexuality with deviance.

Central to this imaginary is the juxtaposition of Adelaide's 'surface' or 'veneer' with the horrors of its violent 'underbelly'. The notion of the 'veneer' draws on Adelaide's smallness, aesthetic order and beauty, and repressive religious ideology. Barbara Hanrahan describes the dynamics of this 'veneer':

The city is so clean, so pretty, and so much — despite the cranes of the skyline — the big country town it takes pride in being, that it seems, paradoxically, to suit the more kinky varieties of evil. Even in the daytime the streets of classy North Adelaide and Unley Park can be tunnels, enclosed by green leaves. And so quiet, so secretive: all the people shut away behind their high walls. And the Torrens, with its

³⁴ "Bible Belt with Satanic Streak: Altar Ego for City of Churches", *Gold Coast Bulletin*, 19 October 2002, p. 36

³⁵ Agatha Christie is one of the world's best known mystery writers, publishing over eighty novels and plays. Angela Lansbury played the role of Agatha Christie's sleuth Miss Marple in the film *The Mirror Crack'd* (1980), and played a similar role of a murder investigator in the television series *Murder, She Wrote* (1984-1996), who investigated real life crime that inspired her fiction.

levelled and lawn-planted banks and picture post-card University Bridge, has had a sinister flavour for years.³⁶

In his comment at Writers' Week, Rushdie identifies this binary as what makes it the effective setting for the horror movie: the sleepy conservatism provides the ideal dramatic counterpoint to the violent crime. The overtly chaotic or violent place lacks the appeal that Stephen King and Agatha Christie are supposedly seeking as their settings. This trope is often evident in David Lynch's screen works where American suburbia and small town life covers and represses sexual perversion and violence. In *Blue Velvet*, an erotic thriller film, the main character discovers a severed human ear in the front yard of an American suburban house, and as he investigates this trace he discovers an 'underbelly' in his local town. *Twin Peaks*, the television series created by Lynch and Mark Frost, is set in a Northeast American town, where the murder of a young schoolgirl Laura Palmer is investigated. The series explored a similar trope of a veneer of small town respectability covering a perverse underworld.³⁷ Lynch describes this trace of veneer and underbelly as something that he sensed at a young age:

I learned that just beneath the surface there's another world, and still different worlds if you dig deeper. I knew it as a kid, but I couldn't find the proof. It was just a kind of feeling. There is goodness in blue skies and flowers, but another force — a wild pain and decay — also accompanies everything.³⁸

This sense that there is a dark, threatening, disturbing underbelly world beneath the veneer of pleasant exterior is something that Lynch has pursued in his work. The trope of the veneer and the underbelly is a central to this imaginary of Adelaide. This trope has directly applied to discussions of Adelaide's character as a city. In 2003, more public controversy was triggered when Adelaide University law lecturer Dr Allan Perry claimed that Adelaide's veneer was in part responsible for generating its violent perverse crimes:

Dr Perry said Adelaide's size and conservatism partly explained its history of unusual, violent crime. In larger cities, such as Sydney and New York, bizarre psychologies could be more easily tolerated and found

³⁶ The event inferred by Hanrahan at the University Bridge over Adelaide's river, the Torrens, is the drowning of Doctor George Duncan who was thrown into the water by vice-squad police officers for being at a 'homosexual haunt' in the area. See Hanrahan, "Weird Adelaide", p. 7

³⁷ *Blue Velvet*. Dir. David Lynch. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group. 1986 and *Twin Peaks*. Dir. David Lynch and others. American Broadcasting Company. 1990

³⁸ *Lynch on Lynch*, ed. by Chris Rodley, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 8

more outlets for expression. “Where there is no tolerance for that kind of individuality in a close-knit, conservative community, the internal pressures tend to mount up,” he said. “Once in a while they explode into the kind of bizarre serial killings that SA has (experienced). [...] If you look at South Australia’s history there does not seem to be any doubt it has more than its fair share of bizarre murders,” [...] Dr Perry said conditions in Adelaide were proving “just that little bit more conducive” to bizarre crimes.³⁹

Perry was interviewed on South Australia’s version of ABC Television’s *Stateline* program and was hotly contested on his claims that Adelaide as a place was responsible for its perverse citizens.

EMMETT Alan Perry, do you think Adelaide is an evil city?

PERRY No, not only don’t I think that, but clearly that is not ever what I said. I think that Adelaide has experienced some very evil crimes, and those evil crimes need to be carefully analysed to see what lessons we can learn, what it can disclose about the people and the culture of Adelaide, so that we can maximise the likelihood of things like this not happening in the future.

EMMETT Well, what lessons do you think we might learn from this?

PERRY I think that the lessons to me that seem to come out most clearly from the bodies in the barrels murders is that there does exist a subculture of violence and deviance which is a product of the social deprivation that has existed in these urban areas for a very long period of time and it’s probably gotten worse in recent years.⁴⁰

Nick Xenophon also requested for Perry’s comments to be retracted,⁴¹ and public furore and criticism was levelled at Perry with statistics showing Adelaide had a normal to below average number of murders per capita in comparison with other cities. David Ben-

³⁹ Penelope Debelle, “City Traits Linked to Crimes”, *The Age*, 10 September 2003, p. 2

⁴⁰ *Debates Over the Cause of the Snowtown Murders*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 14 September 2003, <http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/sa/content/2003/s945070.htm> [accessed 28 April 2006]

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Tovim, Professor of Psychiatry at Flinders University, countered this argument believing that these kinds of murders cannot be linked to any wider social problem.⁴²

Both Perry and Rushdie have engaged with a connection between Adelaide's features as a small, provincial, conservative place and its deviant crimes. Both tropes have defined the features of this imaginary and, importantly, both are generated from fragments of factual information combined with the notions of 'veneer' and 'underbelly' similar to those in the thrillers of David Lynch.

The elision between the factual and the speculative is another key trope of this imaginary. In 2004 English playwright Joe Penhall wrote an article in *The Guardian* about Adelaide and serial killings. Penhall, who lived in Adelaide from 1976-1977, referred to Rushdie's comment:

When Salman Rushdie visited Adelaide for the arts festival, he memorably described it as 'a perfect setting for a Stephen King novel or a horror film'. He didn't know how right he was.⁴³

Despite Penhall's experience of living in Adelaide, and his friendship with a neighbour who was one of the victims of the Truro murders, the imaginary no longer distinguishes fact from fiction. Penhall describes Von Einem's role in Adelaide's history. I have italicised where Penhall's account slips into the mythological:

Bevan Spencer von Einem, a middle-aged accountant who lived with his mother, was convicted of the killings — allegedly also admitting involvement in the disappearance of the Beaumont children and Kirsty Gordon and Joanne Radcliffe. *He had used surgical instruments to examine and mutilate the private parts of his teenaged victims before slicing the bodies into pieces. He would never give up his accomplices.*⁴⁴

The urban mythology in Penhall's account is assumed to be fact. The mythology of Von Einem as an *über* serial killer encompassing the Beaumont children and Gordon and Radcliffe derives from an unsubstantiated claim by the witness Mr 'B' during the Von Einem case. According to Mr 'B', Von Einem had said that he had done some 'amazing

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Joe Penhall, "Riddles of the Sand", *The Guardian*, 21 April 2004, Available: <<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/guesteditors/story/0,,1198313,00.html>>, [accessed 19 July 2008]

⁴⁴ Ibid. Emphasis added.

surgery' on the Beaumont Children and 'connected them'.⁴⁵ Only hearsay and speculation links Von Einem to these cases, not any empirical evidence or prosecution. Penhall assembles these various rumours and speculation as concrete fact.

Penhall also engages with the imaginary's other most significant elision between notions of deviance and homosexuality. Penhall suggests that sexual transgression drives the perpetrators:

His best friend, 40-something James William Miller, mourned his friend's loss, then confessed, claiming he had helped because he was having sex with Worrell and lived in fear of the affair coming to an end [...] [And referring to "Snowtown"] the victims were mostly local misfits and drifters; one was a man who had become a woman and changed his name to Vanessa. The motive seemed to be benefit fraud, but the killers had a particular loathing for homosexuals and paedophiles, the prosecution pointed out helpfully.⁴⁶

Penhall's description interweaves homosexuality as part of the killer's deviance. There is a notion in the thriller genre that sexual perversion is the source of other deviant acts.⁴⁷ Many narratives in the genre position a killer's sexual transgression as the cause of their homicidal tendencies; Hitchcock's *Psycho* is a classic example.⁴⁸ In this way, we can understand this imaginary of Adelaide relating to the notion of repression in psychoanalysis. The 'visible' environment in Adelaide functions as a repressive agency; its small, conservative and puritanical qualities generate a (sexual) repression in its citizens. It represses a range of deviant activities, rather than allowing them to have any conscious expression. The underbelly is bred through this repression and the murders created by it follow Freud's notion of the return of the repressed.⁴⁹ A psychoanalytic discourse presents sexual repression, and subsequently sexual deviance, as the main process to explain the workings of the imaginary.

⁴⁵ Peter Haynes, "Von Einem 'killed 10'", *The Advertiser*, 17 March 1990, pp. 1, 12-13.

⁴⁶ Penhall, 'Riddles of the Sand'.

⁴⁷ K.E. Sullivan, "Ed Gein and the Figure of the Transgendered Serial Killer", *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* (2000), pp. 38-47

⁴⁸ *Psycho*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures. 1960. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, killer Norman Bates' practice of cross dressing as his dead mother is linked to his deviancy.

⁴⁹ *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Gay, pp. 568-572 and Dino Felluga, *Modules on Freud: On Repression*, November 28, 2003, Purdue University, Available: <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/freud3.html>>, [accessed May 8 2006].

Journalist Mark Ellis makes a significant observation about the role of sexuality in this imaginary. He offers a starting point for a more in-depth analysis into the nature of this imaginary.

Parents always subconsciously fear for their young daughters when they leave the house, but in Adelaide parents feared for their strapping young sons in the same way.⁵⁰

When a young man is a victim of a sexual crime, the patriarchal order of our culture is transgressed. As Ellis indicates, there is an implicit heterosexual motive in our cultural assumption that the young woman is the victim of the male perpetrator. The violation of the patriarchal order that occurs when a young man is the victim of a sexual crime makes homosexuality and paedophilia the implied force driving the perpetrators.

The imaginary invites an association of homosexuality with the deviant activity; it asks us to imagine a sexual transgression of which the deviant acts are a side effect. The 'underbelly' in this discourse requires a sexually transgressive motive, a dark place where perversion is left to fester. This underbelly takes on these features in the local mythology of 'The Family', which sits at the centre of *The Rope Project* and is interrogated and unpacked in its dossier.

⁵⁰ Mark Ellis, "Lock up your sons in the world's murder capital", *The Age*, 14 August 2002, p. 13

DOSSIER:

THE
ROPE
project
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Laboratory Concept

From my investigations into my lived and imagined experiences of place, I wanted to create a performance laboratory that would explore an aspect of Adelaide's imaginary. I set up a laboratory to experiment and develop a performance, called *The Rope Project*, that would interrogate the myth of Adelaide's so-called 'Family', which I view as a product of the two competing imaginaries of Adelaide. The laboratory consisted of dramaturgical experiments into the representation and reception of content relating to 'The Family', and performance experiments contained within a black box studio space with a prototype set, video technology and a group of performers.

This dossier is a collection of materials from the laboratory, including writing about the mythology of 'The Family', dramaturgical documents, photographs from source material and from the laboratory experiments, and transcripts of text and dialogue generated as part of the experiments. The dossier reflects fragments of what was generated in the laboratory, a series of experiments into the theatricality of representing 'The Family' and its associated imaginary.

The Mythology of 'The Family'

KIPLING	They live together, work together, play together, plot together.
BYRNE	Do you hope the pressure will break them?
KIPLING	If we keep pressure up at the right time, and the right place and the right areas, sure, that helps to break up the happy family doesn't it.
BYRNE	Do you think of it as a happy family?
KIPLING	Well they are at the moment. ¹

An interview with Detective-Sergeant Trevor Kipling on *60 Minutes* on 25 September 1988 was the trigger for coining the term 'The Family'. This was the name which came to be used by the media and in local rumour to retrospectively identify an imaginary group of killers, and to create a series out of the murders of five young men: Alan Barnes, Neil Muir, Peter Stogneff, Mark Langley and Richard Kelvin.

The origins of 'The Family' mythology are scarce. It has grown out of fragments of discussion in the media, and associated public speculation and rumour about the existence of the group and its activities.² Kenton Penley Miller, a founding member of Gay Community Action group in Adelaide, tracked the history of the 'The Family' in the media and entered into the public discourse of 'The Family' in an effort to 'kill' it.³ The document *Does 'The*

¹ *Thrill Killings*. Nine Network Australia Pty Ltd. 25 September 1988.

² Kenton Penley Miller, "Did We Manage To Kill 'The Family'? The Media Whirlwind That Was", in *Australia's Homosexual Histories: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives V*, ed. by David L. Phillips and Graham Willett, (Sydney: Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, 2000), pp. 99-112

³ *Ibid.*, p. 99

Family' Exist? concisely summarises the alleged 'Family':

Versions vary according to who you talk to, but a popular account is that The Family is a nine-member gang of highly placed homosexuals responsible for the abduction and rape of around 200 young men, and the deaths of at least 5 others. It is said that they have been meeting since 1960 in order to plan and carry out these acts. It is also believed that the police know who they are (prominent doctors, lawyers and hairdressers) but don't have enough on them to put them away.⁴

The group is also rumoured to have made underground snuff movies of their killings.⁵ Bevan Spencer Von Einem, who was convicted for the murder of Richard Kelvin, is alleged to be a member of this group. The 'serialising' of the five 'Family' murders has occurred through a process of interpretation and speculation, rather than confirmed evidence.⁶ Plotting the growth of the myth reveals how the vacuum of information about the particular killings enables interpretation, speculation and rumour.

Prior to the *60 Minutes* story, early media reports about the victims which connected their killings to homosexuality were based on speculation. In July 1983, following the discovery of Richard Kelvin's body, *The News* ran the headline 'Homosexual Gang Could be Killer of Four'.⁷ In the following year Miller quotes the police referring to this "gang" as a "warped sub-culture within the homosexual fraternity."⁸ The notion of the "gang" most likely originated from the police's theory that in order for Kelvin to have been abducted, more than one person must have been involved. Later support for this abduction theory was the prosecution's virulent defence of Kelvin's heterosexuality in Von Einem's trial in 1984, implying that Kelvin never would have approached or entered the vehicle by himself.⁹

In January 1987, the State Coroner began an inquiry into the death of Mark Langley. Police believed that they had enough evidence to link Von Einem to the murders of Langley and Alan Barnes. Von Einem was charged with the murders, but the evidence was too weak to allow either case to proceed.¹⁰ In June 1987, a television reporter conducted an unsolicited interview with a local magistrate, who was in hospital for bowel cancer. The reporter asked if he was part of the homosexual gang, and if he was in hospital for AIDS. While answering no to both questions, the story was still broadcast on Channel 7 under the notion that he denied being in the gang.¹¹ A police investigation later cleared the magistrate.¹²

⁴ Kenton Penley Miller, and others, "Does 'The Family' Exist?" (Gay Community Action).

⁵ Bob O'Brien, *Young Blood: The story of The Family Murders* (Sydney: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002), p. 93

⁶ Charges against Von Einem, based on similar fact evidence from other cases, were unsuccessful based on lack of evidence. See Miller, "Did We Manage To Kill 'The Family'? The Media Whirlwind That Was", p. 105

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101

⁹ O'Brien, *Young Blood: The story of The Family Murders*, p. 207

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239

¹¹ Miller, "Did We Manage To Kill 'The Family'? The Media Whirlwind That Was", p. 103

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 103

The *60 Minutes* story in September 1988 was the defining moment for ‘The Family’, when Kipling was able to publicly present his theory of the homosexual gang. Kipling offered a number of his speculations as fact: that the gang had at least nine members, that it had regularly abducted, drugged and raped young men for over ten years, and that ‘there was no doubt’ that all five murders were connected.¹³ Kipling’s discussions on *60 Minutes* were not based on established fact. Kipling’s appearance on *60 Minutes* generated controversy inside the police department about his theory being delivered to the public.¹⁴

Following an episode of *Australia’s Most Wanted*, Miller recounts the press describing ‘The Family’ as “a ‘vicious homosexual gang’ comprising ‘several highly placed and eminent South Australians who regularly abducted and raped young men.’”¹⁵ The *Sunday Mail* ran a story entitled “The Family Killings: My Husband Hired the Boys”. In the article Ms Mary Gambardella claimed that her former husband Gino Gambardella, who had been charged but acquitted of being an accessory to murder, “had procured boys for other homosexuals and socialised regularly with members of the ‘torture-gang’.”¹⁶ Throughout the 1990s, ‘The Family’ was occasionally revived as a news story, often triggered by other connections to the myth, such as the Snowtown Murders, the release of O’Brien’s book, as well as infrequent articles relating to Von Einem in prison.¹⁷

Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope*

At the same time as I was investigating the myth of ‘The Family’, I also became interested in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1948 film *Rope*. Hitchcock’s *Rope* tells the story of two young homosexual socialites, Brandon Shaw and Phillip Morgan, who choke the life out of an associate, David Kentley, as an intellectual challenge to commit the perfect murder. Inspired by the teachings of Nietzsche taught by schoolmaster Rupert Cadell, Brandon and Phillip supposedly set out to test in action a new morality based on intellectual superiority to decide who has the right to live or die. They place Kentley’s body in a chest in the living room of their apartment and host a party, serving food from on top of this temporary ‘coffin’ to its guests. The invited guests include people connected to his heterosexual family unit (his father, girlfriend, aunt) as well as Brandon’s and Phillip’s mentor Rupert Cadell. After discovering the horrific act, Cadell refuses to be drawn on his own culpability in the murder of David Kentley. He condemns the two young men as being intrinsically evil and different from him, reaffirming the moral and sexual codes of dominant society.

As I was developing my interest in ‘The Family’, I realised that my interest in Hitchcock’s *Rope* was part of the same fascination. Many of the anxieties and interests that animate

¹³ Miller, “Did We Manage To Kill ‘The Family’? The Media Whirlwind That Was”, p. 104

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103

¹⁶ Peter Haran, “The Family Killings: ‘My Husband Hired the Boys’”, *The Sunday Mail*, 13 August 1989, p. 2

¹⁷ Miller, “Did We Manage To Kill ‘The Family’? The Media Whirlwind That Was”, p. 111

Hitchcock's *Rope* are also evident in 'The Family' – such as relations between homosexuality and criminality, sexual deviancy and moral transgression, covert motives and social conventions, intellectual arrogance and narrow-minded suspicions. From my experience with the Wooster Group, I was interested in the possibility of taking an iconic 'text' such as *Rope* and using its constituent elements as a conduit through which to explore my interest in 'The Family'. I wanted to draw upon approaches such as the Wooster Group's to allow diverse material to be laterally juxtaposed, connected through thematic or formal associations.

The form of Hitchcock's *Rope* also interested to me: it was an experimental film shot to appear that it was filmed in one take. In actuality, it consisted of eight shots each filmed on ten-minute reels of film, the maximum length at the time.¹⁸ The process of making the film required extensive rehearsal of a massive machinery of moving walls, props and furniture, all orchestrated to create a seamless representation of reality. Hitchcock describes how this worked:

We used a dolly and we mapped out our course through tiny numbers all over the floor [...] When we went from one room into another, the wall of the hallway or of the living room would swing back on silent rails. And the furniture was mounted on rollers so we could push it aside as the camera passed. It was an amazing thing to see a shot taken.¹⁹

This film, which on one hand appears as a seamless reality (when viewed through the lens of the camera) but on the other is a highly orchestrated construction (when viewed in the sound stage), resonated with the accumulation of 'The Family' mythology that comes to be perceived as real. Hitchcock's version was an adaptation of Patrick Hamilton's play of the same name, which was written in 1929.²⁰ Hitchcock's approach to *Rope* as an experiment was also informed by its theatrical origins:

The stage drama was played out in the actual time of the story; the action is continuous from the moment the curtain goes up until it comes down again. I asked myself whether it was technically possible to film it in the same way. The only way to achieve that, I found, would be to handle the shooting in the same continuous action, with no break in the telling of the story that begins at seven-thirty and ends at nine-fifteen. And I got this crazy idea to do it in a single take.²¹

Hitchcock's film was dealing in its form with the tension between theatre and film, using aspects of theatre (its containment in time and space) to shift approaches to creating film. I was interested in reversing Hitchcock's experiment, translating his cinematic devices back

¹⁸ François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, Revised edn (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 180

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 183

²⁰ Patrick Hamilton, *Rope* (London: Samuel French, 1929).

²¹ Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 179

into performance. This was explored within the laboratory, particularly in the design that employed moving walls and projections that revealed the construction of 'The Family's' representation.

I feel Hitchcock's *Rope* deeply reverberates with the ideas and discourses that are present in the mythology of 'The Family'. I perceive a number of key linkages between 'The Family' and Hitchcock's *Rope*. *Rope* deals with two kinds of families. Brandon and Phillip set up a situation where they invite (and dismantle) the heterosexual family unit connected to David Kentley. The heterosexual family unit is the target of Brandon and Phillip's challenge. The absence of David's attendance creates anxiety and panic for the family while Brandon and Phillip take pleasure in the hidden body of David.

There is also a homosexual family of sorts: Brandon and Phillip are a couple, and Rupert Cadell functions as something akin to a father figure within this family structure. The victims of 'The Family', and of Brandon and Phillip, are the young males of the heterosexual family; their murders are perpetrated by another kind of 'family', deviant and perverse. The explicit discourse on Nietzsche's 'perverse' morality in *Rope* runs parallel with the sexuality of Brandon and Phillip which is displaced and encoded by Hitchcock. The displaced homosexuality is linked to the deviant act of the murder. The audience is encouraged to identify with and then later condemn Brandon and Phillip. At the beginning we follow their anxiety about being caught, then we are encouraged to identify with Cadell, who condemns them as being perverse. Cadell's condemnation of Brandon and Phillip's 'morality' is also a condemnation of their homosexuality.²²

Like 'The Family', Hitchcock's *Rope* is driven by what we are not shown and what we are encouraged to think. There are major gaps created around Brandon and Phillip, their relationship, and their relationship to Rupert, that encourage us to speculate on their sexuality. Absence of fact stimulates both the growth of the myth of 'The Family' and the reading of Hitchcock's film. Both are filled with speculations that invite connections between homosexuality and deviance.

²² D.A. Miller, "Anal Rope", *Representations*, No. 32, Autumn (1990), pp. 114-133

Encountering Audiences

In 2003, after a period of time researching the myth of ‘The Family’, and the murders associated with this myth in Adelaide’s history, I conducted a ‘theatrical seminar’ at the Adelaide Festival Centre in 2003 which provided a forum to discuss and examine the ideas behind *The Rope Project* with an audience.²³ I discovered this material elicited a spectrum of emotional responses, all of them potent. Some audience members felt that that ‘The Family’ and its connections to Adelaide’s history was taboo and should not to be a subject of a performance, that it was too connected to the trauma of the past. Some people expressed their morbid lure to the material as part of the perceived ‘underbelly’ of the city. Others were more conscious that Adelaide’s mythology as a murder capital provided the city with a level of ‘cred’; that it provided something distinctive, macabre and magnetic; that Adelaide wasn’t just a boring large country town.

There was a direct emotional connection for the audience to this material through their lived and imagined experiences of place. Part of my objective in this project was to bring these underlying workings of the imaginary of place into consciousness. It became clear that there was a sensitivity and volatility associated with this material that I would need to engage with in my experiments. There would be a particular dynamic in dealing with these aspects of Adelaide for an Adelaide audience that I would need to consider and navigate. If I made this same work in Sydney or Melbourne, this volatility would not be present – it was directly connected to an audience and their psychic and lived connections to place. Part of the strength of *The Rope Project* was its direct connection to its audience, and that the experiments would engage the audience in looking at a theatrically animated version of the imaginary of its own place.

²³ The theatrical seminar was held at the Space Theatre on 8 February 2003 in association with Brink Productions and the Adelaide Festival Centre’s iNSPACE program.

Experiential Timeline

Due to the sensitive and volatile nature of the material for the audience, the first experiment I undertook was to address how I would structure the audience's experience through this problematic material. I wanted to acknowledge the spectrum of reasons people would be attracted to come to the theatre to see a work about 'The Family', from a therapeutic desire to a salacious one.

I also wished to consider the ethical implications of dealing with a myth which is inextricably tied to a very traumatic reality for a community – the deaths of five young men. Although tied to these deaths, the work that I wanted to make was about an audience's relationship to a myth and their imaginary of place, not a cathartic drama that dealt with a community's trauma (such as *Aftershocks* or *The Laramie Project*).²⁴ As I researched the myth of 'The Family' it became clear that part of its power was its connection to these horrific traces. The bodies of the five young men are the undisputed reality within the mythic picture of 'The Family'. These traces are analogous to a 'Mr Squiggle' drawing. 'Mr Squiggle' was an Australian children's television programme, to which children would send a sheet of paper with random dots or marks which 'Mr Squiggle' would join together to create a coherent single image. The traces (dots or lines) are imaginatively connected to create an image (which is what Mr Squiggle imagines, be it a bird, shoe, apple, etc). If I were to explore 'The Family' in performance it would be inevitable that I would have to deal with this reality.

This initial experiment was a dramaturgical one. I created a document that maps what I wanted people to feel and think through the experience of the performance. I wanted to consider how the varying connections that the audience had with this material could be approached in a complex yet sensitive way.

This document has three parts. The first explores what the audience's expectations are before seeing the performance. What is the lure to see the project? How do the audience imagine that I will deal with the subject material? The second part is a dramatic arc constructed out of experiential points arranged along a timeline that represents the anticipated duration of the performance. It maps what I want the audience to feel and think throughout the performance. Here I wished to identify the kinds of experiences the audience may need in order to be able to engage with this material. The third part looks at the result of the performance, through posing the question 'what will people be saying at the bar?' I articulated what I hoped the audience would have experienced, and identified the things that I hoped they would reflect on and discuss after the performance.

²⁴ Paul Brown, *Aftershocks* (Paddington, N.S.W.: Currency Press, 1993) and Moisés Kaufman and Members of the Tectonic Theater Project, *The Laramie Project* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).

• Like the AFCT showing
 - They should be feeling
~~an~~ ~~accepted~~ distance to
 the project than the suggestion
 of its links to further gender/
 intellect, and also feel
 there is an implied, comfortable
 place that they can ~~get~~ get
 off on Adelaide's "darkness"
 * Crucial that they don't feel
 consciously like the work is
 any way 'sensationalises' the real life
 pain. They cannot think that the
 show is reckless or offensive... (?)
 There is a taboo pleasure here
 that needs to be housed unfathomably in
 - only the work is intelligent / focused...

when they see the marketing...

What the audience think before seeing the show (2006). This document examines what the audience's expectations are before viewing *The Rope Project*, looking at the task of navigating the taboo subject matter that the project in part investigates.

0
5m
10m
15m
20m
25m
30m
35m
40m

Feel LEGITIMATED in
engaging with this project

They feel that the show
will be FUN + PLEASURABLE
- a guilty pleasure?

Comforting ones fear
(laughing at parody
notions of gymnas)
- I could see heightened
paralyzed fear to
assess risk

PLEASURE + TITILLATION
from the thriller genre

needs deconstruction /
subversion

The audience is comforted
with the HORROR of the road

FEAR of physical violence
+ violation

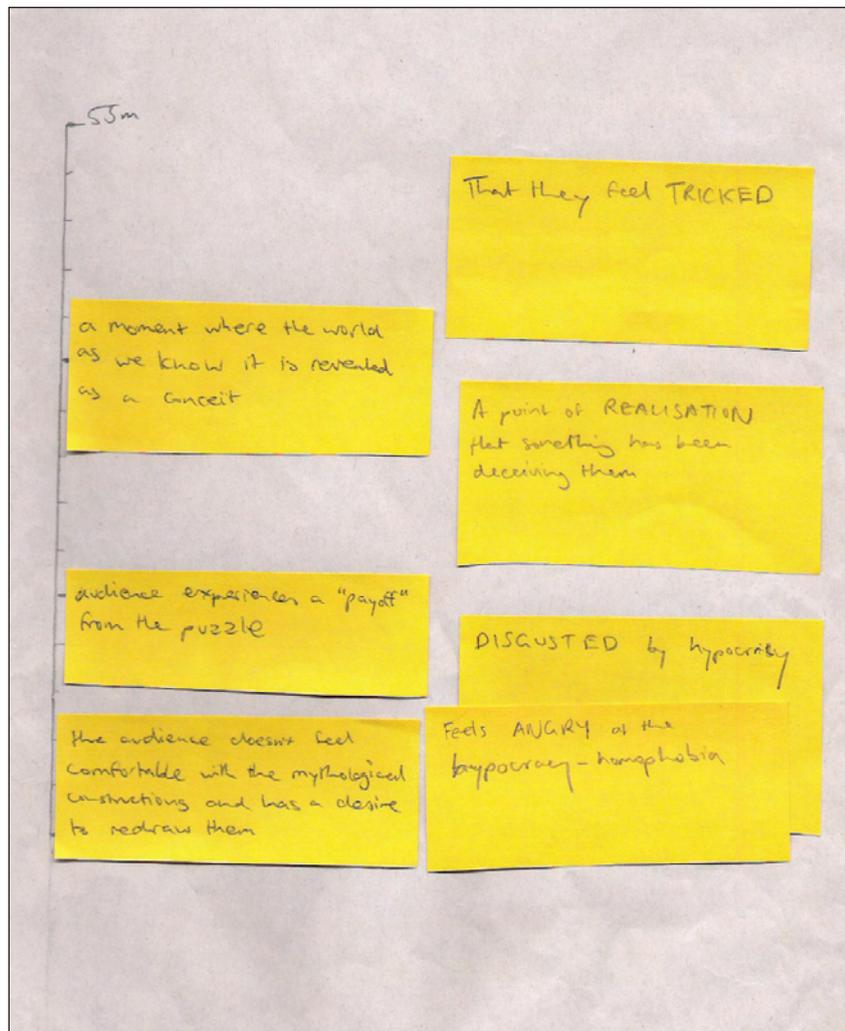
The audience feels RELIEF +
RELAXATION from the previous
tension.

PLEASURE from an
urban horror fantasy

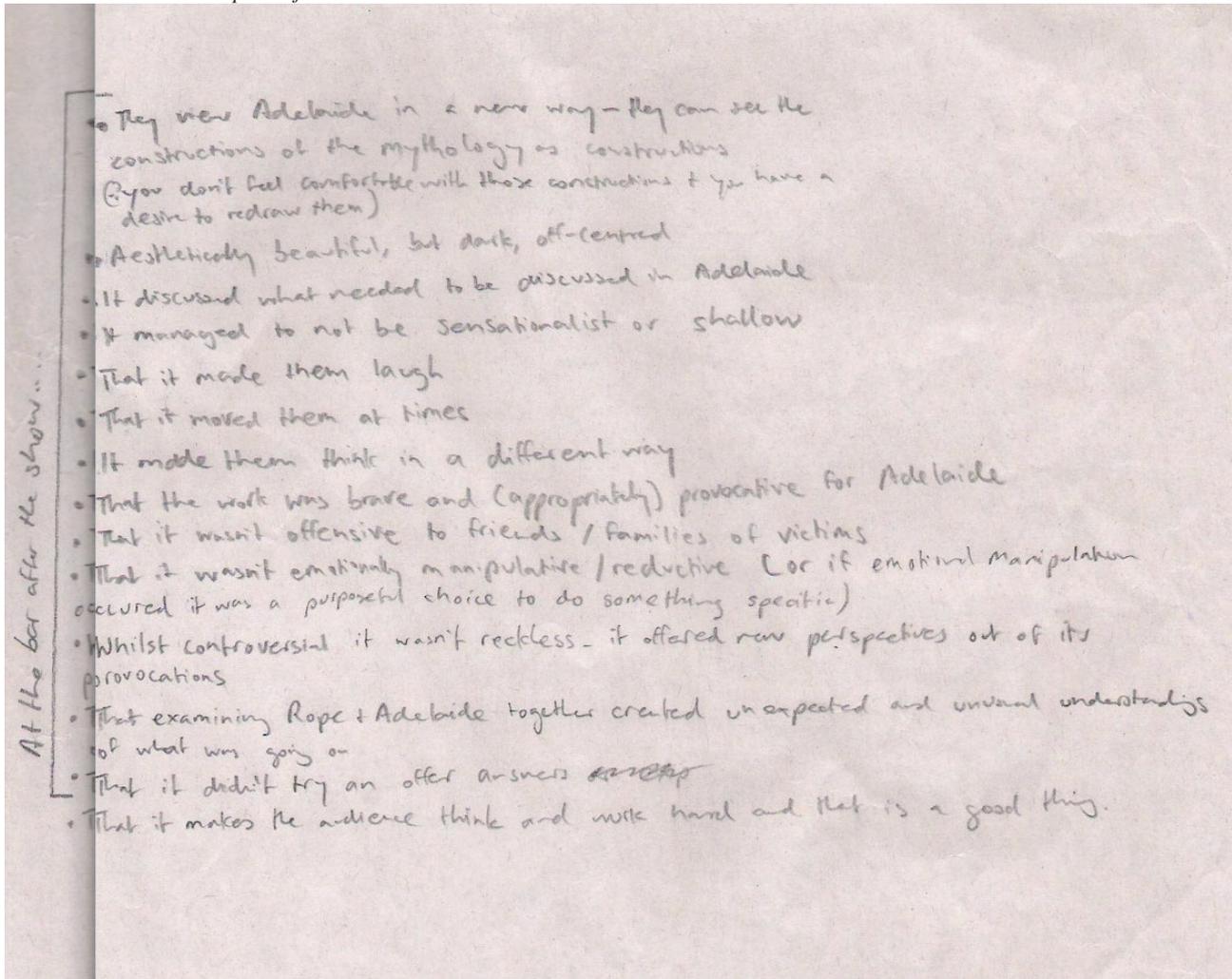
needs deconstruction /
subversion

Audience feels that the
BUBBLE HAS BURST

They feel TRICKED,
have a point of
REALISATION



What the audience experience during the performance (2006). This document maps a dramatic arc of what the audience will think and feel during the 1 hour 10 minutes of the performance. This dramaturgical task looks at the experiential shape of the performance separate from its particular content.



'At the bar after the show...' (2006) This section of the timeline looks at the result of seeing the performance for the audience, posed through a question of what would the artists like the audience discussing 'at the bar' after the performance.

Place, Space and the Visual Representation of 'The Family'

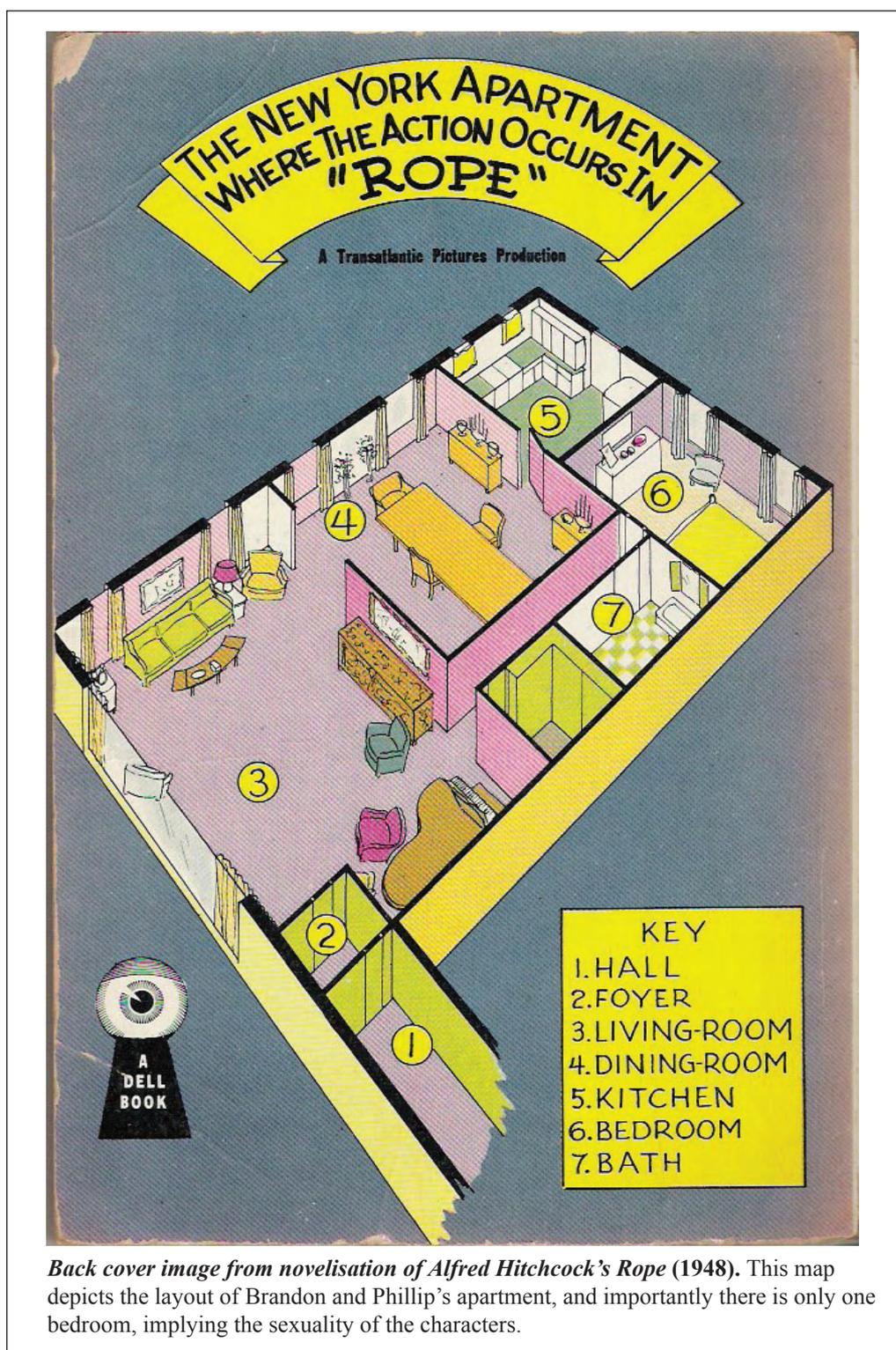
At the beginning of this thesis I described how I need to see and feel what the space is before I can create work. On this project I collaborated with designer Mary Moore, who mentored me in designing my own work when I trained at the Flinders Drama Centre. I have worked with Mary on a number of occasions and have an established process of developing the design concepts with her.

As I began work on this project I was unsure what its spatial world should be. I knew that it should be a place that was connected to 'The Family' and their myth, but what was that place? Where (in the imaginary) are 'The Family' spatially? 'The Family's' true nature is behind closed doors, hidden from the world. 'The Family' have two existences, one as the social fathers of Adelaide (where they are judges, politicians and doctors visible in our culture) and the other as perverse fathers (who execute sexually deviant acts behind closed doors). It seemed that the imaginative place of 'The Family' was within their own private place, within a house, where they could manifest their hidden deviance.

Mary and I also observed that this matched perfectly with *Rope*, in which all of the action occurs in the apartment of Brandon and Phillip. In particular, the 'deviant' behaviour (murder and homosexuality) occurs when the two men are by themselves. At the beginning of *Rope*, after the transgressive act has occurred curtains are opened, Brandon muses if only they could do it in broad daylight. Here the private place of the home is where the transgressive behaviour can have expression, and it must be 'closeted' from the exterior public place through the closed curtains. *Rope's* use of place strengthened our feelings about 'The Family' and its house.

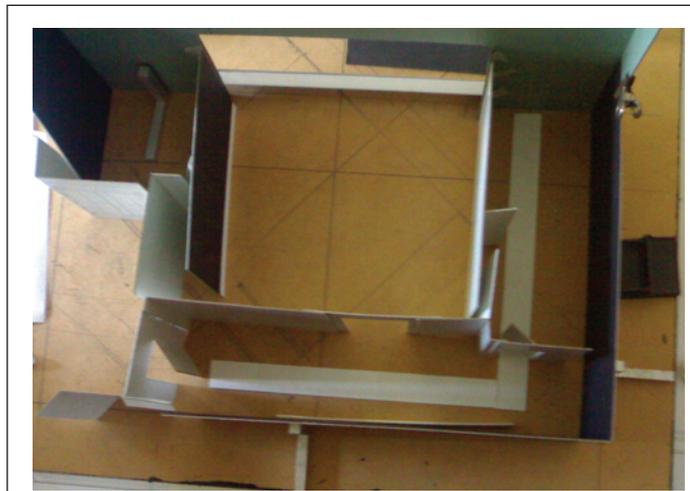
But what kind of house do 'The Family' live in, and where? We saw them imaginatively occupying a particular place in Adelaide. The house we imagined them within was a suburban villa or maisonette, late Victorian or Edwardian in style, probably built at the beginning of the twentieth century. These houses tend to have two to three bedrooms, with a small living room, kitchen, and bathroom, which have high ceilings, cornicing and wooden floorboards. We realised that imaginatively we placed this house in Adelaide's suburb Norwood, where there is much of this architecture among wide avenues with plane trees. Norwood is now an upmarket area of Adelaide, but previously was a working class area, and has more of a bohemian association than some of its other surrounding eastern suburbs which have always been upper-middle class. In the 1970s Norwood was also a place where many gay people lived, including Don Dunstan himself. I also live in a maisonette such as this, but in the western suburbs of Adelaide in a much more working class area. Later, prompted by Matthew Kneale, I reflected on how the set for the project looked like my own house, with similar colourings and sparse decoration.

From this imaginative understanding of the place of 'The Family', Mary and I made a leap in the spatial form of the project. We wanted the audience to (literally) visit the imaginative house of 'The Family'. Instead of allowing the audience to be a voyeur to the space of 'The Family', they would enter as guests, creating a disarming and more empathetic entry into the representation rather than distant objectification. The audience



would enter the theatre to find a front porch of a house, travel through the front door of the house, down a corridor and eventually enter an auditorium to view the family room. This approach to space would provide an initial promenade performance followed by an end-on seated performance. The audience would be literally entering the imaginative space of 'The Family', and entering it as a representation. Mary and I liked the concept of theatrical scenery that aspired to create a sense of reality within the representative space of a black box theatre. A prototype set of this concept was constructed and installed in the black box studio at the beginning of the laboratory process, so that experiments could be explored within this space.

Director's Monologue



The Rope Project (2006) Photo of set model box. The audience enters at the front door (bottom left) and travels through the corridor, eventually leading to the auditorium looking into the family room (above top).

Because of the very real and horrific traces that the myth and history of ‘The Family’ is connected to, I needed to consider how the performance would initially engage the audience? How could I get the audience to trust me with this material on this journey? How could they feel legitimated engaging with it?

It felt important for me as the artist to locate myself within the frame of the performance, to make explicit my connections to this material and implicate myself within the desire to create the work. I wanted to position my own homosexuality and fears within the experiment. I wanted to ‘out’ my own fears associated with place, as well as my sense of how my sexuality positioned me in relation to the myth. As a gay man in my 20s, I felt that I function as a screen for the audience to project two subject positions: the potential victim and potential perpetrator.

The audience enters the performance space to discover the front door of a house, possibly with a small front yard – this space has a veneer of reality. It is a late nineteenth century maisonette style house – classically Adelaide.

The director of the work is in this space and talks to the audience.

SAM I didn’t know any of the details of ‘The Family’ murders until I read a book called *Young Blood*. I was on a bus, travelling from Flinders to the city, and it was late afternoon, the sun was beginning to set. During this journey I learnt of many of the horrific facts of the case, where they happened, how they happened. When I arrived in the city it was now night, one of those weekends in Adelaide when the city is empty, and without even really thinking about what I was doing I hopped straight in a cab and went home, instead of waiting for my connecting bus. When I got home I realised that so irrational, but my sense of the city had changed, something about it for those few minutes was palpable somehow.

There’s no place in the city that I would hold my partner’s hand. Maybe the only place I would do that would be at the door of the Mars Bar. I wouldn’t anywhere else. I feel like there are different zones of tolerance in different cities. I think in Adelaide we have tiny bubbles of space– in front of the Mars bar, maybe in front of the Ed, but no further. Sydney has Oxford St, a whole strip of the city where there is this kind of public space. There’s no way that I would walk down Hindley or Rundle Sts holding my partners hand—no way—and I don’t just think that’s internalised homophobia. I know someone who was punched in the face at the front of the Exeter for kissing his boyfriend, and yeah the guy was drunk etc etc, but one drink can pretty quickly evaporate some tolerance.

So I thought the best way to learn more about ‘The Family’ would be to meet them – which is why I’ve brought you here...

The director knocks on the front door.



The Rope Project (2006) Photo of set model box. The audience gathers at the front door where the director speaks, and is then invited into the house by 'The Family'

Parties

The party as event had significance within the myth of 'The Family' as one of their supposed strategies of abducting victims was through offering them spiked alcohol and drugs, and seducing victims to attend a party where these would be available.²⁵ The dramaturgical device of the party also refers to Hitchcock's *Rope*, where the hosting of drinks and dinner is the social cover for Brandon and Phillip's deviant activities.

Unlike the personal experience I described in the monologue, I wanted to dispense with the anxiety and fear placed in the myth of 'The Family'. I felt that the honesty and seriousness established in the monologue allowed me to then treat the audience's introduction to the myth of 'The Family' very playfully.

I wanted to experiment with the audience entering the imaginative space of 'The Family' at the beginning of the performance, consciously entering an archetypal, representational frame. This was explored as a promenade performance where 'The Family' invited the audience into the house. The audience entered the front door of the house into a party hosted by 'The Family', where they were warmly greeted in a convivial atmosphere with music and offered drinks and canapés.

The audience physically moved throughout the place of 'The Family', so that they would feel inside their world, but also inside a representational frame that they were conscious was not reality. The audience encountered the archetypes and clichés of gay men connected to the public face of 'The Family'. The personas that the audience encountered were those

²⁵ *Thrill Killings*. Nine Network Australia Pty Ltd. 25 September 1988.

of a businessman, politician, lawyer and doctor, who recounted their travels, holidays, and anecdotes about their history together as a family.

This experiment also played with what was open or hidden within 'The Family'. For example members of 'The Family' would show a photo album, flicking quickly through a series of pages that seemingly had pornographic images amongst their holiday photos. Glimpses of what was hidden were laced into a light, comedic interaction with the audience.

Party

The door is knocked and answered by one of the four members of 'The Family' (the Judge). The door opens to reveal the hallway of the house and festive music.

The director and Judge meet properly for the first time (perhaps they've only spoken on the phone before) and talk about how the director has brought along the people he'd mentioned who wanted to meet them.

The audience is welcomed into the corridor space and we enter a promenade/installation style of performance. The audience is offered a drink by one of the family members, another is serving canapés. The audience is dispersed into small groups with whom different family members talk. The atmosphere that is created is genuinely social and jovial.

A number of things happen for various audience members in this time. There are four holiday pictures on the wall – members of the family recount stories about the holidays to various members of the audience.

There is a photo album that the Judge has of 'The Family', which he shows to some people. He shows photos of 'The Family' moving into the house, socialising together, carving a roast chicken together. While he shows the album he quickly flicks through several pages, which seem to contain explicit pornographic imagery.

Members of 'The Family' also may give the audience a tour of the house, showing them the main living room and other parts of the house.

After a period of time the Politician taps his wine glass to call for a toast, and leads the audience further along the corridor. He stands on a chair and makes a toast to the audience to thank them for coming and being willing to hear their side of the story. He extends their home as the audience's and raises a toast. 'The Family' members guide the audience further into the house to 'have a seat and relax' (leading them into the auditorium space).



Rope (1948) directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Brandon and Phillip (centre) host a party with the friends and family of their victim including his girlfriend Janet (left) and best friend Kenneth (right).



The Rope Project (2006) Video still of corridor. The audience are invited into the hallway, where they are given a drink, a canapé, and are shown pictures of The Family on the wall and in a photo album.



The Everlasting Secret Family (1988) directed by Michael Thornhill. At one of the family's parties, the young lover is coerced to have sex with a Japanese businessman, who takes a live crab to be a part of their sexual act.



The Rope Project (2006) images from photo album prop. The photo album displays important 'family' moments: getting keys to their house, a celebration with the first portrait of a son on the wall, and dissecting and eating a chicken.

In the latter part of the performance, I imagine the audience returning into the house for another party which would explore the fears that actually underpin the myth of the family. I believe the horror inversion of family in 'The Family' screens an underlying fear about same-sex couples being able to assume the role of family and parent. I imagine a reintroduction to the house that could animate this underlying fear, through introducing the audience to another kind of party, such as the christening for a child with gay parents, gay marriage, graduation of the child.

Representing the imaginary of 'The Family'

Another series of experiments explored how to represent and animate 'The Family'. 'The Family' is strongly associated with the imaginary of Adelaide as "the perfect setting for a horror film", so if the myth of 'The Family' was brought to life, would it be like a horror film?

When experimenting with the myth, I had a particular interest in both utilising and exposing its lure. I wanted to utilise the aspects of the myth that give it its potency as a horrific fantasy, but I also wanted to undermine the myth rather than reinforce it. In order to do this most of the experiments engaged with a line between horror and comedy, so that the genuinely terrifying could tip into the parodic, and back again. The experiments explored style, from surreal image-based approaches, to bizarre lip-synced song performance, to abject sexual or violent acts.

All of the experiments looked at ways of evoking violence through abstraction. I believe that, as a medium, theatre most effectively creates violence by evoking it through abstract, imaginative suggestion. In film, the portrayal of literal graphic violence is accepted by an audience due to the immersive quality of the medium. In performance, if the same literalness is employed it can have the reverse effect (i.e. the audience know the actor's stomach isn't really cut open). The liveness draws attention to the impossibility of the literal. Abstract evocations of violence were adopted, included allowing the part to stand in for whole, the object stand in for the act, and through playing with the real or immediate within the theatre.

Each experiment had shared elements. They drew upon source material or a trace connected with the myth (ranging from newspaper articles, books, a short story, a reconstruction from *60 Minutes*) and sought to amplify and subvert it in the creation process. The experiments each looked at a different member of 'The Family', each an archetype within the myth (Businessman, Politician, Judge, Doctor, etc). Each experiment also began by exploring the Family member's memory of a 'son', a young male victim, resulting in a range of different styles and strategies to representing the nature of the myth.

The process of experimentation occurred within the frame of the space, which consisted

of two walls that were able to swing inwards and outwards to compress or expand the space, or 'wipe' the space cinematically to change action and location. Within this space, experimentation involved improvisation and task-based devising with performers; a use of sound including immersive soundscapes, radio microphones and pre-recorded voice; and use of video projection on walls and floors.

In addition to the experiments with 'The Family', another representation connected to the so-called 'Snowtown' murders that we explored is also included here. In this experiment we adapted a fictionalised account of characters and events from the Snowtown murders, written by Susan Mitchell in *All Things Bright and Beautiful*.²⁶ The Snowtown murders were linked in response to 'The Family' through the perpetrator's so-called 'motive' behind the killings. The two initial killers, John Bunting and Robert Wagner, set out to kill people they believed to be paedophiles or homosexual. They described themselves as 'vigilantes' against police and others who permitted these perversions, but this 'motive' was very quickly discarded by Bunting and Wagner as they took advantage of any individual who provided opportunity to them.

²⁶ Susan Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2004).

Family introduction

The four Family members slowly walk downstage in the family room and step into the proscenium frame, one by one, forming a family-like portrait image. From here they look at and can address the audience directly. The image has a veneer of smiling pleasantness. Throughout this section this image slowly and subtly moves, the innocent body contact in the portrait takes on a sexualised motive.

THE JUDGE Hello again! This is special, isn't it? Isn't it a shame that we couldn't do it with a few more lights... how frustrating. We're such perfectionists, you see. We can never do anything unless we do it properly. If we had our way we'd all be out frolicking in the sunlight.

I suppose we fancy ourselves as being a little bit talented when it comes to organising these kinds of events. Call us greedy but we've always wished for more talents between us, especially artistic ones, you know, like painting and drama... Can't have everything, I suppose... although the power to destroy can be as satisfying as the power to create.

I really think some of our activities could be seen as possessing a kind of artistic finesse. I really hope as this evening continues that you see this is more than just a home... this is a family. Confused? That's OK. All will become clear through the wonderful art that we create.

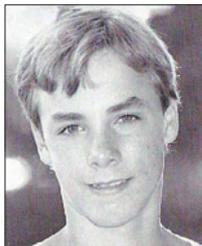
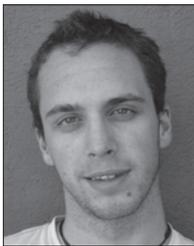
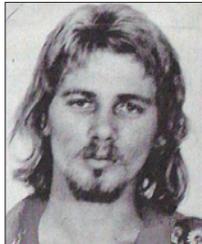
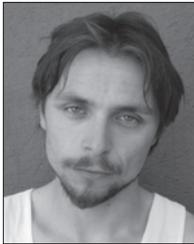
Oopsy! Here I go on rambling again!

What we really want to talk to you about is what we are most proud of. Our sons. We've got many happy memories and tonight we're going to share some of them with you.

Each of 'The Family' members steps away one by one from the portrait image, leaving the Doctor by himself in the frame. He steps off the frame into the loungeroom and sits on the lounge.



The Rope Project (2006). The Family Room (left) has photos of its cannibalised sons on the wall, a flesh coloured lounge which could double as a bed, a chest that could house the bodies of its victims. The members of 'The Family' (right) are composed in the style of a family photo within a cinemascope ratio proscenium frame.



The Rope Project (2006) Photographs from set. The four images on the left are displayed on the wall of The Family Room, replicating the media images (right) of four of the victims of the so-called 'Family' (top to bottom: Neil Muir, Richard Kelvin, Peter Stogneff, Alan Barnes.)



Rope (1948) directed by Alfred Hitchcock. The body of victim David Kentley is stored in the chest in the living room, where the main action of *Rope* occurs.

The Doctor Breathing

The Doctor is sitting facing the audience, perhaps a slight grin on his face. He inhales a breath of air – we hear it with cinematic amplified crispness (he is in fact synchronising his physical actions to a recording of his own breathing). The Doctor continues to simply sit and breath, but the breathing sound has a sexually explicit, coital quality.

As the sexual breathing intensifies, one of the four pictures on the wall is expanding in size. The picture has been projected over itself to scale, but now it is expanding and zooming in. We see the face of a young blonde-haired man. The image expands until it's a close up of his eyes covering the entire back wall.

As the sexual breathing from the Doctor intensifies, we hear a second male voice joining in. As this happens a pair of naked male legs slowly slides into the space near the back wall. The two breathing together continues, and the legs eventually retract with the voice to leave the space.



The Rope Project (2006) Video still from 'Doctor Breathing' section. A projected image of a young man slowly expands out of one of the photo frames to cover the whole wall.

60 Minutes

Two people enter the room through the alcove. It is the Politician and 'Jude' – we are not sure if this is a transvestite or a transsexual – 'she' has curly red hair, extravagant drag-like makeup and a trashy golden dress.

An off kilter jazz-like piano riff plays.

The Politician and 'Jude' approach the Doctor, and sit on either side of the lounge.

They exchange a knowing look between them.

The Doctor stands and unbuttons his white lab coat, and throws it to the ground. He begins to unbutton his suit jacket, as the Politician and 'Jude' eagerly watch. The Politician and 'Jude' approach the Doctor and start helping him to undress, removing his belt, shoes, etc.

The Doctor starts to become a bit disoriented and distressed as the Politician and 'Jude' strip him, until he is in his underwear.

He sits on the lounge, the Politician and 'Jude' glide it forward in the space, pick up his clothes, and exit watching him.

A figure walks into the space holding a silver tray with a highball glass on it. It is 'Louisa'. She has straight brown hair and drag-like makeup. She speaks, lip-syncing to her own deep voice.

As she talks, the left and right side walls of the Family Room slowly start moving, pivoting inwards – a large creaking sound is heard as the walls move in.

LOUISA You know, this is one of our museum pieces. We decided that we had to preserve it for prosperity – but it was hard to break up the set when it was such good crystal... (*Holding up the glass*) Look at this. Our precious J had his last drink from this...

As she finishes speaking the two walls have closed in making a small triangular space with the Doctor, now Joe, just on the lounge by himself. As the walls closed, they obscured 'Louisa' – he is alone.

We hear a droning bass sound, and a whispered voice, amplified and modified – it is that of 'Louisa':

LOUISA Hi, how are you?... What you been up to? ... well... um I think we should give you a lift home huh... You can come back to our house, there's a party still going on there... some girls turning up.... yeah why not... come on...

There is a sound outside of the room near the door – part creak, part scratch, part twisted rope.

Joe gets off the lounge and approaches the door.

He puts his ear against the door, listening.

He decides to open the door.

He steps out slightly, looks both ways. Nothing.

He steps back into the house. Suddenly an arm yanks him out of the room through the door, the door slams with a large amplified sound. Blackout.



“Thrill Killings”, 60 Minutes (1988). The imagined activities of ‘The Family’ are the subject of a reconstruction that moves from a pick-up on the city streets of Adelaide, into the lounge room and eventually the bedroom. The abductee escapes the next morning on to the suburban streets.



A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984), directed by Wes Craven, depicts teenagers in urban homes being abducted out of the real world into the surreal place of their dreams (and nightmares) where they are hunted by a child killer.



The Rope Project (2006) Video stills of ‘Sixty Minutes’ section. ‘Louisa’ introduces her favourite story of one of ‘The Family’s sons. The walls enclose a vulnerable young man, eventually lured by sounds beyond the door.

The Businessman

The Businessman sits on the lounge. He has a sheet of clear plastic, the leg of a baby doll and a clamp.

He stands, looking at the audience and begins to wrap the plastic around the arm wrest of the lounge.

He takes the baby foot and the clamp and clamps the foot to the arm of the lounge.

He takes out a tube of lubricant from his pocket and starts to apply it to the baby leg.

He stands and undoes his belt, lowers his pants slightly, and lowers his anus onto the tip of the foot.

He lowers himself onto the foot, going back and forth pleurably. This goes on for a bit, and builds. There is a sense that he is going further as he's doing this

There is a point where he stops for a moment, then is struggling to move, in pain. He is stuck there for a bit longer, then quietly starts whispering for help. He then starts becoming more panicked, calling out to the audience desperately for help.

Blackout.



The Rope Project (2006) Video stills of the 'Businessman' section. The Businessman sets up unsettling paraphenilia for a solo sexual act.

I Want Candy

The Judge and the Politician are sitting on the lounge. Aaron Carter's version of 'I Want Candy' begins to play. In the prelude in the song prior to the lyrics beginning, the Judge and the Politician are talking, we get the sense they are working out who should do what.

The Judge struts forward, removes his robe, now topless wearing shorts, and puts on a cap. He lip syncs to Aaron Carter's voice on the phone talking:

JUDGE Hey Justin.. hey it's Aaron.. I... I can't come out tonight... I'm going to see this girl... no, her name is Candy... She's real cute.. I gotta go... seeya..

The Politician pulls out a microphone and now lip syncs to the vocals from the song, as the Judge dances as a male backup dancer in a drag show.

The Politician sings kneeling on the lounge, removing his jacket and throwing it across the room during this verse. The Judge (as the boy) has strutted around the lounge and punctuated the Politicians' moves.

POLITICIAN I know a girl who's tough but sweet
 She's so fine, she can't be beat
 She's got everything that I desire
 Sets the summer sun on fire

I want Candy
I want Candy
I want Candy
I want Candy

The Judge bends forward near the edge of the lounge and the Politician playfully grabs his arse. The Judge breaks away and continues dancing.

Go to see her when the sun goes down
Ain't no finer girl in town
You're my girl, you walked up to order
So sweet, you make my mouth water

The Judge crawls playfully along the lounge, the Politician follows him, playfully admiring his arse. The Judge lies down on the lounge and the Politician moves in to lie on top of him – there is a barely noticed struggle as the Judge gets off the lounge and continues dancing.

I want Candy
I want Candy
I want Candy
I want Candy

They have danced around the lounge again and the Politician has lifted the Judge in a faux straddling pose

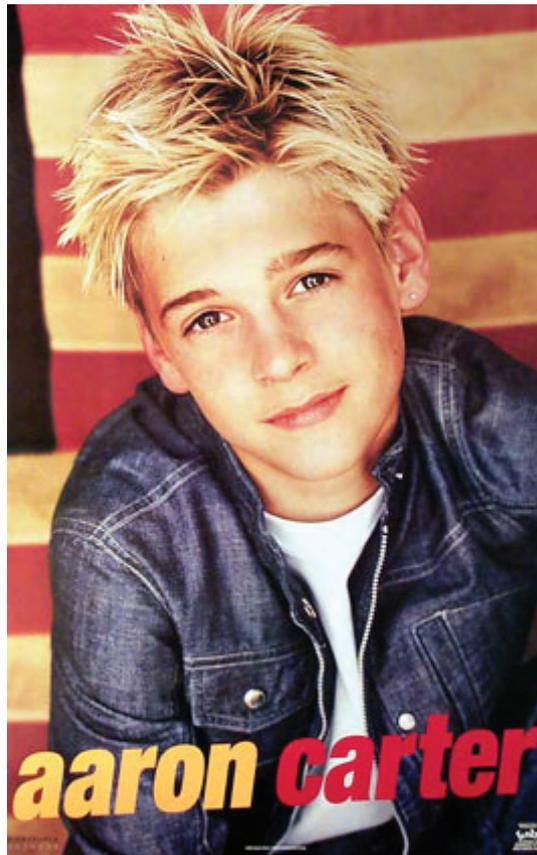


Image of Aaron Carter from CD of 'Aaron's Party (Come Get It)'. The 12-year-old pop star released a cover of 'I Want Candy' in 2000. The desiring subject of the song is gender-equivocal. Its best known version by Bow Wow Wow in 1982 is sung by a female vocalist.



The Everlasting Secret Family (1988) directed by Michael Thornhill. The Senator (Arthur Dignam) takes a beautiful young schoolboy (Mark Lee) as his lover and inducts him into the world of the everlasting secret family

Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!

The Politician throws the Judge roughly to the lounge and pins him down. Things are getting a little more out of control. The Judge responds with a faux expression of fear and gets himself off the lounge.

The lounge is moved downstage with the Politician sprawled out on it.

Candy on the beach, there's nothing better
But I like candy when it's wrapped in a sweater
Some day soon I'll make you mine
Then I'll have Candy all the time

The Judge dances around upstage, and the Politician joins him. He suddenly hits him across the face – he falls to the floor and the Politician covers his mouth and pushes him to the ground. This is a very unpleasant and very real struggle.

We snap to black and the lights come to up reveal the Judge bound and the Politician fucking his mouth with a cucumber, making him gag to the point that he nearly vomits. For real.

Blackout.

I want Candy
I want Candy
I want Candy
I want Candy



The Rope Project (2006) Video stills from 'I Want Candy' section. 'The Family' depict a seduction of a young blonde boy by a Politician, through a lip sync performance. The re-enactment eventually spirals out of control.

Organs

The Judge recovers from his cucumber gagging and comes to stand in the proscenium frame.

JUDGE Greetings and salutations... How are we all? Enjoying the little stories I hope. I'm certainly enjoying myself. So, I've got a little story that I'd like to share with you, it's my personal favourite. Now I must warn you some scenes may offend. Truly... I won't be upset if you need to turn away. But it is my favourite... I'm really quite excited. We did go a little too far with this one...

The Judge strips naked and approaches the chest, which is centre in the space. The Politician, 'Jude' and 'Rhiannon', a third transvestite, with curly hair and a feather boa surround the chest.

The Judge opens the chest and steps in.

'Jude' lifts a plastic garbage bag from inside the chest that covers his whole body, and the garbage bag is tied. 'Jude' and the Politician lift the standing body out of the chest.

Once on the Politician's shoulder the person in the bag starts moving and groaning. He eventually starts hysterically screaming in a very real way. It's somewhat bloodcurdling. 'Rhiannon' has closed the chest and the body in the bag is stretched out on the chest.

'Rhiannon' produces a large knife. The three stand around the body until it is eventually silent and no longer moving. As this happens they slowly put on plastic rubber gloves.

'Rhiannon' takes the knife and cuts open the bag. She reaches inside, searching inside the body. This takes some time. She eventually pulls out a liver. The Politician reaches in and removes a pair of lungs, and 'Jude' removes a heart.

The three slowly approach the audience downstage, holding the organs, almost shaking with pleasure.

'Jude' looks at the Politician out of the corner of her eye, and looks away again. She looks at him again, and then slowly hitches her skirt to reveal a bit of her arse.

'JUDE' (huskily) Jamie... Jamie...

Jamie looks at her

Jamie... Jamie just slap it!!

Jamie slaps 'Jude's arse with the lung. She yells with excitement and sniffs the heart she is holding each time the lung slaps her arse.

'RHIANNON' We're just going to go to black now

Blackout.



The Rope Project (2006) Video stills from Organs section. An absurd horror: 'The Family' derive sexual pleasure from being slapped with organs.

Spotlight questions

'Rhiannon' switches on a miners light which she has been wearing. It is the only light coming from the stage. It scans over the audience. 'Rhiannon' and 'Jude' move toward the audience and step over the proscenium frame and approach the audience directly. In this sequence 'Rhiannon' spotlights members of the audience and asks them questions.

Questions for a middle aged woman or man:

'RHIANNON' Do you have any children?
 Do you have a son?
 How old is he?
 Does he play sports?

Questions for a young girl:

'RHIANNON' How old was your first boyfriend?
 Did he have hair on his chest?
 Was he tall? Was he beginning to become muscular?

Questions for a young guy:

'RHIANNON' Hello.. how are you?
 Do you like parties?
 What are you doing later on?
 Maybe I could buy you a drink?



The Rope Project (2006) Video still from 'Spotlight' section. The two performers survey the audience and then cross over the proscenium frame to ask audience members questions.

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL

'Well, answer it. Can't you see I'm busy?'

V did as she was told, stopping only to take off her apron. She was a small, petite woman with dark lank hair and an expression rather like a confused possum's. When she opened the door she didn't expect to see two men with their arms entwined around each other.

'Hi,' said the older one, who was wearing strange yellow-tinted glasses. 'I'm Barry, sometimes known as Vanessa, and this is my fiancé, Robert. We're your neighbours.'

'Hello,' said V, unsure of what to do next. Knowing what her husband thought of homosexuals, she was reluctant to ask them

Excerpt from *All Things Bright And Beautiful* (2004) by Susan Mitchell, which fictionalises the meeting of homophobic killer John Bunting with Robert Wagner, and Wagner's partner (and eventual victim) Barry Lane.

And you might here some rumours about monica and her sticky fingers - but it's not true well not from stealing anyway. *Rhi*

but do keep an eye out for that gorgeous boy down at 32 you'll think he's charming his way into your pants and before you know it you ~~part~~ *handbag's* gone walk about.

SECTION A

Bunting's wife, V, called out through the kitchen window that someone was banging on the front door.*

BUNTING 'Well, answer it. Can't you see I'm busy?'

V did as she was told, stopping only to take off her apron. She was a small, petite woman with dark lank hair and an expression rather like a confused possum's. When she opened the door she didn't expect to see two men with their arms entwined around each other.

BARRY 'Hi,'

said the older one, who was wearing strange yellowtinted glasses.

BARRY 'I'm Barry, sometimes known as Vanessa, and this is my fiance, Robert. We're your neighbours.'

V 'Hello,'

said V, unsure of what to do next. Knowing what her husband thought of homosexuals, she was reluctant to ask them inside, yet she didn't want to get offside with the neighbours. Undeterred by her silence, Barry said,

BARRY 'We just thought we'd pop in to welcome you to the street and warn you about the others. Not that they'll do you any harm but a few of them are on parole and you should always keep your doors locked... sticky fingers, if you know what I mean. Isn't that right, Robert?'

Excerpt from working script for 'Snowtown' for *The Rope Project* (2006). Mitchell's dialogue has been extracted and prose describing action italicised to be used as stage actions. The performers developed prose text into dialogue or action.

V Well I guess you should come in for a cup of tea.

BARRY Well that sounds lovely... ohh I love what you've done with this wallpaper it looks gorgeous.

Barry and Robert enter the door. During the following the wall quickly wipes back to almost magically reveal Barry and Robert sitting together on the lounge. As soon as we see Barry's camp arm revealed the dialogue jumps.

BARRY So I said to him keep your hand off my man!

The wall wipes to show Barry's hand on Robert's knee, V standing next to the lounge seeing this, and then we suddenly hear (then see) John Bunting, who is holding a real chainsaw and has a coat covered in blood.

V This is my husband, John – don't mind him! John...
They're our neighbours

John has slowly lifted his mask.

JOHN Are they, now? Well, you'd better make them a cup of tea.

V leaves. There is an uncomfortable silence as John stares at the two men.

BARRY Hi, John, I'm Barry Lane and this gorgeous hunk is Robert Wagner.

John stares.

V John... I need your hand in the kitchen my love...

John goes through the alcove offstage. We hear their whispers through the radio microphones.

V John?

JOHN Yes.

V I thought you hated fags, as you call them.

JOHN I do

V Then I don't understand why you...

JOHN Yeah, well, there are lots of things you don't understand, dummy, so let's drop it, eh?

BARRY I might see if they need a hand in the kitchen they've been a while. I really do love this wallpaper...

Barry walks through the alcove to the kitchen and we hear the chainsaw fire up and blood splatters down the corridor. Robert sits by himself nervously. John enters, but in a completely pristine suit holding a cup of tea for Robert. He gives the cup of tea to Robert and sits next to him on the couch. Robert quietly sips the tea.

JOHN Paedophiles should be strung up. Biscuit?



The Rope Project (2006) Video stills from 'Snowtown' section. 'The Family' enacts the story of the so-called 'Snowtown' killers who were on a supposed mission to kill paedophiles and homosexuals. Barry Lane and his younger lover Robert Wagner visit their new neighbours – they are invited into the house by wife 'V' and encounter a chainsaw wielding John Bunting.

Lived Reality

The potency of the myth of ‘The Family’ is largely tied to the horrific murders of five young men. I knew that I could not deal with the myth of ‘The Family’ without dealing with this reality. I was not interested in exploring the forensic or criminal details attached to the murders as a ‘real life’ crime drama or documentary, nor did I want to ‘exploit’ in any way the real trauma suffered by the family and friends connected to these crimes. Instead, it was my view that the mythology had ‘hijacked’ the dead, using them to justify and reinforce the myth’s claims about the connection of homosexuality and deviance. I wished to release the dead from being shackled to the myth, while acknowledging the horrific truth of the five deaths.

Part of the difficulty was how to clearly extract the reality from the myth for its theatrical representation. The more that is said about the reality, the more it slips into the speculative or mythic. Ultimately the clearest way I could separate the reality from the myth was to reduce it to a list of names and physical descriptions:²⁷

Name	Age	Year	Physical traces
Alan Barnes	16	1979	Body found at the South Para Reservoir. He had suffered anal injuries and his back had been broken.
Neil Muir	25	1979	Body found in a plastic bag floating in shallow water of the Port River at a tidal estuary at Le Ferve Peninsular. His body had been severely mutilated.
Peter Stogneff	14	1981	Remains found at Two Wells, consisting of a burnt skeleton. The remains showed that his back had been sawn through and the legs had been cut above the knees.
Mark Langley	19	1982	Body found in Mount Lofty. He had suffered anal injuries and an incision into the abdomen.
Richard Kelvin	16	1983	Body found in the Adelaide Hills. He had suffered anal injuries, a blow to the head and bruising in the lower back.

This list of names and physical descriptions became the starting point for the theatrical representation of this reality. Initially I set up a range of tasks to explore the list with the performers. We addressed the following questions: What kind of representation would work? How much detail should be represented? When does it become taboo or offensive? When do we lose our sense of viewing a reality and realise we are viewing a theatrical representation? This final question, about how to view the reality as clearly as possible without the ‘enacting’ blurring it, meant that the simpler approaches were the most effective. The experiments with performers embodying a persona or enacting actions related to the list were too problematic as representations and got in the way of the facts. Ultimately, the performers as themselves, with physical versions of the names in the space, became the most effective way to present the reality.

²⁷ Bob O’Brien, *Young Blood: The Story of the Family Murders*, (Sydney: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002), pp. 1-17



The Rope Project (2006) video stills from 'Lived Reality' section. The names of the victims are revealed as the dots that have been joined to create the myth of 'The Family'.

Deconstructing the myth of ‘The Family’

When setting up this laboratory I knew that I would not be able to experiment with all the parts of the proposed structure. I decided to focus on the initial monologue, party, representations of ‘The Family’ and presenting the lived reality. As I mentioned earlier, I intend to create a third section of the performance that interrogates what lies beneath the myth of ‘The Family’ and what sustains it. The following represents the theory that will inform future experiments that examine what underlies the myth of ‘The Family’. These future experiments will be based on the following theoretical arguments.

Structurally, *The Rope Project* will allow the audience to engage with the material and will allay their fears, animate the supposed horror of ‘The Family’ and then deconstruct the myth to the traces of reality it has been connected to (like the Mr Squiggle drawing in reverse). This creates an opportunity to examine what the myth supports and enables, and why it has been maintained.

Locating the traces of reality within the myth reveals a key trait: part of the myth’s strength is that there are very few facts and a large information vacuum. Given the absence of facts, the media and public drew upon speculation and gossip to generate more stories and discussions of ‘The Family’. Mark Ellis, writing about Adelaide following Snowtown, discusses his experience of this myth-making process as a youth living in Adelaide at the time.

In any small town, gossip and rumour travel quickly and someone always knows someone else who has first-hand knowledge. In that great tradition of urban myth-making, you never actually meet the person with the information — it always comes second-hand. And so it was with the so-called Family Murders. Rumours ran rife at my school, as I am sure they did in every other school across the state. We gossiped ghoulishly about severed genitalia, broken bottles inserted in rectums, dismembered bodies suspended from trees, and body parts in garbage bags.

In the case of the Family Murders, the irresistible mix of conspiracy, people in high places, bizarre secret sex societies, and the taboo of homosexuality, made it perfect tabloid fodder. It ran for weeks and it has been regurgitated on and off for years.²⁸

A more recent example of the dynamics of absent facts can be observed in an interview with Bob O’Brien published in *The Advertiser* in 2002, at the time of the release of his book *Young Blood*. O’Brien’s book is, in itself, a significant act of mythologisation as the

²⁸ This article was published in 2002 in *The Age*. Ellis arrived as an eight year old British migrant to Adelaide in 1971. Ellis, “Lock Up Your Sons in the World’s Murder Capital”.

first to 'tell' the story of 'The Family Murders':

One of the main suspects, an Adelaide businessman, is still operating his business on a main suburban road while other accomplices — including transvestites and homosexuals have moved from Adelaide.²⁹

The information vacuum creates a large space of speculation for the public: What suburban street? What kind of business? Conjecture can be generated around any gay business owner on a main road in Adelaide.

'The Family' is often discussed in connection with the concept of paedophilia. The origin of this association seems to be connected to the use of the term 'boys' to describe the victims in the media, even though the age range of the victims was between 14-25 years. Despite the term paedophilia defining an attraction to pre-pubescent youths, a less accurate usage sometimes occurs to describe sexual acts with adolescents under the age of consent.³⁰ The female victims of the Truro murders, who occupy a similar age bracket, have never been discussed as victims of paedophilic crimes. The use of the word paedophilia is contested, with some scientists wanting the use of the term ephebophilia (an attraction to post-pubescent adolescents) to stop a blurring of this concept.³¹ Identifying the victims as 'boys' has invited paedophilia to be associated as an ingredient of homosexual deviance in the crimes.

'The Family' mythology of homosexuality and deviance has been shaped by the unconscious (and not so unconscious) fears associated with the sexual liberty of the Dunstan era embedded in the 'Athens of the South' imaginary of Adelaide. 'Athens of the South' can be discursively positioned as a reference to a cultural enshrining of sexual deviance. Ancient Greek culture supported sexual practices that our culture could define as paedophilia.³² Ancient Greece saw a system of sexuality where a male warrior in his early twenties would take on an adolescent boy as a sexual partner until the age of thirty, when the state required the older warrior to marry.³³ This relationship was part of developing (heterosexual) masculinity in young men, where they learnt and developed athletic, warrior skills as well as intellectual knowledge. While this practice existed in various places across Ancient Greece, "[i]n Athens it became a vehicle of cultural transmission, so that the best of each older cohort selected, loved, and trained the best of the younger."³⁴ William Armstrong Percy III believes that this cultural practice was a key ingredient to the culture's

²⁹ Nigel Hunt, "'Family' Gang Members Still Out There — Detective" *The Advertiser*, 8 February 2002, p. 9

³⁰ The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, cited in Marianne James, "Paedophilia", *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 57 (Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, 1996), p. 2

³¹ M. Ashley Ames and David A. Houston, "Legal, Social, and Biological Definitions of Pedophilia", *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 19 (1990), pp. 333-342

³² Noel Purdon, "Necessary Theatre: A City on Trial", *RealTime*, 54 (2003), p. 46

³³ William Armstrong Percy III, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (University of Illinois, 1996).

³⁴ William Armstrong Percy III/ *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*, Available: <<http://www.press.uillinois.edu/f98/percy.html>>, [accessed May 15 2006].

enlightenment, “produc[ing] an astounding number of great men who laid the enduring foundations of Western thought and civilization.”³⁵ This interpretation of the ‘Athens of the South’ imaginary threatens contemporary heterosexual culture by positioning the young male (adolescent, and potentially pre-pubescent) as the object of sexual desire, and embracing an ethical system that could potentially endorse paedophilic acts. Perhaps more importantly, it positions homosexuality as central to the process of creating masculinity, and it implies that the result of this practice defined the men who laid the foundation of western culture.

The notion of powerful men institutionalising a culture of paedophilia is of great relevance to the mythology of ‘The Family’, and I wish to examine how these associations have been mapped onto the Dunstan era and its sexual politics. A clear example of this mapping can be seen in Adelaide in 1999 through the activism of neo-fascist group National Action, as described by Barbara Baird:

A street poster titled ‘Thanks Don: Good Riddance’ appeared around the city of Adelaide in the week after Dunstan’s memorial service. The National Action poster thanked Don Dunstan for the ‘spread of poofs and AIDS’, the ‘paedophile culture and the ‘Family’ killings which followed it’, the ‘spread of wanton abortion’ and ‘silencing Commissioner Salisbury’, and gave ‘special thanks to the South Australian media – so ‘discreet’ on all these subjects’.³⁶

National Action clearly outlines a discourse that the Dunstan era reforms on sexuality were directly responsible for creating a ‘paedophile culture’ in which the ‘The Family’ emerged. National Action views homosexuality as a form of deviancy that stands to threaten the fabric of society. According to this view, any cultural permission for this behaviour will lead to paedophilia and homosexually-motivated homicide. Again this political view blurs homosexuality with paedophilia. The reference to Police Commissioner Salisbury is important and alludes to how Dunstan has been associated with the legacy of ‘The Family’.

In 1978, the Dunstan government was responsible for the controversial sacking of South Australia’s Police Commissioner Harold Salisbury. The sacking was triggered by an article in *The Australian* claiming that the South Australian Police department maintained secret records on thousands of its citizens who were not engaged in any criminal activity.³⁷ The article was subsequently raised in parliament. Commissioner Salisbury assured Dunstan that no such files existed, but further debate about the claims led to an inquiry under Supreme Court Justice White. The Report found that these records did indeed exist, and that they were “scandalously inaccurate, irrelevant to security purposes and outrageously unfair”.³⁸ The Dunstan government dismissed Salisbury as a result of the report.³⁹

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Barbara Baird, “The Death of a Great Australian”, *JAS, Australia’s Public Intellectual Forum* (2001), p. 81

³⁷ *The Australian*, 3 September 1977, cited in *The Dunstan Decade: Social Democracy at the State Level*, ed. by Andrew Parkin and Allan Patience, (Sydney: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p. 15

³⁸ *The Advertiser*, 18 January 1978, quoted in Ibid., p. 15

³⁹ Andrew Parkin, ‘The Dunstan Governments: A Political Synopsis’, in *The Dunstan Decade: Social*



Ganymede, carried by Zeus as an eagle to Olympus (1892) by Johann Frank Kirchbach. The myth of Ganymede represents a Greco-Roman deity (a social father) descending to earth from above to snatch the beautiful adolescent boy from below.

The cheap novelty of it disappeared and I was riveted by a realisation of yet a third implication. I was joined to a line though history which went back to the first primitive tribal person who went my way, who took a virgin boy lover, and every boy who became a man and took, in due turn, a boy lover, through to Socrates. I had played a part now in the continuation of that chain. I had played my first part as a child in becoming a man's lover. I had now played my second part. I now belonged fully in that historical line. It was a way of passing on and preserving the special reality, a way of giving new life, the birth for the boy of a new reality, a joining of him to a secret family, the other family. To belong to that chain is to belong to another life.

Excerpt from *The Everlasting Secret Family* (1980) by Frank Moorhouse. A high powered member of a homosexual "secret family" connects their activities and traditions to Ancient Greece.



'Grim Reaper' AIDS Campaign (1987). The Grim Reaper as a representation of AIDS (and arguably homosexuality) smashes apart the normal heterosexual family in a hell-like bowling alley.

Central to the controversy were the ‘pink files’, records held by the South Australia Special Branch that monitored the activities of homosexual men.⁴⁰ The secret records were of a right-wing bias, with records held on all state Labor politicians and candidates, but none held on their non-Labor counterparts.⁴¹ The socially liberal policies of the Dunstan government were positioned as deviant or ‘criminal’ and located within individuals: ‘bohemian’ politicians and homosexual men. National Action implies that there was illegal activity involving powerful homosexual men that was covered up.

The right-wing fear was that men who were rumoured to be (deviant) homosexuals were being appointed by Dunstan and his government, and that this would lead to an ideological corruption from the top of society. After the Kelvin murder, the *Sunday Mail* made claims that during the Dunstan government, Police Commissioner Salisbury had been forced to destroy police records of ‘The Family’. Dunstan’s implied ‘interference’ with police activities placed him at the head of a conspiracy in Adelaide and redefined the notion of the ‘Athens of the South’. Here Dunstan and other members of the so-called ‘Family’ are like Grecian Gods: they are ruling pederastic fathers, who wreak havoc on the denizens of Adelaide to indulge their own amoral pleasures. While the imaginary of ‘The Perfect Setting for a Horror Film’ suggests the perverse members of ‘The Family’ occupy an ‘underbelly’, the ‘Athens of the South’ imaginary suggests that they occupy the heavens, descending into the place of vulnerable mortals.

Important in all of this is Dunstan’s own sexuality, and the information vacuum about it in the public domain. Throughout his life Dunstan refused to discuss his sexuality or ‘private life’, but it was commonly known that for the last ten years of his life he was in a relationship with chef Stephen Cheng. Dunstan’s memorial service was marked by a glaring absence of any references to his social reforms for homosexuality, his partner Stephen Cheng, or acknowledgement of his importance or connection to the broader gay and lesbian communities.⁴²

The information vacuum around Dunstan’s sexuality parallels the information vacuum around the murders; the lack of information about his sexuality encourages speculation, rumour and innuendo. Bob O’Brien discusses how this innuendo also followed other politicians and public figures across the Dunstan government:

[Dunstan’s] appointment of a reputed homosexual to a senior position within government began all kinds of rumours about prominent people. It also set the scene for stories of prominent people within Adelaide’s society being involved in the boys’ murders and rumours about the existence of a

Democracy at the State Level, ed. by Andrew Parkin and Allan Patience, (Sydney: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p. 15

⁴⁰ Baird, “The Death of a Great Australian”, p. 73

⁴¹ Parkin, “The Dunstan Governments: A Political Synopsis”, p. 15

⁴² Baird, “The Death of a Great Australian”, p. 75

high-level 'Family' began to spread throughout the city.⁴³

O'Brien is clear in *Young Blood* that these rumours were nothing but rumours. The power of these rumours was strong enough to allow the myth to attach itself to other prominent figures, even though the associations were overtly denied. One example is South Australian Magistrate Peter Liddy who was found guilty of child sex crimes against four boys aged 8-10 years old, while he was a surf life saving coach between 1983 and 1986. Liddy was rumoured to be part of 'The Family', and despite the Attorney-General speaking publicly to establish the rumours as completely untrue, the denial arguably strengthened them.⁴⁴ An important aspect of 'The Family' is that all discourse on it, including public efforts to deny it, or "kill it" in the Gay Community Action group's case, maintains it and adds to its legacy. *The Rope Project* does not seek to 'kill' the myth of 'The Family', but to undermine its strengths as myth and destabilise its perceived reality.

A Horror-inversion of the Heterosexual Family Unit

I was intrigued that 'The Family' was dubbed a 'family'. As mentioned earlier, the name was coined by *60 Minutes* in their story, and was later adopted by the media as the name of this group. The story had a working title which was *Thrill Killings*, not *The Family*, as I discovered when I ordered a copy of the segment from Channel Nine.⁴⁵ However, when broadcast, the story was introduced by Jennifer Byrne with the words 'The Family' on a title graphic featuring an image of a pre-pubescent boy and a car with an open door, drenched in a blood-like red. This suggests that the story had a name change from *Thrill Killings* to *The Family* prior to going to air. What motivated this name change? How did the concept of 'family' come into play? Byrne and Kipling mention the word 'family' only once in the twenty minute story, a minute detail in the overall exchange to be magnified into the title of the story. The lack of emphasis in the story on the term or concept of family led me to wonder why this concept had been brought to the fore.

The concept of 'family' may have been selected by the *60 Minutes* producers (in Sydney) as an unconscious – or not so unconscious – reference to an unusual Australian film that had been released earlier that year, *The Everlasting Secret Family*.⁴⁶ This film, based on a short story by Frank Moorhouse written in 1980, depicts an underground secret 'family' of high powered gay men who take young adolescent boys as their lovers and engage in sado-masochistic acts.⁴⁷ *The Everlasting Secret Family* offered a fictional imagining of the workings of an underground homosexual gang. Using *The Family* as the title offers a more tantalising, evocative suggestion of the perpetrators than *Thrill Killings*. Moorhouse's drama, set in Sydney, introduces this Grecian older teacher and younger

⁴³ O'Brien, *Young Blood: The story of The Family Murders*, p. 254

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 254

⁴⁵ *Thrill Killings*. Nine Network Australia Pty Ltd. 25 September 1988.

⁴⁶ *The Everlasting Secret Family*. Dir. Michael Thornhill, International Film Exchange. 1988.

⁴⁷ Frank Moorhouse, *The Everlasting Secret Family and Other Secrets* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980).

student relationship that 'The Family' implies.⁴⁸

The concept of family in 'The Family' is an imaginary horror-inverse of the heterosexual family unit. They are a family with no mothers or women; they are a family that is made up of fathers only. They are not biological fathers, but instead play the role of father in our society — judges, politicians, doctors, lawyers — and so on. It is a family that has children, but not through reproduction. They steal sons, and instead of having a platonic, caring, protective relationship with them, they sexually abuse and mutilate them. They are a family of perverse fathers who cannibalise their sons.

The name of the 'The Family' has currency because within this myth it offers a perverse horror-image of the most valued social unit in our culture. The fact that this group of homosexual men are 'familial' heightens their perversion, and reveals the threat that endorsing this kind of deviancy (homosexuality) will lead to. The myth of 'The Family' also propagates the notion that gay men are unfit to play the role of father, or to have interactions with young men without there being a deviant, sexual or perverse motive at play. The vacuum of information about 'The Family' allows it to become a conduit for other agendas. The myth of 'The Family' associates homosexuality with deviant behaviour, such as murder and paedophilia, despite there being clear evidence that these phenomena are unrelated to homosexuality. Statistics reflect that heterosexuals have a much higher pro-rata involvement in paedophilia than homosexuals.⁴⁹ The vacuum allows all of these things to blend together, and the blurring of definition places homosexuality itself as a form of deviance.

The myth of 'The Family' removes the possibility that the perpetrator had a heterosexual motive. The myth of the perverse homosexual killer takes centre stage, displacing the homophobic motives that could equally occupy this space. The sexual identities of some of 'The Family' victims were contested or unclear, certainly not ruling out a homophobic, heterosexual motive in some cases. 'The Family' succeeds in establishing homosexuality as 'the other', so that the heterosexual male is not made an agent of deviance. 'The Family' is also a vehicle of political assault. It serves a right-wing political agenda that positions sexual liberty as a 'pandora's box' of social evils. 'The Family' is the evidence that this theory is true, and it targets individuals (Dunstan era public figures, homosexuals) as the protagonists.

'The Family' is a mythological product that has resulted from the intersection of the 'Athens of the South' and 'Ideal Setting for a Horror Movie' imaginaries. 'The Family' is a horrific contortion of the conservative fears around sexual liberty that is inferred in the 'Athens of the South'. The figures of 'The Family' revel in amoral perversity, but they also have alter-egos in the 'vener' — that of individuals who are part of the ruling class of the city.

⁴⁸ *Does 'The Family' Exist?* by Gay Community Action also suggests a link to the film. Gay Community Action mention that *The Everlasting Secret Family* had been screened in Adelaide prior to the name 'The Family' being cited, suggesting that police made the leap between the two. My suggestion differs as I believe the Sydney-produced programme and Sydney associated link to Moorhouse could have been responsible for forging the connection, as it was the producers who changed the show title to 'The Family'.

⁴⁹ Mitchell, *All Things Bright and Beautiful: Murder in the City of Light*, p. 220

They orchestrate, yet pervert, the seeming utopia of Adelaide. 'The Family' screens an underlying fear about the reconfiguring of the heterosexual family unit that could include gay men in marriage raising children and adolescents. This fear is visible through the recent contestations of family in Australian culture, such as the definition of marriage being tied to a woman and a man and their desire to procreate.

I envision developing a section of the work that would animate this underlying fear, perhaps exploring the notion of the gay family in a house within the lived reality of Adelaide, juxtaposing with 'The Family' and their house within the imaginary. I imagine a reintroduction to the house where the audience perhaps arrive at another kind of party (a christening for a child with gay parents, gay marriage, graduation of the child). This time they would encounter a reality of gay men fathering boys and/or adolescents. After animating and destabilising the horror of 'The Family', I would seek to debunk the myth by reintroducing the audience to another version of family consisting of gay men that is excessively normalised to agitate the underlying anxieties connected with this alternate family unit.

Redeploying 'Family'

My work on *The Rope Project* developed the notion that the myth of 'The Family' gains its potency by horrifically inverting the heterosexual family. In the process of designing and directing the project, I consciously played on the idea of 'The Family' being like a family. This exploration influenced the design for the project. The audience journeyed into the imagined home of 'The Family', arriving at its front door, travelling through its corridors and arriving to observe the family room, where most of the action was played out. The design also utilised photo albums that the audience were shown and photos of the 'sons' of the family mounted on the wall.

This interest in family is also reflected in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. Brandon and Phillip (who, it is strongly implied, are a homosexual couple) live together in a New York apartment. The guests at Brandon and Phillip's party are from David Kentley's heterosexual family: his father, aunt, girlfriend and best friend. An inversion of this is the male relationships linked through a teacher/student relationship and their shared interest in Nietzsche's philosophies. Rupert Cadell is the former teacher of Brandon and Phillip and first introduced them to Nietzsche's alternate moral code. Brandon and Phillip acted in accordance with this code in killing David Kentley whom they viewed as inferior.

The transgressive nature of Nietzsche's philosophy parallels the implied sexuality of Brandon, Phillip and Rupert. *Rope* sets up two 'families'; one is the normative heterosexual family, the other consists of transgressive, amoral (homosexual) men. *The Rope Project* adopted the aesthetic of Hitchcock's *Rope* and redeployed a range of materials from it,

with the audience entering a cocktail party style promenade performance, the use of a chest to store elements of the lived reality of the dead connected with the mythology, and the use two moving walls creating a changeable theatrical space reminiscent of Hitchcock's continuous long take.

Another concept that informed the structure of the work in development was how the 'The Family' functioned as a myth. Dramaturgically the mythology of 'The Family' could operate like a 'Mr Squiggle' drawing. In this analogy, 'The Family' is like a drawing driven by a desire to join a series of 'dots' (bodies of the real young men who died) into a unified image. The dots are undoubtedly real but the drawing that is 'The Family' is imagined; it is an image that gives an organised unity to the disturbing reality that five young men were killed across a period of time. Structurally, *The Rope Project* began with fully animating the drawing of 'The Family' in all its horror. It then reversed this drawing to reveal the 'dots', the traces of lived reality that were used to imagine 'The Family'. The imaginary act of connecting fragments into a perceived whole relates to the infant's process in Lacan's mirror stage. The mirror provides a unified, cohesive image for the infant who wants to accept it over its real experience of self that is fragmented.

The fear around the inverted family unit is of particular relevance in Australian culture as it has been recently contested, for example, through debates about marriage's inclusion (or exclusion) of same-sex couples. The Rudd federal government is open to reform for achieving equality for same-sex couples, but Prime Minister Rudd stated that "the Marriage Act relates to a union between a man and a woman, and that remains Labor policy as it has been into the past and as it will remain into the future."⁵⁰ Prior to this, the Howard government asserted that marriage was a union defined through men and women procreating.⁵¹ This implies that only heterosexual couples are empowered to reproduce and generate families within our culture. This notion is also made explicit in the choice of name for the Family First political party, which actively pursues legislation to restrict the rights of same-sex couples. The party's choice of name indicates a belief that its members' values embody and define 'family'. The implication in the party's name is that 'Family' (which is solely heterosexual) is put 'first' through conservative, right-wing social policy. Reproduction is also heterosexualised in access to assisted reproductive technology services for same-sex couples and single women in South Australia, who are by law defined as "socially infertile". This definition of "social infertility" is attributed to gay and lesbian couples and single women to exclude them from accessing these services.⁵² The notion of family within Australian culture has emerged as a new site for contesting sexuality and the extent to which non-heterosexual unions will be

⁵⁰ Kevin Rudd quoted in Tony Wright and Brendan Nicholson, "Outrage at Rudd's Same-Sex Marriage Stance", *The Age*, 24 October 2007, Available: <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/federalection2007news/outrage-at-rudds-samesex-marriage-stance/2007/10/23/1192941066209.html>> [accessed 19 July 2008]

⁵¹ See Rod McGuirk, "Australian PM Holds Firm Against Gay Marriage While Condemning Discrimination", Associated Press Newswires, 21 June 2007, and Rafael Epstein, "Australians Don't Support Gay Marriage: Howard", Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 23 May 2006, Available: <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitoms/200605/s1644777.htm>> [accessed 19 July 2008]

⁵² Department of Human Services Research Policy & Ethics Unit, Reproductive Technology - Eligibility Fact Sheet, 2007, PDF, Available: <<http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/reproductive-technology/fact%20sheets.asp>>, [accessed 13 November 2007].

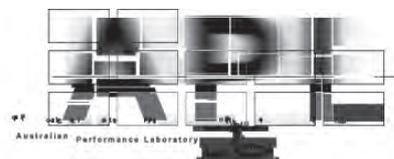
granted equality in our society. *The Rope Project* is an opportunity to use performance (as Joseph Roach suggests) to make these contested issues around family visible and remembered within our culture, rather than allowing them to be invisible or forgotten.

The Rope Project

Conceived and directed by Sam Haren in collaboration with

Mary Moore	(designer)
Andrew Russ	(sound)
Andrew Howard	(sound)
Jonathan Bollen	(dramaturg)
Julie Holledge	(dramaturg)
Joseph Del Re	(performer)
Jamie Harding	(performer)
Jude Henshall	(performer)
Matthew Lynch	(performer)
Lachlan Mantell	(performer)
Louisa Mignone	(performer)
Rhiannon Owen	(performer)

This project has been assisted with the technical and dramaturgical support of the Australian Performance Laboratory (APL) and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Conclusion

Spatial Transference and Osmotic Relations to Place

This thesis has pursued an examination of how particular places become evident in performance, in the conscious ways that the artists articulate and the traces of place that can be seen in their work. The thesis has developed a notion of spatial transference within the creative imagination of the artist. I have articulated a recognition of this within my own creative process on *The Rope Project*, and my study has revealed spatial transference at work in the processes of the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment. I discerned how three-dimensional space is an important starting point in their creative processes. This notion of spatial transference within the work of the theatre director and designer informs an understanding of the particular aesthetics pursued by artists and encourages a consideration of their work in relation to the places and spaces in which they live and work. It brings into focus the spatial work of the director and proposes place is an important starting point for the way artists create.

Within this broader notion of spatial transference, I have elaborated a second concept, which is the artists' osmotic relationship to place. This was evident in my time with both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment. Their experiences of place were 'absorbed' by the artists and manifested within the aesthetic, structure and style of their work. Forced Entertainment, in particular, were very cognisant of this relationship to place. They go onto the streets of Sheffield seeking creative solutions and asking why what they see is not in their work.

Following my time with the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment, I considered what I had absorbed from them during my own work on *The Rope Project* and with The Border Project. Over this time, my practice has developed not through a surface emulation of the Wooster Group or Forced Entertainment's processes, but through a deeper appreciation of the way place informed their unique ways of working. Initially I was captivated by the distinctive forms and aesthetics of their work but, as I reflect five years later, my own work with The Border Project and within *The Rope Project* laboratory feels very different from their work. I have processed these experiences through my own relationship to place

and my own desires as an artist, and this is where something distinct has developed from those influences. Place has been the factor during this process that has allowed me to take what I have found inspiring in their work and find an approach that is my own.

When I was in Sheffield, I had a conversation with Tim Etchells about some of the younger companies that may be viewed as the ‘offspring’ of the Wooster Group. Many of these groups are made up of artists who have worked with or interned with the Wooster Group, including The Builders Association (founded by former assistant director Marianne Weems) and Elevator Repair Service (founded by current Wooster Group sound artist John Collins). One of these artists whom Etchells found most fascinating was Richard Maxwell, writer and director of the ironically named New York City Players. Maxwell’s trademark style is described by Jesse McKindley in the *New York Times* as “characters who speak, argue and even laugh in an unwavering monotone”¹. Maxwell’s style has been “hailed by critics [for its] hilarious and trenchant looks at American passivity”². Etchells felt that Maxwell was fascinating because he had thoroughly departed from the Wooster Group’s influence to the point where something distinctive and unexpected had developed in his work. Perhaps Etchells makes this observation because of his own experience years ago of first encountering the work of the Wooster Group.³ Etchells and Forced Entertainment similarly were fascinated by the Wooster Group, but processed this influence through their own experiences of place. Reflecting on Etchells’ comment, I feel that I have found a distinctiveness through my own digestion and departures from both the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment’s work. In *The Rope Project*, I worked with a style (such as promenade performance) and with content connected to place, which were unlike the pursuits of the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment and quite particular to my own experimentation, but which were inspired by some of their strategies for creating performance.

¹ Jesse McKindley, “Playwright’s Trademark is Deadpan. Now He Wants to Tweak It.” *The New York Times*, 18 January 2006, p. 1

² Ibid.

³ Etchells mentioned in conversation the influence of The Wooster Group’s *L.S.D... Just The High Points* on the earlier work of Forced Entertainment. The interest in the company was followed, in particular, through one of its members, Ron Vawter, whom Etchells interviewed and discussed in *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 84-93

Adelaide, Place and Mobility

When I was preparing to travel to New York City and spend three months with the Wooster Group, many people told me that after my time in New York I would never want to come back to Adelaide. They thought that I would find Adelaide so comparatively small, parochial and boring that its insufficiencies as a place would no longer sustain my interest. It wasn't something that I had really considered until people started saying it to me — would New York irrevocably change my 'at-home-ness' in Adelaide? Would dwelling in Adelaide cease to sufficiently meet what I desire in a place that I live and work?

I did indeed find New York an exciting, captivating and inspiring place, but I also had unexpected revelations about Adelaide when I was there. When talking to artists my age in New York about the work that I had been doing in Adelaide, there was an unexpected desire — perhaps, arguably, jealously — for the opportunities that Adelaide provided. In Adelaide, I could gain a small amount of funding, work with a large group of peers and have artists work full-time on projects. These were all things that artists my age found quite unattainable in New York City. I saw Adelaide from their perspective as a place that provided an opportunity to make work in a way that was not possible in their own city.

But were Adelaide's strengths merely providing the conditions to make work? I remember when working with Garry Stewart,⁴ artistic director of Australian Dance Theatre, that he joked that Adelaide was the company's Wuppertal, the supposedly bland yet hospitable town that hosts Pina Bausch's Tanztheater company. Stewart's reference to Wuppertal suggests that Adelaide is a 'no-place' that lacks distinction (like the image evoked of Cesena where Castellucci's *Societas Raffaello Sanzio* work) but one that provides a 'retreat' from the world for artists to work without interruption. It is a perfect environment for making work with a low cost of living, access to resources, and networks to sustain artistic pursuits. As someone who has grown up in Adelaide, my understanding of it as a place and its meanings are experienced and lived. Because of this Adelaide will never be a Wuppertal for me. It is a place with which I have an ongoing lived and imagined relationship, and it is a source of distinctiveness on which I can draw.

⁴ I worked as a dramaturg with Garry Stewart on a work called *Fabricationalism* in 2003, intended for presentation in the 2004 Adelaide Fringe. *Fabricationalism* was not developed into a full production; some of its choreographic material was integrated into *Held*, another Australian Dance Theatre work developed at the same time for the 2004 Adelaide Festival.

Like Wuppertal and Cesena, Adelaide has a history as a place of incubating theatrical experimentation, such as the work of alternative ensemble companies Troupe, Red Shed, Brink Productions and the early works of director Benedict Andrews with *Blueprint* and *Magpie2*. The Adelaide Festival has a clear relationship to the works of these artists. Over the decades since 1960, the Adelaide Festival has provided inspiration for many of the experimental and contemporary artists within Adelaide and Australia. So while Adelaide may be viewed as a parochial backwater, it is also regularly the host to some of the most radical and experimental work in the world. This dichotomy recalls the competing imaginaries of the city, the artistic grandeur attached to the 'Athens of the South' and the veneer of country town blandness in the 'Perfect Setting for a Horror Film'. My strategy as an artist has been to draw simultaneously on the imaginaries to my own advantage. I take from the imaginary of the radical arts city, but I also take from the imaginary of the quiet country town that serves as incubator, combining the two to realise the kind of work I am interested in.

When in Sydney I have been surprised to learn that theatre artists from Adelaide are viewed as having a certain 'cred' there.⁵ This definitely was unexpected, as I had thought the imaginary that casts Adelaide as the parochial backwater would have most currency in Sydney. Some Sydney artists have described Adelaide to me as a place that exports intelligent, creative people whom Sydney has a desire to import. Just as an international festival consumes art from elsewhere, Sydney is viewed as an arts market with a desire for exotic product. An attachment to place allows artists such as myself to find a way of making the kind of distinctive work that they want which has value in the global market of exchange.

I was recently in conversation with Matthew Lutton, a theatre director in his mid-20s based in Perth. Lutton said that it was only recently that he felt he could have a national career. By this he meant that it was now possible for him to maintain his connection to place in Perth, while also pursuing other interstate opportunities to direct and develop work, without one excluding the other. The geography of Australia often restricts artists's mobility from place to place. This can mean that actors and directors invariably feel they must move to Sydney or Melbourne to pursue the work and opportunities they seek.

⁵ 'Cred' is an informal term for street credibility. In this context it suggests an informal respect earned by peers. See *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. by Erin McKean, second edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Remaining in other places, such as Adelaide or Perth, can initially seem to exclude participation in the larger industries in Sydney or Melbourne.

Lutton's observation is that choosing to remain in your place in Australia does not exclude the ability to work nationally. It is a strategy towards place and mobilisation that allows the artist to experiment and find their unique voice without losing the material opportunities that may keep them practicing. In a way, this strategy parallels that of Societas Raffaello Sanzio, centralising their artistic experimentation while managing the need for mobilisation. For Matthew Lutton and myself, the connection to our home place strengthens the kind of work we want to make and the opportunities to present it beyond our home place. Our connection to place gives us space and opportunity to explore form and content within our own place, and thereby pursue experimentation within our work.

The Rope Project and the Myth of the So-Called 'Family'

When I was developing *The Rope Project* and dealing with an imaginary tied to real trauma, the presence of place was palpable throughout the process. Every move I made in the development was considered through the intended audience's experience of place. The imaginative and lived experiences of the audience, from encountering audiences in the research and development and envisioning their responses to the material, provided a complex, engaging and volatile relationship to the material, and informed the dramatic structure and artistic approach. If I were developing the show for an audience interstate or overseas, these place-specific audience dynamics would not have come into play. Because *The Rope Project* is a work about place, offered to an audience from that same place, there is an intricate and charged engagement with them. Working with place in *The Rope Project* would allow for a much more complex conversation with an audience, tapping into their deepest experiences, both lived and imagined.

This thesis has contributed to an understanding of Adelaide's imaginaries of place and the myth of 'The Family'. 'The Family' has remained an elusive fiction which has never been fully pursued in an academic study. It has gained strength as a myth through its articulation within the print media and through the slippages of fact and fiction which describe it. This thesis has tracked the formation of 'The Family', attempted to delineate what is myth from implied fact, and proposed the agendas that it serves within our culture. I am planning to further develop and present *The Rope Project* in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival Centre and the Australian Performance Laboratory in late 2009 or early 2010.

The Border Project's *Disappearance* and Australia's National Imaginary

The myth of 'The Family' in the city of Adelaide is also a manifestation of a larger anxiety of disappearance within Australia's national imaginary. I have explored a national imaginary of Australia as place where people disappear, maintained by representations that imbue the Australian landscape with a hostile agency, and I have argued that the erasure implicit in the colonial concept of *terra nullius* drives this particular cultural anxiety. This thesis enhances understanding of how this anxiety is animated and maintained within our cultural production, from nineteenth century visual art, recent Australian cinema with international profile and contemporary Australian performance.

I am working on another creative project in 2008 that builds upon the work of this study. The Border Project and the Adelaide Festival Centre will present *Disappearance* at the Space Theatre in November 2008. *Disappearance* will be a journey into the fears, fascinations and obsessions with disappearance in Australian culture. *Disappearance* re-imagines fictional stories and historical events spanning a hundred years. It moves from a jump-cut present day story into an eerie Bermuda triangle-like space that conjures real and imagined occurrences. *Disappearance* interrogates the way that we mythologise a relationship between the individual and the landscape, exposing and animating our collective fantasies and fears.

The performance has three distinct but interrelated sections: the first follows a perfectly ordinary man with a perfectly ordinary life who decides to disappear; the second is an evocative re-imagining of a sequence of events from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*; and the third is set within a surreal dream-like void haunted by figures, events and images of our shared myths and imaginings of those who have disappeared. This new work draws directly from the findings in this thesis about the cultural anxiety of disappearance in Australia. Having traced how this anxiety has been represented in a range of artworks across time, this thesis informs how we can make this anxiety operational on stage, and how we can critique and deconstruct it.

Falling into Place

Looking back on the journey of this thesis, I ask myself: *Why* was I interested in place and performance? What has been at the core of my fascination? What does a connection to place offer the artist? My fascination with place and performance has been driven by my desire as an artist to speak to people through their own experiences. As an artist I

wanted to be able to talk about things that deeply resonate for an audience, and I think work that engages with place does this. Place frames what an audience knows, experiences and imagines — it is prior to all things as Archytas claims⁶ — and drawing upon place allows the artist to talk to an audience through the complexities of their experiences, both lived and imagined.

Connected to this desire to communicate with an audience in this way has been another pursuit: as a contemporary performance maker, how can I create performance that aspires to the aesthetic and formal experimentation that I admire in other artists around the world but that, at its core, is something distinct, driven by a discourse and content that is unique to my experiences and understandings of the world? How can I explore form *and* content to create work that is unique and that has resonance for me and an audience?

The contemporary performance that I have admired abroad has forged its uniqueness through distinct relationships to place, from the absorption and transference of experienced places to the implantation of its artistic intents within place. This kind of theatrical experimentation entails the artist dealing with the fascinations that come from experiences and imaginings which are particular to place. Place is a way of coupling formal ambition with the distinctiveness from localised experience. When these two come together as I'm making performance, everything falls into place.

⁶ As cited by Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium*, cited in Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, p. 14 n. 48

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