

**THESIS TITLE**

***Bird and Wyrd Song: Writing the Sacred in Australian Theatre.***

Thesis submitted by Sheila Duncan for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Drama, School of Humanities and Creative Arts,

Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

Flinders University, South Australia.

Sheila Duncan: ID 9502684

MSc Creative Writing, MA Communications Studies, Grad Dip Aboriginal Studies, BA  
Anthropology.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	1
List of Images.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Declaration.....	6
Acknowledgements.....	7
<b>INTRODUCTION:</b>	
i) Personal Statement- the sacred experience in theatre.....	8
ii) Provocation –Yarrow et al <i>Sacred Theatre</i> .....	10
iii) Purpose –Why this research?.....	11
iv) Part One: Possibility. ....	16
v) Part Two: Artistic Audit.....	18
vi) Part Three: Creative Works and Practice as Research.....	21
vii) The Ethics of Invention.....	24
viii) What is an Author?.....	26
<b>PART ONE: POSSIBILITY</b>	
CHAPTER ONE: Sacred Experience and Audience Experience.....	31
1.1 The Sacred as Connection.....	32
1.2 Sacred Experience.....	33
1.3 Audience Experience.....	39
CHAPTER TWO: Sacred Theatre.....	42
2.1 Sacred Theatre- Yarrow .....	43
2.2 Holy and Sacred Theatre – Peter Brook.....	48
2.3 Ritual and Sacred Experience.....	52
2.4 Sacred Theatre as Therapia: The aim to heal.....	55
2.5 Other Discourses Contributing to a Contemporary Sacred Theatre.....	60
2.5.1 The European Avant Garde.....	60
2.5.2 Postmodernism.....	62
2.5.3 Liminal Theatre.....	64
2.5.4 Postdramatic Theatre.....	66
2.5.5 Vectorization of signs.....	69
2.6 How to weave a net: Conceptual and creative knots towards writing Sacred Theatre.....	70
<b>PART TWO: ARTISTIC AUDIT</b>	
CHAPTER THREE: Practice in Australia 1947-75.....	73
3.1 Kevin Gilbert: <i>The Cherry Pickers</i> 1968.....	75
3.2 Peter Kenna: <i>A Hard God</i> 1973.....	81
3.3 Patrick White: <i>The Ham Funeral</i> 1947.....	86

CHAPTER FOUR: Practice in Australia 1975-2005.....	93
4.1 Contexts.....	94
4.1.1 Training.....	94
4.1.2 International focus.....	95
4.1.3 Indigenous theatre.....	96
4.1.4 Women’s theatre.....	97
4.2 Margaret Davis: <i>Isis Dreaming</i> 1991: Sacred Theatre as Therapia.....	98
4.3 Enoch and Mailman: <i>The 7 Stages of Grieving</i> 1995.....	109
4.4 Jenny Kemp: <i>Still Angela</i> 2002.....	119
4.5 Conclusions.....	131
CHAPTER FIVE: Practice in Australia: Brink Productions.....	133
5.1 Brink’s Dramaturgical Process.....	134
5.2 Case Study: Andrew Bovell <i>When the Rain Stops Falling</i> 2008.....	140
5.3 The script/production.....	144
<b>PART THREE: CREATIVE WORKS &amp; PRACTICE AS RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>156</b>
CHAPTER SIX: Creative Practice and Process: <i>Bird</i> .....	157
6.1 <i>Bird</i> – The beginning.....	157
6.2 Material Thinking.....	165
6.3 The Lizard.....	168
6.4 Workshop: The next phase of <i>Bird</i> .....	173
6.5 Computer generated animations by Nic Mollison.....	178
6.6 <i>Bird</i> : The Reading and Survey.....	181
6.7 Post Workshop Redraft and Reflection.....	183
6.8 <i>Bird</i> : Play Script by Sheila Duncan – 10,791 words.....	186
CHAPTER SEVEN: Creative Practice and Process: <i>Wyrd Song</i> .....	255
7.1 The Beginning.....	255
7.2 Victoria Lamb’s Set Design.....	262
7.3 The Next Phase.....	264
7.4 <i>Wyrd Song</i> : A New Title and Reflection.....	270
7.5 <i>Wyrd Song</i> : Play Script by Sheila Duncan – 9,686 words.....	275
CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusions.....	331
APPENDIX ONE: <i>Bird</i> Reading Survey Responses 5 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2014.....	342
APPENDIX TWO: Support material for <i>Bird</i> on USB Drive provided.....	344
a) Animations by Nic Mollison DVD; The Road 00:09; The Gorge 03:58; The Lizard 05:57; Kevin Morgan’s House 07:10	
b) Song Extract Audio Visual	
c) <i>Bird</i> Full Movie of Play Reading	
d) Song Extract Audio	
e) <i>Bird</i> Full Reading Audio	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	345

## LIST OF IMAGES

<b>1. Electronic sound frequencies on sand:</b> .....	162
<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS67HA4YMCs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS67HA4YMCs</a> (last accessed 8 <sup>th</sup> July April 2016).	
ACCESS TO IMAGES on USB Drive Provided	
<b>2. Kseniya Simonova's sand animations:</b> .....	163
<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=518XP8prwZo">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=518XP8prwZo</a> (last accessed 8 <sup>th</sup> July April 2016).	
ACCESS TO IMAGES on USB Drive Provided	
<b>3: Satellite Photograph of the Gammon and Flinders Ranges:</b> .....	169
<a href="https://www.google.com.au/maps/@-31.2508801,138.1521396,195037m/data=!3m1!1e3">https://www.google.com.au/maps/@-31.2508801,138.1521396,195037m/data=!3m1!1e3:</a>	
(First accessed February 2013/Last accessed 24 <sup>th</sup> April 2016)	
<b>4. The Road Animation at 00.21 secs.</b> .....	179
Snap-shot of Animation : The Road, by Nic Mollison. Used with permission.	
Full Animation: (USB. Folder: Appendix 2:a. Animations <i>Bird</i> DVD, Quick Time.	
Title: The Road)	
<b>5. The Road Animation at 00.52 secs.</b> .....	179
<b>6. The Road Animation at 02.12 secs.</b> .....	180
<b>7: The Road Animation at 04.10 secs.</b> .....	180
<b>8: The Set Design for <i>Wyrđ</i> by Victoria Lamb</b> .....	263

## ABSTRACT

This practice-led research project explores the possibility of writing ‘sacred theatre’; theatre which tells the story of a ‘sacred experience’ and has the potential to evoke a similar experience in an audience. As a playwright, my aim has been to write two play-scripts, *Wyrd Song* and *Bird* and to explore how theatrical works may be a catalyst for a sacred experience. Although I acknowledge that no audience reaction can be fully guaranteed, the crucial aim of the exegetical research is to explore how different techniques may opportune a specific audience experience. The research begins with my own interpretation of the sacred and then discusses various perspectives on a sacred experience. It then surveys the scholarly literature and theatre practice that speaks to the possibility of a contemporary, western, non-religious ‘sacred theatre’. This survey covers theatre practices which may also be called post-modern, liminal or postdramatic and extends the definition of ‘sacred experience’ to include an experience of *communitas*, transportation, transcendence or *therapia* (healing).

In order to situate my own creative practice within the Australian context I explore six Australian plays which either address the sacred in content or are, in my opinion, concordant with my own creative aims. My analysis of this work constitutes what Haseman (2006) calls an “artistic audit” where the analysis is not “neutral” or objective, but is subjectively targeted towards analyzing *practice* (both writing and performance elements). This artistic audit includes Australian plays written between 1947 and 2002 that have been labeled expressionist, mythopoetic, liminal, hybrid and postdramatic. They are: Kevin Gilbert’s (1968) *The Cherry Pickers*, Peter Kenna’s (1973) *A Hard God*, Patrick White’s (1947) *A Ham Funeral*, Margaret Davis’ (1991) *Isis Dreaming*, Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s (1995) *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and Jenny Kemp’s (2002) *Still Angela*. I then focus on the collaborative dramaturgy of Brink Productions in South

Australia, whose aim to evoke an experience of *communion* or transcendence for an audience shaped the writing and production of *When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell (2008). This play struck me as clear Australian example of sacred theatre. I conclude the artistic audit with a detailed case study of the play's development process and a theoretical analysis of the writing.

I then turn to my own creative practice to analyze how the techniques and processes discovered through exegetical research have informed my own creative practice. The plays *Wyrld Song* and *Bird* are included as part of this analysis. In theorizing my own process, I conclude that techniques of writing which disrupt the rational presentation of time and space are useful to evoke a sacred experience in an audience, but are not always repeatable or applicable to all creative works. As Brook (1993) observed there is no hard and fast 'toolbox' for writing sacred theatre, but there are methods to orchestrate a glimpse of the elusive sacred in the way that a network of moments are constructed on the page.

## 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..  .....

Dated.. 16 February 2017.....

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## INTRODUCTION

### i) PERSONAL STATEMENT

Imagine you are sitting in a theatre audience. The performance you have just witnessed and experienced has reminded you of a connection to something much bigger than yourself; something wholly other to the rational and material. The intricate arrangement of narrative, language, performance, visuals and music has dissolved the perceived boundaries that separate you from everything else. The performance has lifted you out of yourself and made you feel connected, supported, healed and whole. You feel as though you can trust a way of being in the world that you recognize and that you know deeply, but that you ignore or deny in your everyday life.

This was my experience after seeing Pina Bauch's *Blue Beard* and *Kontakthof* as part of the 1982 Adelaide Festival of Arts. Although I had experienced this sense of connection and healing many times in nature, this was the first time I had ever experienced the same feeling in a theatre. It felt like a 'sacred experience' in the theatre. Since then I have experienced this feeling several times, during the performances of: Phillip Glass (1988), *Ten Thousand Aeroplanes on the Roof*, Text by David Henry Hwang with projections by Jerome Sirlin; Robert Wilson/Philip Glass (2014), *Einstein on the Beach*; Japanese Noh Theatre (World Expo, 1988); Theatre de Complicité, *The Winter's Tale* (1992)/*Mnemonic* (2009); Les Deux Mondes, *Leitmotif* (2002); Brink/Bovell, *When the Rain Stops Falling* (2008) and Enoch and Mailman, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (1996).

I do not claim that these practitioners deliberately set out to evoke a 'sacred experience' in an audience, but their creative instinct and practical expertise had managed to achieve this...for me. Le Coq based companies such as Theatre de Complicité and Les Deux Mondes would certainly have had sacred theatre in their sights, since this was an intrinsic part of their training, but what about those examples most commonly associated

with postmodern or postdramatic theatre? What is it within those works that could evoke what I am calling a ‘sacred experience’?

I trained in French Classical theatre with Jean-Laurent Cochet in Paris in the early 1980s. Throughout this time I had friends who were training with Le Coq and we would spend hours discussing the audience-actor connection that we were being encouraged to find through performance. Amongst other theoretical works, I read Brook’s *The Empty Space* (1968) for the first time and went to see many of his productions at the Bouffes du Nord. These were heady days of idealism about the potential for theatre to evoke a sacred experience in an audience. Brook called it “Holy Theatre”, Grotowski called it “communion”, Artaud had called it “metaphysics in action”, Le Coq called it “universal poetic sense” and Cochet called it “presence”. Nonetheless these theorists were teachers and directors of performance; they were concerned with actors and *mise-en-scene*, with lighting, set design, sound-scapes and the unique relationship that can be achieved between performers and audiences. Of course they respected writers, especially great poets, but apart from Brook’s highly articulate appraisals of Shakespeare, there was not much consideration of how sacred theatre could be attempted in the *writing*. It seemed to be a matter of innate talent or genius that a writer could incidentally evoke the sacred while getting on with the nuts and bolts of telling a story. But is this true? Is there a science to it that may be learned? Is there a metaphorical ‘toolbox’ of techniques that could be employed? Is it possible to deliberately write theatre that can evoke a sacred experience?

As a writer, I want to create the kind of work that I love to experience; theatre that makes me feel connected, healed, that dissolves boundaries. Such theatre reminds me of a worldview I know deeply but ignore in the everyday processes of survival. It reminds me of the sacred connection I sometimes feel in nature. Such is my ambition in this practice-led-research, but in order to do that, I must first analyze ‘what works’ and ‘what doesn’t’

in my own creative processes as well as those of others. This thesis then, including two creative artifacts, is an attempt to understand the techniques and processes which contribute to the writing of sacred theatre.

Sheila Duncan

## ii) PROVOCATION

This PhD journey began with the chance reading of a book edited by Ralph Yarrow called *Sacred Theatre* (2007). I picked it up because I was struck by the audacity of the title in a book generated by academic scholars; surprised that the idea of sacred theatre was back on the agenda after what had seemed to me, to be a long absence. However, after reading the book, I realized that its purpose was precisely to re-introduce the idea of sacred theatre as a possibility rather than to make a statement about a definite genre or discourse. In many ways the contributors to *Sacred Theatre* opened up a proverbial “can of worms”, wriggling with questions and unfinished theories, brimming with possibility and begging for a response; a conversation. How could I refuse? I will discuss the book *Sacred Theatre* in detail in Chapter Two. Suffice to say here, that my impulse to begin a PhD was provoked by two questions arising from this book: “What is sacred theatre?” and “Is it possible to consciously and deliberately write it?” These questions provide the conceptual foundation of my research. I arrived at a working definition of sacred theatre as theatre that evokes a phenomenological shift in perception around the relationship between self and the world, but this definition raised important questions such as: “What is sacred?” and “What is a sacred experience?” Clearly, a full exploration of these questions would have taken me way beyond the parameters of this PhD and so in Chapter One I have provided my own definitions as they pertain to my aims as a creative practitioner.

The second question arising from my reading of Yarrow et al (2007): “Is it possible to deliberately write sacred theatre?” emerged because I was dissatisfied with the examples provided by the authors. Much of the book comprises a critical appraisal of the works of several playwrights through the lens of ‘sacred theatre’ with all its elastic definitions. These playwrights include Tom Stoppard, Carol Churchill, David Henry Hwang, Ionesco, Harold Pinter, Genet and Samuel Beckett. It occurred to me that of all the examples discussed; there was probably only one playwright who could have deliberately set out to write a piece of sacred theatre and that was Genet. So, I set up the hypothesis for myself that if the contentions of *Sacred Theatre* were true, then it must be possible to deliberately apply them to the writing of new work. This became the challenge of the creative component of the thesis; to deliberately write plays as blueprints for a potential sacred theatre. The idea of setting up two key research questions, based on the reading of Yarrow et al (2007), one to be addressed through the exegetical work and the other to be addressed via creative practice seemed to be a very clear and achievable process. However, this simple and unidirectional methodology underestimated the complex relationship between creative practice and research.

### **iii) PURPOSE: WHY THIS RESEARCH?**

Although primarily centered on creative practice with the clear intention to write towards sacred theatre, the purpose of this research shifted focus as the relationship between research and practice became more inter-textual and interactive. At first, the relationship between practice-led-research and research-led-practice was confusing to me in that these two directives seemed to have two different objectives. Practice-led-research suggested that creative practice itself was the object of research and the new knowledge generated would be expressed as a new form of creative artifact, augmented by an exegetical

examination of the creative process. Alternatively, research-led-practice suggested that research would contribute to and be expressed through creative practice. I mistook this to mean that the objective of research was to inform the content of the creative work. However, as the hybrid creative and critical approach began to influence and shape my overall thesis, including the creative works, it became clear that the objective of the research–practice relationship was more complex than writing plays and explaining ‘sacred theatre’. It could not be a unidirectional model premised by the simple question–response method I had set up for myself. I discovered that the practice-research relationship is closer to a cybernetic system with feedback loops and subtle inter-relationships. In short, if I was to achieve the objectives of my research, I would need to seek out a more comprehensive methodology.

My initial approach to the creative work was to write three short plays: *Bird*, *Dreamhouse* and *Passionflower*. Each of these plays would focus on what I perceived to be three different aspects of the sacred; perception, place and the contrast between intuitive knowing and learned knowledge. At this early stage, I wanted to make definite statements about the sacred and so my tacit approach at the time was to write stories around these statements. *Bird* was to be a play looking at *perception* of the sacred, premised on a very simple image: a woman (Elise) hits a bird while driving on a country road. The bird flies through the windscreen into her body and she eventually turns into the bird. Her transformation into a bird is accompanied by an increased perception of the sacredness of the land. The second short piece, *Dreamhouse*, was to be a play about *place* and would explore the possibilities of a house triggering experiences of reincarnation, or of a character having lived somewhere before. The third play in the trilogy, *Passionflower*, was to focus on the difference between unexplained knowing and learned Indigenous *knowledge* of the sacred via initiation.

However, after an intense period of re-thinking accompanied by a year of exegetical research, I began to question whether I wanted to write stories *about* the sacred experience, or if I wanted to *evoke* a sacred experience for others. Most of my examples of sacred theatre (Australian and international) had precipitated a sacred experience for me even if some of the pieces did not directly refer to the sacred. I realized that I needed to shift focus from the general aim of writing and researching ‘sacred theatre’, towards the more precise *possibility* of writing and engaging with work which could evoke a ‘sacred experience’ in a theatre audience. The idea of “possibility” comes from Brad Haseman’s (2006) performative research paradigm which I will discuss next, as one of my primary research methodologies. The aim to evoke a particular experience in an audience called for research around audience reception which I discuss briefly in Chapter One.

This refinement in terminology away from the general ‘sacred theatre’ to the more specific ‘sacred experience’ narrowed the purpose of the creative work, but paradoxically opened up the scope and purpose of the exegetical research. Furthermore, during this first year of research, I was negotiating with the Ethics Approval Committee. This process made me reconsider the Indigenous content in my creative works, particularly in *Passionflower*. More specifically, it raised two questions about the purpose of my creative research. Did I want to write about my own perceptions and experiences of the sacred through an entirely subjective lens, culturally situated as a migrant to Australia? Or, did I want to make an objective statement about my perceptions of an Indigenous sacred? This latter approach could be considered to be cultural appropriation and I did not want this to occur.

Creatively these two approaches would result in two very different kinds of plays; the first would be more like an extended monologue where the movement and slant of the piece would come from a purely subjective viewpoint. The second could be more

Brechtian in tone where characters could be conceptual and the construction of story events would inevitably culminate in some form of objective commentary or statement. Even in these early days of my research, I was already beginning to realize that pseudo-objective storytelling could be counterproductive to evoking a ‘sacred experience’. Such ethnic positioning from a white writer around Indigenous conceptions of the sacred was also ethically untenable. I could not claim to objectively know or understand the Indigenous sacred, I could only write from the subjective perspective of my own sacred experience.

As a result of such interrogation, I decided to rethink the plays I had proposed and write my own experiences as two plays instead of three. These were *Bird* and *Wyrd*. *Bird* would now incorporate some of the story elements and thematic ideas of *Passionflower*, while *Wyrd* would have the same premise as *Dreamhouse* but the story would now be set in Scotland. This story would be based on my own experiences around reincarnation and the sense that I have lived in a specific place at some time in the past. *Wyrd* would differ from *Dreamhouse* in that it would incorporate the history of the early Picts, in Fife, Scotland, reflecting the cultural knowledge of my own family and particularly our unquestioned belief in reincarnation and second sight. I should qualify here, that when I talk about reincarnation, I am not referring to the Hindu or Buddhist system of belief, about which my Scottish, working class family knew nothing. I refer to a system of belief generally understood to have been held by the Picts, Druids and the Celts; that we are reincarnated over many lives as an allegiance to certain groups or families and that we sometimes bring knowledge with us from these previous lifetimes.

In the exegetical enquiry the shift in focus from the general term ‘sacred theatre’, a term which many of my research participants rejected, to the more specific concept of ‘sacred experience’, opened up the potential to examine a wider range of Australian examples. I found that while there were many Australian practitioners attempting to create

theatre which could evoke an experience such as a transcendental experience, or a communal experience, they simply did not call this ‘sacred theatre’. This shift in focus meant that more Australian research participants could be included in the exegetical enquiry around how such an experience could be achieved in a theatrical production. It also opened up several other questions.

If my purpose was to evoke a sacred experience in an audience, the obvious question to address would be: “What is a sacred experience?” and “How is this communicated in international and Australian theatrical works?” If there is a precedent, “what techniques and processes were employed to achieve this objective?” So, the purpose of this enquiry shifted as I allowed the relationship between research and practice to become more cybernetic and when I expanded my research methodologies to include wider practice-led-research models.

The creative purpose of this research, then, has been to write two plays, *Bird* and *Wyrd*, later called *Wyrd Song*, which could both speak about and evoke a sacred experience for a theatre audience. I recognize that it is almost impossible to guarantee a specific audience experience since audiences are neither homogenous nor predictable. However, it is possible to isolate the techniques and processes that have the potential to generate or enhance a specific audience experience. Much of this research is about finding those techniques and processes in the works of others and considering how I could use these in my own work. My exegetical aims then, are to: elucidate my use of the terms ‘sacred’ and ‘sacred experience’; situate the scholarly enquiry around sacred theatre; situate my own practice within a body of Australian works which have successfully achieved or at least attempted sacred theatre and outline those techniques and processes which have been effective. The outcomes of this study are threefold: first, the writing of two creative works which deliberately employ the discovered techniques and processes of

evoking a sacred experience for an audience. Secondly, the aim is to analyze the works of Australian practitioners who have created work within the emergent definitions of sacred theatre. Thirdly the ambition is to articulate my own theoretical contribution to the pedagogy of playwriting, playmaking and theatre studies which may enhance the conversation around the *possibility* of a sacred theatre.

#### **iv) PART ONE: POSSIBILITY**

In the endeavor to frame and structure the exegetical work I have borrowed heavily from the writings of Brad Haseman (2006-2009). These collectively argue for performative research as an alternative methodological paradigm to the established qualitative or quantitative approaches to research. In Haseman's paradigm the research is premised by possibility rather than a research problem. It is expressed symbolically through the creative work and theorized as research on practice providing a potential to explore "new epistemologies of practice" (Haseman 2006:3). This means that the starting point for research does not have to be a traditional research question and hypothesis for solution, with rigid methodological constraints, but may be an inventive, experimental methodology where the practitioner is not separated from the process or results. As discussed, this *possibility* allowed me to begin the creative research with an open question: "Is it possible to write theatre which can evoke a sacred experience in an audience?" The paradigm of possibility also allowed me to base the research on my own definitions of the 'sacred' and 'sacred experience'. For me a sacred experience is "a phenomenological shift in ontological perception in relation to self and the world (that is, everything that is not self)". This wider definition of the sacred experience is not based on religious knowledge or practice, but on the experience of dissolution of boundaries between self and not-self in one's perception of being. My observation is that one does not need cultural or religious

knowledge to experience the sacred, but the artist needs a shared cultural framework to express that experience in a meaningful way.

In Chapter Two I survey the works of scholars who have already explored the possibility of sacred theatre or holy theatre such as Ralph Yarrow et al, Peter Brook, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski. In addition, by focusing my research on theatre which evokes a sacred experience, I am able to expand the enquiry in two important ways. First, it allows me to explore the theories of scholars and practitioners who do not necessarily call their approach ‘sacred theatre’, but whose ambitions align with creating a sacred experience for an audience, where that experience also includes healing or *therapia*. This allows me to discuss feminist theories around the sacred, as well as to consider the potential of mytho-poetic, postmodern, liminal and postdramatic theatre to evoke a sacred experience.

Second, this approach allows me to focus the review towards the specific creative findings of these theorists within what Haseman (2006: 8) calls an “artistic audit”, a body of research which augments the traditional literature review as a non-neutral context of practice.

As researchers ‘practice’ and make such work, it is essential they reach beyond their own labours to connect with both earlier and contemporaneous productions which contribute to the overall research context for their work.  
(Haseman, 2006: 8)

This non-neutral approach to the literature allowed me to frame the research within my own specific contexts and ambitions. In other words, aside from establishing that the possibility of sacred theatre had been considered by previous scholars and practitioners, in Chapter Two the purpose of research is also to understand *how* these findings could contribute to my own creative process.

## v) PART TWO: ARTISTIC AUDIT

By employing Haseman's idea of an "artistic audit" in search of the possibility of sacred theatre (Chapter Two), I have been able to consider a wider range of Australian work within the enquiry, including works that had previously been labeled expressionist, mythopoetic, liminal, hybrid and postdramatic. My decision to focus on Australian works in the artistic audit, rather than investigate international examples, was based on curiosity but also the necessity to limit the scope of research to a specific time and place. As an Australian playwright I wanted to establish a context for my own creative practice but also to discover "what works" in the Australian environment and why. Before I began this research, I had but two Australian examples of plays which I considered to be sacred theatre: Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling* and Enoch and Mailman's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. My task in conducting an artistic audit was to find other Australian examples with a view to analyzing their script construction and production processes. Having read hundreds of plays which seemed to reinforce my initial preconception that not many writers were attempting sacred theatre in the Australian cannon, I eventually began to find examples where aspects of a broader definition of the sacred appeared in the content of the writing. In order to control the scope of the artistic audit, I have excluded writers such as Louis Nowra, Daniel Keane and even Dorothy Hewett. I decided to concentrate on works by Kevin Gilbert, Peter Kenna and Patrick White, because for me they are pioneers in broaching the subject of 'sacred' in an era when that word was met with increasing skepticism. I also include the work of Jenny Kemp and Margaret Davis, because they attempt to portray the liminal, the mytho-poetic and the mystical in their work, reflecting an alternative perception of reality.

The purpose of this artistic audit of Australian work is not simply to describe the various theatre productions I have chosen as examples of sacred theatre, but to interrogate

the methodologies of practitioners through the specific analytical lenses relevant to my own enquiry. Once again my analysis is not neutral, but targeted towards analyzing *practice* (both writing and performance elements) which either demonstrates efficacy in evoking a sacred experience, or has addressed the sacred in some way. For example, if the sacred is considered in the content, through form, as *therapia*, or in the ambition to achieve a specific audience experience such as *communitas*, transportation, or transcendence.

Such analysis has involved broadening my theoretical approach beyond performance theory, to include some concepts emerging from anthropology, psychology and phenomenology. The incorporation of cross disciplinary theories was not *ad hoc*, but emerged from the creative works under scrutiny. For example, works which attempt the kind of liminality and ludic deconstruction found in ritual are theorized using concepts developed by anthropologists such as Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1967-90). Works which employ semiotic vectorization with a synchronistic structure are theorized through the lens of theatre semiologists such as Pavis and psychologists such as Jung. I have structured the analysis of Australian works into three chronological chapters, because the historical contexts of the work determine the approach to the sacred in content and form.

In Chapter Three I examine three Australian plays written and performed between 1947 and 1975. This period corresponds to a theatrical context best known as the *New Wave* in Australia. *New Wave* writers were predominantly concerned with the articulation of a unique Australian identity and culture, through the genre of social realism and use of the Australian vernacular. The three plays studied in this chapter stand out from the *New Wave* in that they approach the sacred and do so from various perspectives. Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* (1968) directly confronts the loss of the indigenous sacred relationship to the land as a loss of culture and identity. Peter Kenna's *A Hard God* (1973),

confronts the loss of Catholic faith and religion as a moral framework in Australian society. Patrick White's *A Ham Funeral* (1947) explores the tension between the ephemeral inner sanctum of the psyche and the harsh realities of a practical life. As I did not see the productions of these plays, I have explored the ways the sacred has been treated in the form and content of the writing only.

From the late seventies to the new millennium, four significant shifts in the development of theatre practice impacted on the way the sacred was explored in Australian Theatre. Chapter Four begins by outlining these four major shifts: new training technologies incorporating the theories of European practitioners, particularly those discussed in Chapter Two, a new focus on international audiences, the rise of women's theatre and the rise of indigenous theatre. The three plays analyzed in this chapter reflect these new developments. *Isis Dreaming* (1991) by Margaret Davis is an attempt at *therapia* encompassing a Jungian and feminist approach to psychological healing through telling the story of the mythic Goddess Isis. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (1995) by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman aims at cultural healing through storytelling and the reassertion of the sacred relationship between nature, the land and indigenous culture; resonant with the concept of "reversibility" coined and theorized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1987). Jenny Kemp's (2002) *Still Angela* explores the interface between the inner world of the psyche and the outer world of reality via a woman caught in liminal space and vertical time.

In Chapter Five, the artistic audit continues with an exploration of the work of Adelaide based company Brink Productions concluding in a case study of Andrew Bovell's (2008) *When the Rain Stops Falling*. Most of the material in this chapter comes from interviews conducted with the Artistic Director, Chris Drummond and playwright Andrew Bovell around their creative processes. Drummond outlines his ideal theatre as

“transcendent”, although he does not go so far as to call it sacred theatre. Consistent with the company’s stated ambition to foster an experience of *communion* with the audience, Drummond’s approach is one of collaborative dramaturgy exploring liminal and heterotopic space and non-linear time. In this Chapter, I consider the collaborative approach of Brink Productions as a potential ideal framework for the writing of sacred theatre. My analysis of *When the Rain Stops Falling* explores amongst other techniques and processes, the theories of Jung’s (1960) *synchronicity*, Foucault’s (1984) *heterotopias* and Pavis’ (1997) *vectorization of signs* in the overall construction of the piece.

As a result of this comprehensive artistic audit over three chapters, I was able to situate my own creative ambitions within the Australian context, but also to develop a list of possible techniques and processes towards the aim of writing theatre which could evoke a sacred experience in an audience.

#### **vi) PART THREE: CREATIVE WORKS AND PRACTICE AS RESEARCH**

In Part Three of the thesis, I describe and analyze the journey and process of writing the two major artifacts of this practice-led project in two separate chapters. In Chapter Six I discuss the creative process involved in the writing of the play *Bird* which involved radically altering my usual approach. The full play script of *Bird* is included at the end of Chapter Six. Support material for *Bird* including computer generated animations and a recorded play-reading may be found on the USB Drive provided called Appendix Two.

In Chapter Seven, I describe and analyze the writing processes of the play *Wyrd Song*, which has had an incredible journey from film treatment to novel to a three-hour play and finally to a short play with songs. The play script of *Wyrd Song* is provided at the end of Chapter Seven.

Both of these plays have benefited from the generous input of creative practitioners working within the Flinders University Drama Department. The development of *Bird* was also greatly assisted by a Workshop Funding grant of \$2,800.00 from Flinders University's Faculty of Education Humanities and Law. The workshop culminated in a small public reading which enabled me to survey audience members about their response to the play.

Three distinctive practice-as-research methodologies have informed the exegetical chapters and the creative works. Much of the analysis and practice is based on Haseman's (2006) *Performative Research Paradigm* as well as his paper co-written with Daniel Mafe (2009) around the concept of "mess". Two further practice-led-research models have been useful to shape the creative works and articulate the analysis; these are Paul Carter's (2010) three conditions model in 'The Ethics of Invention' and Estelle Barrett's (2010) 'Foucault's "What is an author": Towards a critical discourse of practice as research'. Barrett has provided two clear models which I have used to structure the analysis of my creative work and to reflect on creative practice. Carter's concept of "Material Thinking" in particular has been instrumental as an approach to redrafting the creative works. It has also enabled me to direct the exegetical research towards finding efficacious techniques and practices for evoking a sacred experience in an audience. Since the methodologies articulated by these authors have influenced my entire thesis, particularly Chapters Six and Seven including the creative works, I will take some time here to briefly outline their main points.

Haseman's (2006) performative research paradigm differs from traditional quantitative and qualitative paradigms of research, because the research outputs express fundamentally different views not only of the world, but of how knowledge is created. Quantitative research expresses its outcomes as a quantity (or amount), in numbers, graphs or formulas. Qualitative research expresses its outcomes as discursive writing through

words. In contrast, performative research not only expresses its outcomes through investigating the processes of expression, but also (and Haseman argues principally) through the performative and symbolic data generated by the artifact itself.

For me, the research outcome challenge has been to create two artifacts (play scripts) that would generate a very specific effect: a sacred experience. However, since the writing of these two plays (my own practice) occurred concurrently with investigations into the theoretical and practice-based-research of others, it became increasingly difficult to separate my own processes from those found in the ‘artistic audit’. As the creative works progressed, I could not clearly articulate whether I was being influenced by others and thereby appropriating their techniques and approaches, or whether addressing the gaps in my own practice, had guided me to focus on how others had addressed similar problems. Haseman & Mafe’s (2009) ‘Acquiring Know-how: research training for practice-led researchers’ addresses this “messiness” by suggesting that practice-led researchers are constantly embroiled in the problems of “emergence” and “complexity”, where many parts/relationships and interactions and synergies take place. These often occur symbolically and the combined effect may be unexpected or surprising. A major part of the research process then, is the reflective practice brought about via the “mess”, which they argue contributes to a different kind of knowing, characterized by affect (2009:223).

For the creative practitioner, emergence and reflexivity are much more than distracting variables in the research which need controlling. Instead they are both foundational and constituting; operating at practically every level of the research, and this is what makes it difficult, messy and at times a frustrating endeavour for the creative researcher. (Haseman & Mafe 2009:219)

These concepts of emergence, complexity and reflexivity are very familiar to me as a creative practitioner, but in the academic environment I found such “messiness” to be even more complex because I was preoccupied with the concepts of ‘research’ and ‘research-

led-practice'. I found myself wanting to incorporate 'research' into the creative projects in ways that were detrimental to their creative aims. For example, in the play *Wyrd*, my research into Scottish history began to infiltrate the writing to such a degree that it changed the focus of the play. Similarly, in the play *Bird*, my research into Uranium mining threatened to overwhelm the mythopoetic content and style. As a creative practitioner in the academic environment, I struggled with a crucial tension between proof and possibility, subjectivity and objectivity and the imagined and the real.

### vii) THE ETHICS OF INVENTION

In 'The Ethics of Invention' Carter presents a "three conditions model" which begins with a perception of "lack" in the cultural environment and a subsequent need to create a new "invention". He calls this a "forming situation", which "articulates the sensation that something is *missing* in the cultural environment: a sensation of lack, loss or absence" (Carter: 210:21). Carter maintains that this forming situation originates outside of the artist, but that the artist responds to this perceived lack in a "discursive momentum leading to the realization of new symbolic form" (22). At first I found Carter's model to be useful as a way of identifying what I first perceived to be a "lack" of sacred theatre practice in Australia.

However, after more detailed research in the Australian context, I have found instead that many artists were attempting to create what I call 'sacred theatre', but it was still very much an experimental process. Using Carter's idea of a forming situation, I realized that there was a perceived lack by many theatre practitioners, both International and Australian around spiritual or holy theatre, (Peter Brook calls it a "hunger"), but a very scattered articulation of the processes or practices needed to address this. Indeed, much of the accepted pedagogy around playwriting is often counter-productive to achieving a

sacred experience for an audience. Such pedagogy and practice had therefore been abandoned by many of the practitioners I have studied, in favour of a collaborative process. This “lack” of pedagogy around writing sacred theatre was particularly evident in my own creative practice and became a principal research question in the exegesis.

According to Carter, once this lack is recognized, the enquiry moves towards a second condition, one of “discursive momentum”, which entails creating a discourse between artist, materials, experimentation, collaboration and negotiation. Carter refers to such a discourse as “material thinking”, where “materials” can be “documents, images, sites, animate bodies or the situation itself” (22) and where the artist actively undercuts or changes the accepted logic of production in order to achieve a new form. Material thinking involves a deconstruction and “mashing up” of existing knowledge, including tacit, learned and experienced knowledge, towards a deliberate aim or manifesto for creating new knowledge and new cultural product. This thinking includes the interrogation of existing materials at one’s disposal. To simplify, if an artist keeps using the same tools and the same means of production, there is a limited chance of achieving new knowledge or cultural product. For me, material thinking within the discursive momentum has involved reassessing my own creative processes and exploring other more effective practices or techniques that I could utilize.

The quest for a more effective kit of tools, techniques and processes to write sacred theatre became a primary focus of my thesis, both in the exegetical and creative ambitions. For example, I was trained and have been successful as a playwright through my ability to tell a good story. This is a traditional and highly commercial form of writing, utilizing a teleological, Aristotelian, beginning, middle and end structure. However, my research has shown that a ‘sacred experience’ occasions itself outside of logic, chronology and *telos*. A major part of my own material thinking was to recognize that new tools were required for

my own discursive and creative toolkit. As my research developed however, and I began to apply this research to creative practice, I recognized that there is no hard and fast rule of application. What works for one creative endeavor or practitioner does not always work for another.

The third condition in Carter's model is the *necessity* of the new form or invention itself. In my own case: "Why write sacred theatre?" and "What is the perceived benefit of this new 'invention' to industry partners?" Here, Carter dissuades practitioners from the pursuit of defined outcomes since this pre-emptively lays down parameters presuming that "no further investigation" is required (23). Rather, the observations found within discursive momentum, may raise more questions than they answer, thus "firming up the territorial security of those who come after" (17). For Carter, one of the primary functions of creative research "is to study, document and valorize those periods in which the usual logic of combination is suspended" (22).

### **viii) WHAT IS AN AUTHOR?**

Estelle Barrett (2010) draws upon Foucault's (1991) essay "What is an author?" to apply his theories around discourse formation as a model for the practice-led researcher.

Foucault's essay interrogates the idea of the author as a single "original" contributor to new knowledge or the written work as a unique creation. He asserts instead, that the work operates as a mode of existence reflecting and circulating the procedures and systems of those discourses, already operating within society. For Foucault, the "author function" lies in questioning these discourses to acknowledge which aspects have been appropriated and how they have been utilized; a process which involves the author dispersing into different "selves" (Foucault, 1991:118-119). Barrett constructs two clear comparative tables from Foucault's essay. One shows a relationship between "Author Function" and thesis

construction, while the other draws from Foucault's notion of "Dispersed Selves" to assist in the analysis of creative process (Barrett, 2010: 139-141).

Starting with Foucault's first stage of "author function", Barrett's model guides the researcher to identify the methodological, conceptual and other filiations within the current project and possible other projects (139). This preliminary stage roughly corresponds to Chapter Two, where I outline the conceptual thinking around Sacred Theatre and attempt to situate myself as a playwright within the discourse. The second stage in the Barrett/Foucault model serves to map the genesis of ideas in the artist's own work as well as the works of others.

The aim here is to acknowledge shared influences; to trace the way the studied works interrelate contextually and to identify gaps in analytical and practice based knowledge. This second process corresponds in my own work, to the detailed analysis of "Practice in Australia" which I have called Part Two: Artistic Audit. The third phase of Foucault's "author function" process is modeled by Barrett (2010:139) as the assessment phase. In this phase the researcher articulates the way that understandings accumulated through the previous two phases have influenced and shaped the overall thesis including the creative component. In other words, how the research has extended the artist's tacit and practical knowledge and how this new knowledge can be applied by others.

I have found the Foucault/Barrett "Dispersed Selves" model useful in structuring the analysis in Part Three of my exegesis. In the "Dispersed Selves" model the author is divided into: the self that speaks the preface (situating themselves); the self that makes general claims to symbols and constructs (adopting an approach); and the self that speaks to tell the works possible meaning, obstacles and results (Barrett 2010: 140-141).

However, Barrett makes an important contribution to Foucault's thesis. For Barrett, "Situated Knowledge" does not only include explicit and exact knowledge but also

includes tacit knowledge including “lived experience” (143). Such inclusion could lead to a tension between “lived experience” and “situated knowledge”. If lived experience is outside of or cannot be articulated by the existing discourse, then new methods and frameworks must be invented. For Barrett this is precisely the role of creative practice as a research. Such tension has been reflected in my own creative process, where situated knowledge - tacit and learned knowledge about playwriting - was at odds with my lived experience of the sacred. Barrett acknowledges that this tension cannot be addressed with Foucault’s thesis alone and recommends Paul Carter’s (2010) *three conditions model* (described above) to address the discrepancy.

I have found these three practice-led-research methodologies to be complementary, in that they pertain to different aspects of the overall thesis. Haseman’s ‘performative paradigm’ has helped to structure and focus the exegetical work as well as to facilitate and articulate the creative works. Carter’s model has been instrumental in engaging me in the process of ‘material thinking’, where developing new tools and strategies have been imperative in order to create a new ‘invention’; sacred theatre. The Foucault/Barrett “Dispersed Selves” model has assisted in articulating tensions found in writing of this thesis, including the creative works. There is a discernable difference in my writing style between the analytical chapters in Parts One and Two, the reflective chapters Six and Seven, and the creative works themselves. This highlights one of the many challenges intrinsic to the creative based PhD, where practice and analysis sometimes require an entirely different language. Following the “Dispersed Selves” model, I have allowed myself to move between writing styles which range from etic to emic analysis, subjective observation and creative writing.

In Chapter Eight, my conclusions do not aim to present solutions as such, rather a series of potential stepping stones towards sacred theatre which are borne out in the

creative works themselves. I do not claim these to be definitive examples of theatre that evokes a 'sacred experience' in an audience, but they are a valiant attempt to do so, experimenting with new techniques and processes that I would not have previously considered. In this final exegetical Chapter, I describe and analyze the main discoveries of my research, including those creative practices most efficacious in evoking a 'sacred experience' in an audience. Such practices have been discovered amongst the artistic audit of other Australian and International practitioners, as well as through the discursive momentum and material thinking involved in my own creative practice.

My main finding is that some techniques of writing which disrupt the rational or logical presentation of time and space are useful to evoke the idea of 'sacred' for audiences, but there is no magic formula or 'sacred experience' toolbox. What ultimately defines sacred theatre in contrast to absurdist, postmodern or existential theatre is that there is an underlying and well-constructed reconfiguration of the disrupted logic as an alternative 'unity'. This 'unity' does not need to be an Aristotelian unity, but it does have a unique and logically consistent framework, such as a net, a web or an atomic structure. Within works of successful sacred theatre, there is an intrinsic unity of written, semiotic and performative elements which occasionally pulls down the veil of rational separation between self and other, self and objects or self and the world. The glimpse of an underlying, overwhelming and profoundly ancient connection between all things is thus revealed.

## **PART ONE: POSSIBILITY**

### **CHAPTER ONE: Sacred Experience and Audience Experience**

### **CHAPTER TWO: Sacred Theatre**

## CHAPTER ONE:

### SACRED EXPERIENCE AND AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

This thesis is premised upon my own personal conviction that a sacred experience does not necessarily imply a religious experience. Nor is sacred knowledge always religious knowledge, but it may be intuitive or divined knowledge, such as that described by Foucault as *divinatio* (Foucault 1970:59). More importantly for this creative research project, I do not presuppose that a theatre which can evoke a sacred experience is necessarily a religious theatre, but it does point to a way of seeing and being in the world that is beyond the rational and material. For me, a sacred experience promotes a phenomenological shift in perception about one's relationship to the world that leaves one feeling deeply connected to that world.

The word *sacred* (from the Latin *sacer*) implies in its etymology, the divine and venerated as well as the terrifying. In his seminal work *Das Heilige* (1917, translated 1923, *The Idea of the Holy*) Rudolf Otto argues that the non-rational in the sacred or holy corresponds to a notion of the *numinous*, (from Latin *numen*: God) which he characterizes as the holy/sacred minus its moral and rational aspects. He claims that the sacred experience always reveals an aspect of divine or superior power or mystery and that the 'sacred' or 'holy' manifests as something "wholly other" to human logic; "a totally different order of reality from the natural realities" (Otto, 1923:11-12). This 'wholly other' is not constructed by humans, but may be perceived and represented by humans in myth, story and the concept of religion itself. A perception or experience of this "wholly other" may present as a recognized mythical, spiritual or religious phenomenon, or it may present itself as a glimpse into the energetic/atomic connection that comprises the totality of the universe. My own understanding and definition of the sacred comes from this latter concept which can be best described through basic atomic theory.

## 1.1 THE SACRED AS CONNECTION

In *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra (1975/1989) points out that quantum physics “forces us to see the universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole” (1989:150). Even the atom is not an independently existing entity, but a set of highly integrated and reciprocal relationships. There is no hierarchy between atomic particles and more importantly, there is no objectivity, no moral judgment and no concept of profane. Absolutely everything in the universe is made of these reciprocal relationships; the energy and intelligence that keep electrons and protons spinning around neutrons. It is the nature and complexity of these relationships that constitutes matter and differentiates form or things. It is easy to see the difference between ‘things’; between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between ‘self’ and ‘other’. It takes effort and sometimes an accidental epiphany to see the underlying web; the anterior of things. Foucault calls this underlying network the “anterior signs” (Foucault 1970:59) that are first perceived through *divinatio* and then communicated through a series of *signatures of resemblance* (1970:17-25). If one looks at the anterior web of signs through the lens of these signatures of resemblances, then the interpretation of the sacred becomes a symbolic and cultural process, where sacred spirits, gods and goddesses take on a recognizable anthropomorphic or animistic form. If, however, one looks at this web of relations through a different lens, a microscope for example, where the invisible becomes visible, there is no anthropomorphism necessary. The universe is revealed as a network that has no single mind and yet it is intrinsically intelligent and replete with highly reciprocal relationships.

This perception of the universe reminds me that I am not separate but connected at atomic level to all other beings and things in existence. When I contemplate the underlying unity of all things, I am reminded that everything in the universe, including myself, is sacred. In my everyday life I may ignore the sacred, but every now and then, something

reminds me; an accidental *epiphany* reveals that I am integral to something much bigger and wholly other to my limited, rational perception.

I emphasize the concept of the epiphany because I suspect that the structure of epiphany may facilitate a sacred experience in a theatrical event. Epiphanies occur when the symbolic, physical and psychological circumstances of an individual's life are ordered in such a way that some sudden shift in perception, or realization of truth, is all at once revealed. They are a flash of perception, that once experienced cannot be forgotten or dismissed. Epiphanies do not have to be around matters sacred, but when they are, there is an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu*; the sudden and complete revelation of something one has always known (*gnosis*), dare I say at an atomic level, but has conveniently forgotten.

For me, the sacred is not characterized by a set of objects or behaviours but an underlying set of relationships closer to atomic intelligence, where there is no concept of not-sacred: there is no 'profane'. The sacred is the "anterior", the web, the interconnectedness of all things and beings. When we glimpse the sacred in those brief and fleeting moments of epiphany, or noetic moments, we experience a phenomenological shift accompanied by the deeply refreshing knowledge that we are all "one". It is the contention of this thesis that such an experience is not only possible, but possible in the theatre.

## **1.2 SACRED EXPERIENCE**

In their rich and complex book *The Feminine and the Sacred*, Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva (2001) disengage the sacred from its conflation with religion and attempt to bring their theorizing of the sacred back to experience, specifically within the female body. For Clement the female experience of the sacred in spontaneous trance, for example, is an unconscious act of rebellion against oppression. "The sacred among women may express an instantaneous revolt that passes through the body and cries out" (2001: 10). Kristeva

claims that due to her ability to give life, the sacred connection between body/meaning and therefore life and meaning is biologically stronger for a woman. Citing Husserl's concept of the "porousness of being" and Merleau-Ponty's idea of "flesh", she maintains that a woman, even outside of the trance, experiences a perception of the sacred that overrides the mind-body dichotomy on a daily basis because she is a "distillation of flesh within the mind, and vice versa" (2001: 16). Here these theorists argue in their own way, that females have access to the sacred by virtue of their embodiment and oppression. I don't completely agree with the essentializing nature of these assertions. However, I understand that the authors are writing in a specific historical context and trying to distance themselves from a patriarchal Christian and male interpretation of the sacred which excludes the female body and its experiences.

Despite the fact that these writers frequently disagree about the nature of the sacred experience, they concur that the religious and the sacred are distinctly different and that the sacred *pre-dates* the religious (2001: 30). Clement, in particular, is clear that whereas religion creates a cleavage between good and evil, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden, the sacred is "sublime" in the Kantian (1781) sense of the word, in that it short circuits the division of such concepts based on reason or knowledge. For Clement, the sacred supports a sensibility of understanding. "So yes, the sacred authorizes the lapse, the disappearance of the Subject, the syncope, vertigo, the trance, ecstasy, the 'above the roof so blue'" (2001: 30). For Kristeva the sacred experience shatters order and introduces another kind of order; the sublimation of reason. "Your saints and my priestesses abolish decency in the face of God; now we have returned to square one of the sublime according to Immanuel Kant" (2001: 122). So, here with words like lapse, disappearance of the subject, vertigo and sublime, there are echoes of Rudolf Otto (1917) who characterized the sacred experience as "numinous", and "wholly other" to the rational.

This has creative implications for my thesis, for if one is to evoke a sacred experience, one must evidently work outside of the rational and even outside of hegemony. As my research bears out, it is not merely shattering order which evokes a sacred experience, but the reconstruction of a new symbolic order. This is particularly the case with the reassertion of a female interpretation of the sacred to be considered in Chapters Two and Four.

Otto describes the sacred experience as “*mysterium tremendum*”, clearly differentiating it from the rationality of the everyday experience (Otto, 1923:11-12). For Otto this experience cannot be sustained, but is momentary and must be relinquished precisely *because* it is irrational. Building on Otto’s claim, Mircea Eliade (1957:9) suggests the sacred experience is awe-inspiring in that emanates from an overwhelming superiority of power, accompanied by a feeling of terror. Furthermore, this sacred mode of “being” is one of perception or “positioning”. The sacred may be ongoing and all around us, but we may only glimpse it for short periods and in certain states. The sacred experience is a flash, a shift in perception away from the rational; an epiphany.

In ‘Religion and the Sacred’ from *Georges Bataille: Essential Writing* (1998), Bataille argues that the sacred experience is essentially a communion. Furthermore, the sacred experience is the opposite of transcendence, but is more precisely immanence, that is, inherently within. This is where the sacred and religion differ for Bataille and where he, along with Merleau-Ponty begin to step outside of the Western epistemology of the sacred and align with the thinking of quantum physics and Eastern mysticism. For Bataille, as for Kristeva and Clements, the sacred predates and transcends religion, but for him the sacred experience itself is one of immanent communion, outside of the reasoning and knowledge of religion. This communion may be a silent experience, but may also result in an unleashing of passion. Once again there is a disassociation between the rational and the

sacred, but this time the sacred “communion” does not deny the body. For Bataille a sacred experience dissolves the mind-body dichotomy (Cartesian split) and this is why he calls it immanence rather than transcendence. It is not an out of body experience, but a body/mind fusion of phenomenological *remembering* accompanied by enormous energy, or passion (Richardson, 1998:42). Communion is not a one-way transaction, from the gods to humans; it is a reciprocal state of being which dissolves boundaries and illusions of separation between “us” and “them”, the “sacred” and the “profane”. Communion also involves what Merleau-Ponty calls “reversibility”, which I will explore next.

The ‘sacred experience’ regains philosophical credence over ‘sacred knowledge’ in most theoretical works after Bataille. However, it is within the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty that the body becomes the primary site of experience and knowing.

Phenomenological perception is described as an interaction between the body and the “flesh” of the world. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty (1945), departs from his predecessors Husserl and Heidegger, in that he disputes the semantic paradigm that perception is directed by ideas: abstract constructs of things formed in consciousness. Merleau-Ponty’s primary contention is that “we are *open onto* the world and that we are *embedded* in it” (Carman, 2012: xi). In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, perception is not a mode of thought, indeed it is the opposite. It is a “flash of recognition (of) what ... we must already have comprehended, but had forgotten precisely owing to our immersion in the visible world” (Carman, 2012: xvi). In other words, perception is *a priori* a sensorial process of the body, not an intellectual one (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 93).

Within this framework, the experience of perception can never be objective, abstract or outside of the body. Perception is an interaction between the body and the environment. It is a relationship. Furthermore, this is not a unidirectional relationship, but

reciprocal, what Merleau-Ponty called “Double sensations” which he later went on to develop as the concept of “reversibility”.

When I touch my right hand with my left hand, the object “right hand” also has this strange property itself, of sensing...the two hands can alternate between the functions of “touching” and “touched”. ...The body catches itself from the outside in the process of exercising a knowledge of function; it attempts to touch itself touching, it begins “a sort of reflection” and this would be enough to distinguish it from objects. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012:95)

The concept of “reversibility” will become extremely important later in this thesis when I discuss the plays *The Cherry Pickers* (Chapter Three) and *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Chapter Four). It also has relevance to the concept of reversibility of time that I bring into the analysis of Kemp’s *Still Angela* (Chapter Four). I have found Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “flesh” to be highly relevant in describing and defining my own experiences of the sacred. It comes closer than theological descriptions in defining the kind of ‘sacred experience’ I am attempting to evoke in a theatre audience, so I will outline this concept in more detail.

In his last and incomplete work, *The Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1968) moves away from phenomenology towards the ontology of the “the flesh of the world” (*la chair du monde*), also discussed in his last published essay, “Eye and Mind” (Baldwin, 2004). In these later works, including the last unpublished chapter “The Chiasm”, the concept of “reversibility” dissolves the subject/object distinction. The term chiasm designates the “optic chiasm”; that place in the brain where the two focusing eyes intertwine and are interdependent. In other words, the subject of vision and the object of vision are equally and necessarily empowered to “see” and perceive each other. Merleau-Ponty uses this term to indicate a new conception of the body which combines subjective experience and objective existence, building on the previously quoted phenomenon of one hand touching the other.

In this later paper he suggests that “flesh” involves the tactile experience of touching and the reversible principle of being touched, showing the ambiguous status of our bodies as both subject and object (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 106). The relationship is reciprocal and equal in power. Merleau-Ponty calls this “reversibility” and describes it not as a state of “perception” but a relationship of “being”. In other words, we cannot stand objectively apart from the world and “observe” it. We are reminded through the body that we are embedded in and continuously in relationship with what David Abram (1996) calls the “interdependent web of earthly life”. This is the matrix that underlies the interdependent relationship between all things, including the perceiver and the perceived (Abram, 1996: 66). In an earlier analysis of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “flesh”, Abram (1988) refers to this as an experience of *depth* and suggests that contrary to the assertions of dualistic psychology, Merleau-Ponty was one of the first to demonstrate that this experience is not created in the brain or posited by the mind, rather it is discovered or remembered as something already there in the body. Perception unfolds into *depth* because the brain, like the rest of the body, is already embedded in a world which has a sensitive physiology in its own right.

I suggest that in the moment when one experiences the reversibility of “flesh”, that “flash of recognition”, there is a phenomenological shift in perception that leads to an intrinsic shift in knowledge about one’s being in the world. This shift in knowledge and being could be an epiphany. Hindu and Buddhist philosophers call it *sphota* (that from which the meaning bursts forth). Psychologist William James’ (1902) coined the term ‘noetic’ to describe those states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. Noetic describes not only an experience, but significant illuminations gained from that experience, which are transient, but authoritative enough to remain as intrinsic knowledge. Importantly such knowledge is not gained through reason but through

subjective perception and a sense of revelation. Furthermore, such experiences often give a sensation of “the oneness of everything” (Inglis, 1989: 254-255).

Several key descriptions of a sacred experience have emerged here which will inform the aims of my creative work and the analysis of works in Part Two. The sacred experience is a revolt from reason which may short-circuit hegemony, it is non-rational and momentary, a flash of perception, an epiphany. The sacred experience may be one of immanence, transcendence or communion. It may be a flash of recognition and remembering, or dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy. What characterizes this experience is a phenomenological shift in perception about one’s relationship to oneself and the world. My first question is: “how do I translate this individual experience into an audience experience?” My second question is: “Is such a uniform audience experience even possible?”

### **1.3 AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE**

Marvin Carlson argues that no two theatre audience members see exactly the same play because the complexity and openness of theatre semiotics provides the spectator with a “unique and individual ‘synchronic’ reading as the play moves forward diachronically” (Carlson 1990:99). Furthermore, Hans Robert Jauss (1982:23) argues that each audience member brings its own “horizon of expectations” to the theatre experience based on previous theatre experiences but also lived praxis and social experience. Attempting to evoke a consistent and homogenous experience in a theatre audience seems an impossible task. Even performances of the same play in different eras and production contexts will affect a different reading as Susan Bennett (1997:50) examples with an analysis of different performances of Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*. Her analysis is also an example of

the conservative nature of audiences, suggesting that the immediate reaction to new symbolic forms is one of resistance.

Stanley Fish (1980:171) maintains that readers can be a normative force because they form a stable “interpretive community”. These interpretive communities share ‘interpretive strategies’ which shape not only the reading of a text, but also which texts will be chosen for publication and production. Fish’s theories around interpretive communities and the normative role of the reader have political and aesthetic implications for any theatre that is trying to say something outside of the dominant ideology or form. Theatre practitioners who seek to stimulate audiences into new experiences have therefore needed to develop new aesthetic strategies and ways of engaging an audience.

In early reception studies based on the work of Sigmund Freud, Norman Holland (1968:62) suggests that “all texts have a central core of fantasy” and that audiences need and create meaning by employing a set of adaptive strategies and problem solving. They will suspend disbelief, for example, in order to uphold the fantasy on stage. In the absence of extant textual meaning, such as in the works of Ionesco, audiences will participate in the creation of their own meaning (cited in Bennett, 1997:37). In other words, audiences are not simply passive ‘readers’ of proscribed meaning, but become engaged by theatre if it gives them the opportunity to participate in the construction of meaning. The aim to engage the audience as participants in the construction of meaning entails a careful consideration and placement of semiotic triggers in the overall aesthetics of the theatrical work. I will consider the dynamics of this engagement process as ‘ludic reconstruction’ in my brief analysis of ritual in the next chapter.

Such ‘reconstruction’ also involves re-thinking the relationships between signs and possibly removing some semiotic codes all together. An early example of this comes from Antonin Artaud who argued that the evocation of a spiritual experience in the theatre

would require the abandonment of “text” as the primary conveyor of meaning in theatre (Artaud, 1958:44). The subsequent loss of language based “text” as the primary semiotic paradigm in theatre allowed for the interchangeability of other texts and signs as well as the proliferation of signs evident in postmodern and postdramatic works. Wolfgang Iser (1978) argues that the engagement of a reader or audience member is achieved through structured blanks and negations, which the spectator then feels compelled to fill. As a result of these blanks, the spectator becomes both the producer and receiver of meaning. Such engagement creates a sense of “decentred subjectivity” which, I believe could correspond to the ‘sacred experience’ I am attempting with my own work.

What interests me most in the ‘sacred experience’ is the dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy. This may arrive in moments of perception which can be achieved by chance, by trance and/or dedicated practice. Merleau-Ponty calls this experience the “reversibility of flesh”, Otto calls it “*mysterium tremendum*” and Bataille calls it “immanent communion”. I posit that a sacred experience entails a phenomenological shift in ontological perception around the relationships and boundaries between the self and not-self (the world). Ultimately, this shift reinforces the knowledge deeply entrenched, but almost forgotten, that we are indeed all intrinsically and irrevocably connected.

## CHAPTER TWO: SACRED THEATRE

In this chapter I examine the scholarly and practice led literature around discourses pertaining to and within sacred theatre, holy theatre, postmodern, liminal and postdramatic theatre from the perspective of a creative practitioner. It is not my aim to write a comprehensive coverage of these competing, overlapping and often contradictory theoretical discourses. Rather, my focus is on selective theoretical concepts and creative practice methodologies that not only inform the analysis of the Australian works considered in Part Two, but also influence my own creative practice towards writing sacred theatre, examined in Part Three.

As a starting point I outline the theories of sacred theatre discussed by Yarrow and his contributors (2007) and the concept of ‘Holy Theatre’ discussed by Peter Brook (1968). Sacred theatre is frequently associated with ritual and the efficacy of ritual to affect *therapia* or healing and the shared experience of *communitas* through a ludic reconstruction of the symbolic order in the liminal state. A brief review of how ritual has been theorized to achieve this effect, in both anthropology and contemporary theatre, is considered in this section. I explore the way sacred theatre as *therapia* has influenced feminist reclamations of the sacred through poetic language and the mytho-poetic form. Some of my initial examples of sacred theatre such as the work of Pina Bausch and Robert Wilson have been theorized as postmodern theatre, suggesting that there are elements or techniques within this discourse that may evoke a phenomenological shift in perception. Dissatisfied with the term ‘postmodern theatre’ analyst Susan Broadhurst has theorized the work of Bausch and Wilson under the banner of liminal theatre (1999). Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that the postmodernist approach does not adequately theorize the “new theatre” which he calls postdramatic. I briefly analyze all three of these discourses in this section.

I hypothesize that what makes sacred theatre distinctive from postmodern, postdramatic and to some extent liminal theatre, resides in a subtly different approach to unity. For example, the postmodern celebrates disjunction and disunity of the rational without replacing this with an alternative pathway. What seems to characterize sacred theatre is a reconfiguration of the sign-signified relationship resulting in a different kind of cohesion or unity outside of logos and reason. Whitmore calls this the “collaborative unity of the aesthetic event” (Whitmore, 1994: 219). The effect of this “collaborative unity” is not an experience of nerve jangling disruption, although this may be one of the creative techniques employed, rather the effect is paradoxically one of connection, communion and healing.

## **2.1 SACRED THEATRE – RALPH YARROW ET AL (2007)**

As mentioned in the Introduction, the impetus to explore the nature and possibilities of sacred theatre via practice led research came from the chance reading of the book *Sacred Theatre* edited by Ralph Yarrow (2007). Some of the research conclusions in this book provoked my initial research question: “Is it possible to deliberately write theatre that will evoke a sacred experience in an audience?” *Sacred Theatre* (2007) features contributing essays by Franc Chamberlain, William S Haney II, Carl Lavery and Peter Malekin. The book is structured under conceptual categories where authors do not write their own designated chapters, but each contributes their sometimes contradictory views to the same chapter. As such, I reference authors here by the title of their essay contribution, rather than the chapter title.

The authors present a plurality of perspectives around the shared claim that the sacred experience, a mode of being and perception, is central to theatre practice and is a vital part of performance theory. Many of the observations made in this work not only

launched, but have shaped my current research, particularly the definition of sacred as something which “opens us to the other” (Yarrow, 2007:10). However, there are several contestable points in this work, particularly when Haney (2007:83-92) claims that writers such as Carol Churchill aim to write sacred theatre. While *Sacred Theatre* has provided an important conceptual framework for this current research, in many ways it has stimulated more questions than answers. I believe this reflects the authors’ intention to open up the field for discussion, rather than provide a seminal statement.

In defense of their singular genre ‘Sacred Theatre’, the authors reference the writings of several modernist theatre practitioners including Peter Brook (1968), Jerzy Grotowski (1968) and Antonin Artaud (1958) as well as contemporary practitioners such as Peter Sellars (2005). They begin by asking “What is the sacred?” and, presuming that sacred theatre exists, they ask: “What is the experience that sacred theatre can deliver?” (13). They present a complex and rich array of definitions of the sacred and the sacred experience, both in and outside of the theatre including: “a double consciousness”; “passing through and becoming other”; “a process of transcendence”; “altered states of consciousness”; “disjunction” and “dislocation”. William Haney for example, defines the sacred of theatre as a “voiding of thought” (after Artaud 1958:71) and by implication a shift in consciousness that “effects a blurring of boundaries between subject and object, self and other” (Haney, 2007:16). He suggests that performance is an optimized condition of *liminality*, first defined by Van Gennep (1960) as a state of no-man’s land, betwixt and between worlds during a rite of passage, where the receiver can be taken out of the ordinary and see things anew. Franc Chamberlain quotes anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1980) to suggest that the sacred is an “unfixing” from the everyday perspective towards an experience beyond consciousness and perhaps even beyond our articulations of it (Chamberlain, 2007:26). Carl Lavery posits that “The sacred is a liminal phenomenon, a

logically impossible place where two opposing forces meet in synthesis that is characterized by disjunction” (Lavery, 2007: 34).

Peter Malekin’s contribution to Chapter Two, ‘The Sacred, Drama, Ritual and the Ancient Mystery Religions’ (2007:46) is reflexive of a broader appreciation of non-western philosophies. This has been instrumental in raising some of my initial research questions, as well as shaping the research to come later in this chapter. Malekin considers ritual, time and space as transformative ‘modes of being’. He argues that whereas ritual can be employed to enforce social dogma, theatre has a tendency to undercut and question such convention and especially falseness in convention (48). Malekin suggests that ritual practice has the ability to shift consciousness to a state “beyond knowing”, which he equates to “pure consciousness”, a state devoid of subject, object or empirical content (49). In his consideration of theatrical space as “transformative”, Malekin cites Brook’s (1968) idea of the ‘empty space’ as one where we as subjects can taste the absolute and unqualified; a world of forever becoming (51). So, a major research question emerged for me as a creative practitioner: “How can the “forever becoming” of space be achieved in theatre praxis and specifically in playwriting?” This question prompted me to consider Michel Foucault’s (1984) reflections on heterotopias to be discussed later in this chapter and also Jenny Kemp’s use of liminal space in *Still Angela* (Chapter Four).

Citing Peter Brook (1993), A. J. Ayer (1956), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1961), Malekin promotes the philosophical potential of theatre to enact time as “an eternal beginning” (55). He concludes that such an experience of time is transformational because it may reflect an alternative perception of time to an audience. Here, yet another practical question emerges from Malekin’s thesis: “How is the concept of ‘timelessness’ or an ‘eternal beginning’ achieved in a theatrical work?” Although he does not use the term ‘vertical time’, I believe this is what Malekin means: where past, present and future may

appear superimposed, existing all at once. His philosophical ideals seem to be supported in those theatre forms where time is not always causally moving forward, but may be captured synchronically. Furthermore, his reference to Ayer points to a philosophical argument for the reversibility of time (after Merleau-Ponty), where the future may influence the past as well as vice versa. These concepts will be further explored in Chapter Four.

In a summing up of the aesthetics of sacred theatre, without claiming any *one* methodology of practice, Yarrow (2007:57-63) borrows heavily from existentialist and absurd theatre practices to outline some potential features which I have found useful and outline below. Overall, the first part of this work sets up a very strong argument for sacred theatre as a genre capable of evoking a phenomenological shift in audience perception, around the self and other through transcending or interacting with two or more existential planes (liminality). Yarrow concludes that sacred theatre is an open ended process involving fluidity between persona and self, play and trust, pushing and allowing. It is a process of awakening using the performative space as a catalyst for wonder (182). He concludes that capturing the sacred is a synchronistic event, outside of time, “It is a moment” (201).

*Sacred Theatre* has furnished my research with a series of practical ideas and techniques towards the possibility of writing sacred theatre. First, is the idea that a phenomenological shift in perception around the sacred has more to do with the frame and form of the theatrical work than with content. Second, the use of poetic language or pushing language beyond comprehension, as in absurdist writing, seems to provide a disruption of rational thought. This transcends everyday logic and allows new conceptual and even magical worlds to gain credence. These new worlds can be a metaphoric articulation of that which is ungraspable within human reason, providing a glimpse of

alternative existential planes. Third, techniques usually associated with postmodern theatre such as ‘fissure’, ‘tearing apart’ and the absence of grand narratives seem to be effective in eroding the resilience of a socially constructed rationality. However, the authors of *Sacred Theatre* provide few pathways for an alternative logic. This is, I believe, is a fertile area for further research, which I shall pursue in this thesis.

Finally, one of the most effective techniques in the accomplishment of a sacred theatre seems to be the way that action may be situated in time and space. Action occurring in a liminal time or space may dislodge referents from a fixed reality, thereby encouraging an open-ended reading by an audience and giving a sense of ‘dream-state’. A logical perception of time may also be disrupted through layered or vertical time such as that found in Noh Theatre, or with a series of events or scenes presented in synchronous time within a diachronic story. This can most often be accomplished through the employ of heterotopias, where many places are presented in the same space at the same time and where their a-causal relationship may be observed in the moment.

Foucault (1984: 46-49) observed that heterotopic sites function through their property of being in relation to other sites in such a way as to neutralize, or invert, the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. In this way, the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space, several places or sites that are in themselves incompatible.

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment. I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault, 1984:46)

So, the theatre stage as a heterotopic site is capable of bringing together a series of places that are foreign to one another. Furthermore, Foucault observes that heterotopias are most often also heterochronies. These function at full capacity when they also invert the relationship between individual sites and the slices in time associated with them. The

heterotopia achieves an absolute break with a naturalistic sense of time and in effect creates a sense of non-linear or vertical time. The concept of heterotopias and meta-heterotopias has contributed to my own “material thinking” (Carter 2007) towards the possibility of writing sacred theatre as well as the analysis of *When the Rain Stops Falling* in Chapter Five.

## 2.2 HOLY AND SACRED THEATRE – PETER BROOK

In Europe from the 1960’s- 1980’s theatre practitioners deliberately set out to *affect* a spiritual or sacred experience in an audience and there were no apologies or qualifications around the terminology. One of the most famous of these practitioners is Peter Brook. In 1968, Brook published *The Empty Space*, arguably one of the most influential works for Western theatre practitioners, even today. In this book he categorizes four types of theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough and Immediate. Consistent with the aims of this thesis, I will concentrate of the second of Brook’s types: The Holy Theatre.

In ‘The Holy Theatre’, subtitled ‘The Theatre of the Invisible made visible’, Brook describes a kind of theatre that is based on an audience’s “hunger” for an experience that transcends their everyday life: “a need for something [...] not there” (1968:49).

Acknowledging that theatre has its origins in ritual, he observes that the imitation of ritual is rarely convincing, because it has lost its reference to the “holy” with weaker and watered down versions designed not to offend and to “keep children good”. Despite the audience craving for an experience beyond the ordinary, Brook suggests that we shy away from the ‘holy’ in theatre because it has let us down. He claims that if true contact with a sacred invisibility through the theatre still exists, then we must re-examine all possible vehicles for its accomplishment, beginning with Artaud. Brook describes his own experimental processes with Charles Marowitz at the Royal Shakespeare Company, which

attempted to investigate and apply Artaud's theories of *Theatre of Cruelty* in praxis. Through a series of exercises, limiting the actor's tools of expression to only one, they discovered that the "friction of un-yielding opposites makes fire" (57). In other words, the disruption of easy meaning through playing its opposite creates a sense of "hazard" and through this, different meanings can appear.

As a result of such experimentation, Brook is one of the first practitioners to articulate that through disruption of the rational in theatre, one gains a glimpse of the world bubbling underneath. Further, he observes that through the illogical use of language, authors of Theatre of the Absurd are able to articulate the "absence of truth in our everyday exchanges and the presence of truth in the seemingly far-fetched" (59). Brook perceived these effects to be short lived, however, and by 1968, he was convinced that the Absurd had reached an impasse; the surprise element had worn thin. Similarly, in his own experimentation with *Theatre of Cruelty*, he observes a "groping towards a theatre, more violent, less rational, more extreme, less verbal, more dangerous", but here again, he finds "the joy in violent shock also wears thin" (61). He then considers the "Happening" as yet another approach to jolt the audience into new sight, concluding that the series of "mild shocks followed by let-downs...progressively combine to neutralize the further shocks before they arrive" (62). This serves as a warning for the creative practitioner; a mere disruption of the rational, logical and the use of shock, does not guarantee contact with a sacred invisibility. Indeed, it could have the opposite effect of numbing the audience to the techniques of employ.

Was it possible to create 'Holy Theatre' in 1968? Brook surmises that Holy Theatre must not only *present* the invisible, but must offer the conditions to make a shift in *perception* possible and that this is done through deliberate construction. He cites three contemporary examples of practitioners who are able to achieve this: Merce Cunningham

in dance; Samuel Beckett in writing and Jerzy Grotowski in actor training. In all three examples, Brook finds a “bearing witness” to whatever truth the artist has seen, accompanied by intense work, rigorous discipline and absolute precision. His final example is Shakespeare, and it is within the appraisal of this playwright’s approach that Brook comes closest to a model for achieving “holy theatre” in writing:

His [Shakespeare’s] aim continually is holy, metaphysical, yet he never makes the mistake of staying too long on the highest plane. He knew how hard it is for us to keep company with the absolute – so he continuously bumps us down to earth...We have to accept that we can never see all of the invisible. So after straining towards it, we have to face defeat, drop down to earth, then start up again. (Brook, 1968:69)

In his later writings, particularly *There Are No Secrets* (1993), Brook never deflects his gaze from the aim of achieving a sacred theatre, and by this time he stands alone in calling it ‘sacred theatre’. Nor does he deflect from his analysis of process around how to achieve such theatre, asking the important question: “Is the sacred a form?” (59).

Reiterating his former conclusions, Brook surmises that the holy, sacred or invisible cannot be compelled to manifest, but may appear at any moment *if* the conditions are right. In order to make these conditions right, he suggests we must look to the present moment; for that moment of *sphota*, where the right sound, gesture and exchange can spark the elusive and the invisible into life. He goes on to analyze how this moment may be constructed and concludes that to reach a single moment of profound meaning, there must be a precedent chain of smaller moments that build in intensity and finally carry us away (Brook,1993:83).

In other words, sacred theatre needs a net of moments. Like fishermen, weaving nets to catch certain fish, it is the artist’s skill in weaving a series of moments which establishes the conditions for epiphany or the moment of *sphota*. The quality of the knots influences the quality of fish caught (1993:84). In moments of grace and excellent construction Brook describes the achievement of sacred theatre as catching the “Golden

Fish”. His question is: “how to catch this elusive Golden Fish?” His conclusion is that it involves: paradox in thinking; collaboration in praxis and negotiation between the ordinary and the invisible in content including the unavoidable allowance of silence. “All spiritual practices bring us towards the invisible world by helping us to withdraw from the world on impressions into stillness and silence” (1993:87).

Importantly, Brook uses the mythical analogy of the door, the limen, the space between, which is not to be observed, but experienced as an entry point to the invisible and the sacred. Brook acknowledges the importance of the liminal space in ritual, but he warns of cheating; of empty imitation. The door/limen is one of challenge, not convenience. In effect, the net one must weave to catch the “Golden Fish” is one that opens a portal into another world, one of entry and release from the mundane, where the past and future exist in the present. This portal or limen gives us a distance from what envelops us in the everyday, while simultaneously reducing the distance between us and that which is far away (1993:95). Although Brook does not use this terminology, what he is indeed describing is the “ludic deconstruction” that occurs in the liminal phase of ritual and offers the shared sacred experience of both communion and *communitas*.

After much experimentation in practice, Brook surmises that there are no hard and fast rules to “catch the Golden Fish”, but it is possible to weave a net-best-knotted to capture it. He articulates three main points around weaving this particular net that are essential to my current research. First, is that simple disruption does not work; inevitably audiences grow weary of it and it fails to satisfy the “hunger” for a sacred experience. Second, is there needs to be something to replace this disruption; a ludic *re-construction* that ultimately works as a portal into another way of seeing. After the disruption has occurred, there is a need for an alternative pathway to unity or communion. Third, there are no guarantees. The Golden Fish may elude even the best knotted net, because this fish

is not a permanent and definable “thing”. It changes with cultures, with history and with stories. One cannot simply apply one or two techniques and expect a sacred experience, as I have discovered in my own creative works and in the works of others (to be discussed). I acknowledge Brook’s considerable thinking towards my own metaphorical toolbox or ‘net’ towards writing sacred theatre. If there is any sure principle, it is that the sacred or the invisible cannot be looked upon for too long, but may only be glimpsed in the careful construction of a moment.

### **2.3 RITUAL AND SACRED EXPERIENCE**

As Brook (1968) points out above, the imitation of ritual without direct or symbolic stimulation of the sacred becomes meaningless for an audience. I have discovered in writing my own creative piece *Wyrđ Song* (Chapter Seven) and also in the analysis of Margaret Davis’ *Isis Dreaming* (Chapter Four), that simply adding ritual to an overall performance can even be alienating. This is particularly the case if audience members do not have a cultural and symbolic understanding of that ritual. Richard Schechner, (1988:70) makes the important observation that the ‘efficacy’ of ritual to evoke a sacred experience directly corresponds to *participation* in ritual rather than *observation* of it. This is an important distinction for me as a creative practitioner. If passive observers of ritual do not gain the potential sacred experience of participants, then how effective is ritual as a technique for sacred theatre in the contemporary environment?

Schechner (2006:72, 1976:14) observes that ritual as ‘cultural tourism’ is not effective in evoking a sacred experience because spectators are not social engaged in the process, but become passive observers of the exotic or strange. Audiences may become participants in ritual however, if they are involved in the symbolic construction of meaning

of that ritual throughout the play itself; if they become shared contributors in the symbolic world. But how is this achieved?

In his seminal work *Rites de Passage*, Arnold Van Gennep (1960) outlines three important stages in ritual which effect the change in perception and status in the ritual participant. These stages are: separation from society, a transition or liminal phase where the individual is “between” states, and the ritual re-incorporation into society usually accompanied by great celebration. Van Gennep suggests that it is during the transitional or liminal space where the most change takes place; a shift in the perception of self which accompanies the shift in status. Peter Malekin (in Yarrow et al, 2007:46) considers this liminal space as vital for performance theory because the theatrical space or “empty space” itself, is considered a place between two existential planes. Thus, it has the potential to evoke both an alterity of perception and a possible entirety of perception. In the liminal space of a theatre, (Brook calls it the limen) audiences are removed from their everyday world and are prepared to suspend engagement with it for a brief period of time. In the best possible environment for sacred theatre, something will happen in this liminal space to evoke a sacred experience. What exactly is that something?

Victor Turner coined the term *liminal persona* (or neophyte) to designate the transitional being (ritual participant) who becomes structurally invisible to the society, in that they are “betwixt and between” states of social classification.

Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, [...] more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise. (Turner, 1967:97)

In his later works, Turner (1974, 1985) calls these “novel configurations of ideas” a “ludic reconstruction” (Schechner, 2006:77, Deflam, 1991:12). During the liminal state, a transition state betwixt and between the structural and symbolic orders, this “ludic reconstruction” shifts the frame of reference in the network of meaning from the structural to the symbolic; from the causal to a-causal. Such a shift in frame, results in a change in

perception around the rational order of relationships between subject-object, space, time and logic. It dislodges semiotic referents to material reality and, through repetition of new symbolic configurations, opens the portal to a new reality. This is a sacred, symbolic reality, where transportation or transformation may occur; for example, trance states, speaking in tongues, enlightenment and epiphany, etc. This shift also de-emphasizes the structural and logical (rational) separation between subject and object resulting in a spontaneous “shared experience” or *communitas* amongst participants (Turner 1985:300-30).

In liminality, *communitas* tends to characterize relationships between those jointly undergoing ritual transition. The bonds of *communitas* are anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, non-rational, existential, I-Thou relationships...a total unmediated relationship between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other, but safeguards their uniqueness. (Turner, 1974: 71)

Therefore, theatre as a *limen*, has the potential to deliver not only a ludic *deconstruction* of the structural order of society towards a *reconstruction* of the symbolic order, but also to deliver an audience experience of *communitas*.

Three main elements of ritual have impacted on my own creative work, as well as the analysis of Contemporary Australian practitioners such as Margaret Davis and Jenny Kemp. These are: first, the idea of the *liminal persona* in a liminal state, where the ‘rational’ referents to ‘reality’ become altered, effecting a ludic de-construction of the symbolic order. This leads to a new configuration of the subject-object/space-time relationship in the theatre space. Second, the *efficacy* of ritual to promote *communitas* via a mode of participation, which includes not only the physical presence and proximity of an audience, but also their shared symbolic and intellectual involvement in ludic re-construction, for example, the ritual passing of objects in the final scene of *When the Rain Stops Falling* (Chapter Five). Third is the deliberate use of ritual as sacred theatre with the

intention to promote psychological and spiritual “healing” amongst participants and observers; sacred theatre as a form of *therapia*. Sacred theatre as *therapia* originated in the Ancient Greek temples of Asclepius, where pilgrims could gain:

A larger perspective on the self and social order...through art, music, dance, drama, healing therapy, sacred practice, laughter, altered states of consciousness and communion with archetypal realities. (Houston 1987:11)

A common feature of the work I explore in Chapters Three to Five, as well as my own creative practice, is the intention to invite and promote some kind of psychological or social healing through the work.

## **2.4 SACRED THEATRE AS THERAPIA: THE AIM TO HEAL**

Theatre as *therapia* has influenced several health sciences disciplines including psychodrama, gestalt therapy (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman 1951), narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) and drama therapy (Jennings, 1987). In this study however, I wish to focus on *therapia* as the deliberate reclamation of the ‘sacred’ for women, by women, led by feminist theorizing around spirituality in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This involves not only the reassertion of women’s spiritual authority within established religions such as Christianity, but also the reclamation of non-western and pre-Christian understandings of the sacred goddess.

Luce Irigaray (1993:9 -21) argues that women live in accordance with exclusively male genealogical systems, and that mother-daughter relationships are subordinated to relations between men. Nowhere is this more apparent to Irigaray than in the loss of transference of spiritual knowledge from mothers to daughters and in the neglect of goddesses such as Hestia, the female deity who guarded the flame of the domestic hearth (10). For Irigaray, this neglect has resulted not only in the loss of goddesses in worship, but the usurpation of women’s sacred knowledge and expression by the patriarchal linguistic order, granting its own gender to God, the sun and the cosmos. Her call to

redress this imbalance involves women validating their own subjective status as equivalent to that of men, respecting the “other” in themselves and demanding that respect from society.

How are we to give girls the possibility of spirit or soul? We can do it through subjective relations between mothers and daughters.... [including]...Learn once again to respect life and nourishment, which means regaining respect for the mother and nature. (Irigaray, 1993:41)

Irigaray’s call to reclaim the sacred involves a return of power to the mother, the recognition of sacred knowledge passed through matrilineal genealogies and a return to the worship of polytheistic goddesses. In the theatre, the themes of women validating their subjective status were reflected in the writings of women playwrights such as Christina Reid, Anne Devlin and Marina Carr. In Australia writers Margaret Davis and Jenny Kemp sought to find a language to articulate their subjective experiences, either of the sacred or of alterity. I include myself in this category of writers with both of my creative works, *Bird* and *Wyrd Song* aiming to articulate and evoke my own subjective sacred experience. Indeed, the early choice to portray the Scottish Picts was based on the fact that they were a matrilineal society who worshipped pagan Goddesses (Chapter Seven). I am aware that the critical perspectives I outline in this section are reflective of writers in the late 1970s to early 1990s (Second Wave Feminism) and are not commensurate with current feminist theory. However, it is not my intention to engage with the political debate raised by these feminist writers, grounded in specific historical and cultural circumstances. My interests lie in the pathways these theorists present in opening up the creative possibilities for me as a woman writer, to express an alternative view of the sacred.

In reclaiming and articulating their subjective sacred, many women artists were challenged to deconstruct and re-imagine not only their relationship to the sacred and cosmologies, but to language itself. A question emerged: “How can women reclaim power over their articulation of the sacred, or anything else for that matter, if the paternal

linguistic order, that Lacan calls the “symbolic”, is the organizing principle of hegemony?” Julia Kristeva’s seminal publication *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974/1984) attempts to find a way outside of Lacan’s symbolic order via the “semiotic”. More precisely she uses the pre-linguistic/pre-conscious concept of “*chora*”, a third space or interval, which she claims is formed by the multiplicity of libidinal drives found in the primary (pre-conscious) relation to the maternal body. Lacan argues that the patriarchal symbolic order is achieved through the repression of primary libidinal drives, thus suppressing the multiplicity of meanings occasioned by the relationship to the maternal body. Kristeva asserts that the *chora* ruptures the univocal nature of language arising from the symbolic order because “it is a modality of significance not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic” (Kristeva, 1974: 26). In other words, the mother’s body is the ordering principle of the *chora* whose main articulation is subjective, semiotic and plurivocal.

For Kristeva, poetic language has a similar modality in that it does not conform to univocal signification; but rather fractures and multiplies meaning. In a later work, Kristeva (1980:134) argues that poetic language has the ability to disrupt the patriarchal symbolic order because it has the potential to violate the grammatical rules of national language, and unsettle the subject/object distinction. Although Judith Butler (1990) has criticized Kristeva’s argument, claiming that it depends on the very symbolic hegemony she is trying to disrupt, Kristeva offers a pathway in creative process to articulate the subjective and the sacred through poetic language with its rhythms, repetitions and plurivocality of meaning. Malekin asserts that poetic language and even Vedic language have the potential to evoke the sacred because of their sonorous qualities and non-specific referents (in Yarrow et al, 2007:55). Kristeva extends the potential of poetic language to

also subvert the patriarchal symbolic order and therefore to re-imagine and articulate a sacred experience *outside* of that order.

However, as we have seen, audience reception in the theatre is complex and is itself informed by the patriarchal symbolic order. Audiences may accept the subversion of reason through poetic language (for example Beckett), but will ‘interpretive communities’ accept the subversion of an entire world view or system of belief? Kristeva herself acknowledges that even poetic language can fall short in articulating the feminine subjective experience. This is especially true when feminine articulations around the sacred, (trance, speaking in tongues) received within the patriarchal symbolic order are frequently interpreted as psychotic. Or, as Irigaray observes, for many women artists, the expression of truth frequently involves a portrayal of suffering and even an anguish approaching horror (1993:100-101). She concludes: “The loss of divine representation has brought women to a state of dereliction” (Irigaray, 1993:104).

How do female artists articulate their subjective sacred when the precedents from mainstream drama illustrate that the female sacred experience predominantly ends in psychosis or suicide? Shaw’s *St Joan* (1924), Pielmeier’s *Agnes of God* (1985), and *The Crucible* (1953) by Arthur Miller are famous examples. These plays were written by men, but as Adrienne Rich (1993) has observed, this is also true of female writers, who struggle to find a linguistic, creative resistance to the symbolic order.

In my own experience, this tension has occurred in what Barrett (2010) describes as the difference between situated knowledge and lived experience (2010:143), where the subjective and “lived” experience cannot be articulated within the accepted symbolic order or discourse. Finding a shared language to articulate the subjective, female sacred experience involves engaging in the methodological process called “material thinking” described by Carter (2007). This does not simply mean disrupting or usurping the current

and dominant Symbolic order, but interrupting it with enough shared logic that it still makes sense.

Anne F. O'Reilly points out in her insightful book *Sacred Play* (2004) that a women's inability to find a language to express or symbolize herself is often testament to the status of women within the patriarchal symbolic order described by Irigaray and Kristeva (140). She observes that in Marina Carr's play *Portia Coughlan* (1996), for example, the solution for the protagonist to express herself lies not only in poetic language, but in inventing her own myth of origins, thus entering the world of the mytho-poetic (O'Reilly 2004:140). Here, O'Reilly points us directly to the theories of Paul Ricoeur (1995), who argues that the recovery of the sacred lies not in a return path to traditional religion. Rather, it lies in the recovery of myth and symbol as a hermeneutical, imaginative possibility to create a new, transcendent sacred, the mytho-poetic. This implies that women theatre artists can draw on the mytho-poetic as a potential vehicle to express their subjective sacred. Nonetheless, the patriarchal symbolic order still requires negotiation.

Even a cursory examination of mytho-poetic works like Shakespeare's *Tempest* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* reveals a fictional cosmology/culture into which the characters and audience enter without question. In contrast, a frequent characteristic of mytho-poetic plays written by women is that their female protagonists can never fully enter their alterative cosmology, but are pulled back to the world of the real. Indeed, in O'Reilly's example *Portia Coughlan*, Portia is caught in the *liminal* space between the fictional world of her creation and the real, between the conscious and the unconscious, between the inside and the outside. So for Marina Carr and many other women writers, the mytho-poetic accords a potential glimpse at an alternate cosmology, but the protagonist struggles to enter it fully. In other words, the protagonist is trapped between two opposing existential planes. What the mytho-poetic offers *most* for women writers is the recognition

of a woman's liminal position. This is exemplified clearly in the works of Jenny Kemp and Margaret Davis (Chapter Four).

In the recognition of liminality there is healing and often *communitas*. In acknowledging the gap between the female experience of the sacred and the role women are expected to perform in the symbolic order, audience members (women *and* men) who have also experienced this gap may recognize their own struggle. There is healing in the speaking and sharing of the female sacred experience. The reclamation of the sacred for women by women involves the reimagining of feminine spirituality through language, ritual techniques, myth and often Jungian based psychology.

There is also healing in the speaking and sharing of other disprivileged narratives such as those discernible in the indigenous plays included in Chapters Three and Four: *The Cherry Pickers* (1968/88) and *The Seven Stages of Grieving* (2001). Indeed, all of the works included in this research attempt *therapia* in some way. As I consider Sacred Theatre as *therapia* in forthcoming chapters, the themes of poetic language, the mytho-poetic form and liminality will reassert themselves as practical techniques for creative practice.

## **2.5 OTHER CREATIVE DISCOURSES CONTRIBUTING TO A CONTEMPORARY SACRED THEATRE**

### **2.5.1 The European Avant Garde**

In the pursuit of practice towards theatre which could evoke a spiritual or sacred experience in an audience Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski emerge as pioneers. Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, famously based on a single viewing of Balinese Theatre, called for an end to the subjugation of theatre to the text. It sought the recovery of its own unique language, half-way between gesture and thought towards a "metaphysics"

of speech, gesture and expression; “It is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to enter our minds” (Artaud, 1958:99). Artaud made a clear, if romantic distinction between the Oriental theatre of “metaphysics in action” and the Occidental theatre of “psychological tendencies”. He claimed that in Oriental theatre there was a more complex language of gestures and signs, postures and sonorities facilitating a poetic and profound level of consciousness beyond the capabilities of Occidental text-driven plots (Artaud, 1958:44). Although Artaud himself did not have the theatrical technologies to realize his own vision, his nascent thesis with its call towards semiotic plurality was highly influential in exciting the imagination of subsequent practitioners. Artaud’s vision was less an appeal to ‘alterity’ than a call for ‘entirety’ in the semiotic evocation of theatrical performance. A similar plurivocality to that we have just discussed in Kristeva’s notion of the *chora* and poetic language. Artaud’s manifesto towards a “metaphysical theatre” calls for *parataxis* or the de-hierarchicalization of text and other theatrical signs and, as we have seen through Brook’s experiment, a complexity of contradictory signs that pre-empt absurdist, postmodern and postdramatic theatre.

In contrast to Artaud’s thesis of multi-semiotics, Jerzy Grotowski’s *Poor Theatre* and the *Polish Laboratory Theatre* stripped every decoration from the stage; scenery, music, costumes, lighting and make-up so that all was left was “the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, ‘live’ communion” (Grotowski, 1968:19). Any formal delineation of stage itself was removed by Grotowski, with actors and spectators sharing the same space, a technique that had been anticipated by Copeau, and then later developed by Schechner. The other major contention by Grotowski was that the actor was priest; that through eliminating all psychological blocks the actor could reveal his/her essential being and was thereby capable of establishing “communion” with an audience.

Grotowski's ideal towards achieving "communion" involves stripping back theatrical semiotics so that the audience's primary relationship was with the actor as priest or shaman, affecting a less cerebral and more visceral experience such as that achieved in ritual.

### **2.5.2 Postmodernism**

Two immediate examples of theatre that had evoked a sacred experience for me were created by Pina Bausch and Robert Wilson. Since their works are frequently considered as postmodern theatre, I need to ask, "Is there something in the postmodern experiment that contributes to the potential creative practice of sacred theatre? Charles Jencks (1987) claims that the notable conventions of postmodern aesthetics reflect paradox expressed through oxymoronic descriptions such as 'asymmetrical symmetry', 'disharmonious harmony', 'unfinished whole' and 'dissonant unity' (Jencks, 1987, 1993:282). These terms reflect current scientific theories that the universe itself is "not finished", but is continuously dynamic and evolving. Jean-Francois Lyotard celebrates the "unfinished" as recognition that "not everything has been said" (Lyotard, 1989, 1993: 245). He relates the "unfinished" to Kant's concept of 'agitation' and 'disrupted harmony' as a feature of the sublime.

The features of repetitive violence, explosive shock, agitation and "unfinished whole" are clearly evident in Pina Bausch's work. More than thirty years later, I still have the images of repetitive violence against the female protagonist of *Bluebeard* (1982) printed on my memory. In Bausch's *Bluebeard*, it is the seemingly endless repetition of violent action which nods to the concept of "unfinished". In the hands of another artist, the violence may have happened in real time, and then ended. In Bausch's hands, the action does not reach a logical and rational conclusion, nor does it "finish" within a comfortable

timeframe, pointing to the endless nature of violence against women. Paradoxically, the overall sense of the piece is “finished” in that it contains an underlying, if unconventional unity.

Jencks suggests that in the postmodern aesthetic, the unconscious is invoked as a juxtaposition of fragments; a fracturing of the relationship between past and present, resulting in a kind of dream logic which provides an overall “harmonious aura” or a “narrative without a plot” (Jencks, 1987,1993: 286). Such ‘dream logic’ gives equal value to symbolic and/or illogical events and images, in the reconfiguration of meaning and memory. This is what Bausch achieves in *Bluebeard* and many of her other works. Her use of juxtaposition, repetition and the illogical stretching of time, serves to reconfigure meaning at the symbolic level, not unlike the ludic reconstruction occurring in the liminal state. The culminating effect achieves what Lyotard describes as “presenting the unrepresentable” in the here and now.

As a creative practitioner, I have found useful techniques and concepts within the postmodernist aesthetic that may contribute to the writing of sacred theatre. These include repetition, disjunction, unfinished, dissonance and fragmented unity or narrative without plot. There are some theatre analysts, however, who claim that the aesthetic framework of postmodernism does not adequately describe the theatre being produced in Europe in the post WWII period. Susan Broadhurst suggests that artists such as Bausch and Wilson move beyond the category of postmodern, towards what she describes as liminal theatre, while Hans-Thies Lehmann considers the same artists as exponents of postdramatic theatre.

### 2.5.3 Liminal Theatre

In *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory* (1999), Susan Broadhurst applies her study to the inter-semiotic modes of signification in the theatre works of Wilson, Bausch and Müller, which she provisionally categorizes as “Liminal Theatre”. She calls their work ‘liminal’ because she claims they are quintessentially hybrid forms embracing new technologies and where heterogeneity, marginality and a collapse of the linguistic above other modes of signification are characteristic. Broadhurst further defines the features of “liminal performance” as: fragmentation, a loss of the auratic (or Benjamin’s “aura”), collapse of hierarchy between high and popular culture, hybridization of forms, indirect content, awe/excitement and discomfort, accentuation on technology and mixing of codes. Although she acknowledges a close affiliation to postmodern aesthetics, Broadhurst claims that her theorization around the aesthetics of the sublime and her focus on the ability of ‘liminal’ performance to elicit the sublime as an audience response, is markedly different to postmodern theory. For me this is an important theoretical difference, because her analysis promises to look at the way audiences are involved in the construction of a unified or ‘sublime’ experience.

In her analysis of Pina Bausch’s *Café Müller*, Broadhurst claims that Bausch’s dance-theatre (a hybridization of forms) uses Brechtian techniques of alienation; fragmented and repetitive gestures; varying tempo of performance; and disjunction of processes to explore the themes of loneliness, compulsive behaviour and the desperation for human contact. However, she argues that Bausch’s work goes beyond Brecht’s didactic theatre in that it releases symbols that dismiss hierarchies of conventional narrative dramaturgy. At the same time, it retains a sense and meaning. Juxtaposition and jarring physical and visual metaphors unsettle the audience and frustrate a simple reading of the work, while at the same time producing a *synaesthetic* effect, or unity. What is important

here is that the audience is invited to participate in the discovery of this unity. Bausch weaves a net of jarring, repetitive disruption, but in doing so gives the precise semiotic clues for an audience to interpret and construct an a-causal synthesis. The audience becomes part of the ludic deconstruction and reconstruction of the accepted symbolic order, while experiencing a liminal state of uncertainty.

Broadhurst elaborates on this concept with an analysis of *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) by Robert Wilson and Philip Glass. She suggests that Wilson's ability to create powerful images that lack specific meaning, or without a *protagonist*, is characteristic of liminal performance. Here the subject's position is a 'vacant' site that may be filled by different individuals or objects, thus problematizing notions of fixed identities (Foucault 1972:54-5). The text itself is not a script, but a series of 113 charcoal sketches, with musical scores, spoken texts and choreographic diagrams, arranged as a sequence of cinematic stills. Wilson wanted to present a spectacle that could not be contained in verbal language alone, and with Glass worked on the assumption that the audience completed the reading of the work. Wilson's principal aim was to create a heightened perception in his audience through manipulation of time, the construction of visionary images and the fracturing of verbal language (Broadhurst 1999:89).

For Broadhurst, *Einstein on the Beach* is more of a collage than an integrated whole: "It disconnects text from image and music, producing 'defamiliarization' effects and disrupting traditional narrative" (Broadhurst 1999:89). This gives the spectator the freedom to imagine or interpret a separate meaning from the visual and aural resources. She claims this is a characteristic of liminal theatre, where "there is a loss of authority of the artistic producer/director" (89). Once again, we find a deliberate attempt by artists not to dictate meaning, but to provide the right conditions for audiences to find it for themselves; to participate in the construction of meaning. De-familiarization is the key

ingredient, as it is in ritual. Through separating the direct notation between sign and signified, the invisible can make itself a possible alternative network of meaning. It is the implicit which points to the invisible, and touches on, but never announces the sacred.

I will incorporate some of Broadhurst's conceptual theories around 'liminal theatre' into the analysis of two Australian plays in this research: *Still Angela* by Jenny Kemp in Chapter Four and *Land & Sea* by Nikki Bloom in Chapter Five. However, in the theorizing of "what works" in Sacred Theatre, I think the key tool to take away, is that "audiences complete the reading of the work" and therefore become participants rather than passive observers. The semiotic clues to affect the preferred reading are not haphazard. They are carefully constructed by implication. In the weaving of the net to catch the Golden Fish, the knots of Wilson and Bausch are "sublime" in that the dramaturgy employs Postmodern technologies as well as a ludic reconstruction inside the liminal state between the visible and invisible.

#### **2.5.4 Postdramatic Theatre**

In *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) Hans-Thies Lehmann attempts a comprehensive theory around the relationship between drama and the 'no longer dramatic' forms or conventions that emerged in theatre after 1970. He sets out to find a language for this "new theatre" in aesthetic terms by considering the aesthetics of space, time and the body, equally with use of text. He reconsiders the traditional relationship of theatre to drama; claiming that in the late twentieth century, theatre and drama have 'drifted apart'.

The dramatic paradigm, based principally on Aristotle's *Poetics* is one of exposition, ascending action (*telos*), *peripeteia*, catastrophe and resolution (*denouement*). This reflects a singular logic where the authorial and omnipotent voice of writer/director presents a singular and unidirectional view of a fictive cosmos to a "solipsistic" viewer.

For Lehmann, like Artaud, the step to postdramatic theatre occurs when the theatrical moves beyond language and non-verbal elements are positioned equally alongside it. Theatre semiotics become non-hierarchical. There is no complete and dominant fictive “cosmos”. The aim is no longer the wholeness or synthesis of a composition of words, meaning and gestures, which presents itself to an audience, but theatre becomes fragmentary and partial. It renounces unity and synthesis and allows the risk of impulse, fragmentation and microstructures of texts.

Further, the shift in logic from a theatre *work* to a theatre *event* engages the audience as an active component, so that the idea of a coherent piece and closed process is thus superseded “by the exposed act and process of an aggressive, enigmatically esoteric or communal theatrical communication” (Lehmann 2006: 61). The spectator searches for correspondences amidst the fractured, extreme and distorted uncertainty of non-hierarchical signs (images, movements, words). In short, as we have seen in liminal theatre, it is the spectator who searches for unity in the seeming chaos; semiotic clues may be suggested but a definitive reading is not guaranteed or even provided.

Lehmann characterizes postdramatic theatre as that which aspires *beyond* the dramatic. He outlines a series of signature techniques including: the retreat of synthesis (or teleological thesis) implying *parataxis*, the de-hierarchicalization of texts and signs and a plethora and simultaneity of texts and signs. Another technique is the open and fragmented presentation of place through a shifting frame of perception. Such presentation can be achieved through metamorphosis rather than action, for example, through a landscape or architectural feature without a referent, or the pre-logical, non-hierarchical images of dreams and mythical worlds.

His earlier article ‘From Logos to Landscape’ (1997), tackles the questions of text and logos found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, particularly the hierarchy of *mythos* (plot)

character, *dianoia* (thought, idea or theme) and speech (both monologue and dialogue). Lehmann carefully considers Aristotle's privileging of text, including plot structure/logic, dialogue and flow of information in contrast to his analysis of *opsis*, that which the audience sees. He argues that the European tradition of 'dramatic theatre' is not simply a question of privileging language (speech) over *mise-en-scene*, but that the dominant logic of dramatic theatre is *telos*. It is here that Lehmann's claimed paradigm shift exerts itself as a retreat of synthesis, but also differentiates itself from the postmodern. In the equalizing of language with other codes, the structure of dramatic texts towards a clearly formulated goal becomes exposed. In postdramatic theatre, there is a refocusing of structure away from the teleological, cause-effect narratives of dramatic theatre, towards an "architectural espacement of the text" (Lehmann, 1997: 66).

The resulting conversation shifts in axis from dialogue within the theatre to dialogue between theatre and audience. When audiences become contributors to the dialogue, they participate in the symbolic construction of meaning and thereby enter the space of immediate experience which also has the potential to be a sacred experience.

Within these principles of postdramatic theatre, the retreat of synthesis offers a clear possibility to the writer of sacred theatre. Without a teleological order or unity, there are no constraints to replicate or mimic a socially constructed world. This deliberate deconstruction of rational or assumed order is resonant with postmodern and liminal approaches. It also resonates with the ludic deconstruction achieved in liminal states of ritual. In the parataxis of postdramatic theatre a different unity may emerge beyond *telos*, beyond the dramatic. There does not need to be a causal beginning, middle and end. Without this causality, events can appear as fragmented incidents, illogical landscapes may collide and we may gain access to a symbolic world beyond the rational and beyond the real. We may see paradox and we may recognize non-causal pathways to meaning.

Furthermore, this world beyond *telos* means that significations of that world do not have to have singular and real referents, but may refer to ideas, images or events constructed and extant only within the fictive logic of the play.

### **2.5.5. Vectorization of signs**

In “The State of Current Theatre Research” (1997), Patrice Pavis notes that the problem with a classical semiotic analysis of theatre performance is that it deconstructs and compartmentalizes a performance into a system of categorized signs, which “arbitrarily segment the signifier in order to translate it into possible signifieds” (213). Through addressing theatre as a series of codes, classical semiotics necessarily dissects the overall perceptual impression theatre can bring to the spectator, which Merleau-Ponty (1987:15) doesn’t believe possible; “it is impossible [...] to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts” (cited in Pavis, 1997:213).

Pavis proposes that instead of fragmenting perception with a notion of individualized signs, it is possible to link networks of signs according to a process of *vectorization*, where “each sign has meaning only in relation to other signs” (14). In this process of vectorization, an audience learns the significance of and relationship between signs, as a gradual and subtle process, *within* the world of the performance itself. It is, therefore, the dynamic relationship *between* signs within a carefully constructed network, which allow an overall meaning or perceptual impression larger than the sum of its symbolic parts.

In many ways this is exactly how ludic deconstruction works within ritual. The main referent of any one sign is not fixed to the outside world, but becomes established by its consistent relationship to other signifiers within the piece. Pavis suggests that such networks hold the production together. But it is more than this; such networks are

gradually built throughout the production so the final piece of information or meaning drops in as an experience of sudden realization or epiphany. An example of this will be explored in the analysis of Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling* (Chapter 5).

## 2.6 HOW TO WEAVE A NET

### Conceptual and Creative Knots Towards Writing Sacred Theatre

Several important concepts and useful terms have emerged from the research in this chapter which I have incorporated into the analysis of Australian work in Part Two. There are also some important theories and practical techniques that I have applied to my own creative practice discussed in Part Three. From the analysis of ritual comes the idea of the liminal state, where ludic reconstruction away from the structural towards the symbolic dislodges referents to the rational and re-configures the subject-object, space-time relationship. This is not purely a disruption of the sign-signifier relationship, as discussed by Patrice Pavis, but the deliberate construction of a new semiotic order outside of the rational and every-day. As Brook has noted, disruption for disruption's sake loses efficacy over time. In the deliberate attempt to evoke a sacred experience for an audience, the work needs to be carefully constructed to introduce a new unity which has the capacity to generate the shared experience of communion and dissolution of the subject-object divide. Two further concepts to emerge from the study of ritual are the shared experience of *communitas*, and the aim to heal or *therapia*.

Drawing on my analysis of the work by Ralph Yarrow and the contributors to *Sacred Theatre* (2007), I have identified several theatrical techniques which could be successful in evoking a sacred experience in an audience. Many of these have been borrowed from postmodern aesthetics and absurdist theatre. They include: poetic or incomprehensible language, situating the action in a liminal time and space, disruption of linear time, heterotopias, form and frame rather than content and openness to "becoming"

rather than the “finished”. I have also identified the mytho-poetic as a useful genre for women writers. Although here, the genre is often not reproduced in its pure form, but encourages disclosure of the liminal experience, where protagonists are trapped between, and must negotiate, two opposite existential planes. Finally, in the analysis of postmodern, liminal and postdramatic theatre, several clear techniques emerge which are useful for practice and analysis. Through the interrogation, deconstruction and deliberate reconstruction of presumed singular sign-signifier relationships within theatre semiotics, there may emerge a multi-semiotic de-familiarization of that which we “think” we know, towards multiple hermeneutic possibilities. This involves *parataxis* or de-hierarchicalization, as well as simultaneity of texts and signs. Such construction also involves the use of a-causal and non-linear narratives which are non-teleological and therefore do not proscribe synthesis, but rather invite the audience to participate in the interpretation of the synaesthetic event. Such participation in the construction of meaning, shifts the emphasis from dialogue within theatre to dialogue between theatre and audience, and may have the same *efficacy* as participating in ritual to evoke a sacred experience for an audience.

## **PART TWO: ARTISTIC AUDIT**

### **CHAPTER THREE: Practice in Australia 1947-75**

### **CHAPTER FOUR: Practice in Australia 1975-2005**

### **CHAPTER FIVE: Practice in Australia: Brink Productions**

## **PART TWO: ARTISTIC AUDIT**

In Part Two of the exegesis, I aim to situate my own creative works within the Australian context as well as to map the territory of other Australian theatre makers whose work could be considered sacred theatre. This involves analyzing play scripts and productions where the sacred is approached as part of the discursive content of the writing, as an approach to *therapia*, or aims for an audience experience such as communion, *communitas* or transformation. I also look at Australian plays which have succeeded in evoking a sacred experience for me as an audience member. Even though some of my immediate examples of sacred theatre come from international artists and companies, I have limited my focus to Australian plays and productions, because that is where I live and practice as an artist. Also because many of my other examples have already been discussed by other scholars, including those I have covered in Part One. I acknowledge that there are many non-Western examples of sacred theatre that I have not covered in this PhD thesis. I am extremely interested in such theatre, but I recognize the need for research parameters in what could easily become an ever-expanding study.

I begin this study with three Australia works written and produced in the period between 1947 and 1975, a period when work written by Australian playwrights was at last being recognized as relevant to Australian audiences.

### **CHAPTER 3: PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA 1947 – 1975**

Although considerations of holy theatre and sacred theatre, (Chapter Two), had influenced European practice for several decades, dominant Australian play texts suggest that sacred theatre was not a consideration for mainstream practitioners even as late as 1975. Indeed, anecdotal evidence points to an initial resistance. In her book *Make it Australian*, Gabrielle Wolf (2008) notes that Australian Performing Group (APG) member Kerry Dwyer had

received a scholarship to work with Grotowski in Paris, and brought his exercises back to the Melbourne based group. The idea of these exercises was to create sacredness in the relationship between the audience and performer.

In a sense it was sacred theatre in that it was really performing not from the ego, but from the soul to the soul, so that you'd be contacting some higher force or higher being. (Dwyer in Wolf, 2008: 13)

Ultimately however, these exercises were rejected by the APG whose predominantly “...male members favoured a more detached, Brechtian approach that did not demand their deep emotional involvement” (Wolf, 2008: 13).

Although few Australian playwrights in this era turned their attention to the increasingly complex relationship between humanity and God or the sacred, there are three notable exceptions: Patrick White, *The Ham Funeral* (1947), which preceded the *New Wave* by over twenty years; Peter Kenna, *A Hard God* (1973), firmly entrenched within the *New Wave*; and Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* (1968), which was infamously excluded from consideration in the *New Wave* movement (Casey, 2000). In this Chapter, I briefly discuss these works to explore how various aspects of the sacred, including religion and the metaphysical, are treated in the writing.

There are two reasons why these plays deserve their own brief chapter separate from the works considered in following chapters. First, these plays were written separately from the production process, so their content, style and techniques are predominantly author driven. Second, I did not see the original productions or recordings of these plays and so cannot comment on the audience experience. Therefore, I focus on the play scripts themselves and look at the way the sacred is treated in the content or form. Both *The Cherry Pickers* (1968 draft) and *A Hard God* sit firmly in the genre of naturalism, telling stories of lower class people dealing with hard issues of survival. These two plays question respectively from the Indigenous and White -Irish perspective, how traditional belief systems around the sacred can sustain characters in a world where these beliefs are no

longer valued. In a later draft of *The Cherry Pickers* (1987) however, Gilbert inserts a non-naturalistic Prologue. *The Ham Funeral*, written in 1947, but not performed until fifteen years later, makes no attempt at naturalism and has indeed been called expressionistic, a symbolic drama and a non-naturalist fantasy (Brissenden, 1964: 247). Nonetheless this play also questions the role and value of higher consciousness in the face of basic, economic survival. All of these plays ask the postmodern or postcolonial question: “How do we shape our spiritual identities/beliefs in the face of colonial oppression or post-WWII economic rationalism?” That, by the way, is where the similarity ends.

### **3.1 KEVIN GILBERT *THE CHERRY PICKERS* 1968**

In 1971 the first full-length play by an Indigenous playwright written in English was workshopped at the Mews Theatre in Sydney. The play was *The Cherry Pickers* by Kevin Gilbert, which had been written in 1968, prior to Gilbert’s release from Goulburn prison in New South Wales and his subsequent collaboration with Pastor Frank Roberts to draft the Aboriginal Land Rights Bill. There was a single public showing of the piece, directed by Kevin McGrath, with a cast including June Johnson (Gilbert’s sister), Flora Landon, Lyn Johnson, Athol Compton, Lionel Donnelly and Smokey Landon playing Didgeridoo. Shortly after, the play was performed by Nindethana Theatre in Melbourne with an all Aboriginal cast.

Gilbert had also written several short skits in 1970 titled *The Gods Look Down and Other Sketches*, described by Gilbert on the manuscript itself as:

An emotional fantasy using subconsciously emotive scenes based on the modern spiritual drift and identity loss, which is actually the present search for a spiritual force or God. (Gilbert, 1970: Unpublished manuscript)

The sketch demonstrates Gilbert’s recognition of lack of hope, faith and direction in the Indigenous youth of the late sixties and seventies. It is a psychedelic plea for something deeper than the ego-centric manifestation of human love. Raul, the central character sums

up the essence of the sketch when he declares, “Love is dead! We chomp only on the bones that remain...What is the passion of love without the source?” (1970:np). Gilbert himself claims the message is subliminally aimed at white society, whose lack of spiritual foundation had led to feelings of emptiness and despair, not only for Indigenous people, but for Australian society in general.

Spiritual drift and identity loss is also the major theme of the 1968 draft of *The Cherry Pickers*; revised and expanded in 1987. In this draft, the play begins with a direct address “prologue” asking the audience to understand the “malice and injustice” that Indigenous people had suffered for 200 years and to realize that to “laugh and play” is the only thing that holds the characters back from wailing for their dead. The first scene opens at the camp-site of a family of seasonal workers, Cherry Pickers, waiting for their leader Johnollo to arrive so that the work can begin. Three of the elder women in the camp, Bubba, Emma and Sabina talk about the coming of the season, but Sabina says she has seen the “Wahwee Bhugeene” signifying that something bad will happen. News arrives that “King Eagle” is dying and Sabina takes this as another bad omen. Throughout the first act, “King Eagle” is referred to as a person; an Elder, and we are told that his strong relationship with Johnollo ensures a good season as it signifies the traditional relationship between those elders who have secret knowledge of the Ancestors and nature. Johnollo’s absence throughout the play is symbolic of a contemporary loss of access to the Dreaming through the inability of tribal elders to perform the necessary rituals. The many references to King Eagle’s sickness and dying throughout the play seems indicative of the sad and slow death of traditional culture. This theme is first introduced in Act 1 when the youngest family member Bet-Bet asks:

Bet Bet:	Where are all the Princes and Kings of our old tribe gone?
Sabina:	All dead....all gone! Ah.... ( <i>Reminiscing, rising to her feet in agitation</i> )

I was a princess in them days. No prince, no kings, just  
 warriors. Great Warriors. I WAS a princess.  
 (*She starts to sway, to dreamily corroborree...*)  
 (Gilbert, 1988:33)

When Chucksa enters with the news that Johnollo is coming, there is much rejoicing and the entire group runs off to tell the good news to King Eagle in hopes that this will revive him.

The next scene opens at the orchard where it is revealed that “King Eagle” is not in fact a person, but the oldest, largest and most productive cherry tree in the grove. A young couple, Tommolo and Zeena arrive armed with sacred *tjuringas* and other relics of the traditional culture. Tommolo insists that they must perform a sacred ritual for the survival of their people, but Zeena objects, saying she must not do it because she is a woman.

Tommolo insists that she must participate because there is no-one left. Zeena points out the irony of performing the ritual beneath King Eagle, a white man’s cherry tree, when they should be under a native gum tree. Tommolo accuses her of not believing in Aboriginal culture, but she defends herself:

Zeena: I am merely trying to tell you that we can’t live, nor find a new life by embracing a Stone Age identity in this nuclear age. We should rightfully be proud of our culture for it was the expression, the cry, the search for beauty by primitive man. This truth we should hold and advance by... not revert to that cultural age. Man must advance, must mature, and must never, never revert back for life is a constant process of growth. (Gilbert, 1988:61)

Her response is indicative of the new Aboriginal Identity emerging in the 70’s; the idea that Aboriginal culture would indeed survive Colonial oppression. However, this would entail that Aboriginal peoples acknowledge and embrace the present and move together into the future. Gilbert was first and foremost a political activist, agitating for change not only on the white political battlefield, but calling for his people to garner their own cultural strengths to fight for their own justice. He reiterated this call in his seminal book *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It* (Gilbert, 1973). Tommolo’s response to Zeena

sums up the essence of *The Cherry Pickers* and Gilbert's plea to his audience to remember that Aboriginal Identity is not stuck in the past, nor a dead museum piece, but involves recognizing what is sacred to their culture. For Gilbert, what is *sacred* is a living vibrant relationship with the spirits of the land, which must be honoured, otherwise as a people they cannot grow, cannot leap forward.

Tommolo: Don't you understand Zeena? I've looked at life, the world, the white man's way. I've looked through a white man's eyes and I was lost. (*Pause*) I ain't lost anymore. I am *nothing*. The trees, the grass, the river, the earth is *everything*. I am *nothing*, a *nothing*. Now that tree is me. It's all of me. I am that tree. I am nothing, yet I am somethin' because the earth is me. These rocks are me and I am the movin' soul of them all. See, I looked at that tree and said that is a tree. I kept it all separate and alien, but now, like the old days, I am nothing but that *tree* is me and I am something and when I die I will flow into the creative essence that made me, the tree and all created life, for we are inseparable. I have come home Zeena. (Gilbert, 1988:65)

Tommolo's speech is not about religion; it is not about repeating ceremony as a cultural artefact. It is a call to remember a way of seeing and being in the world; a call to honour the sacred creative essence of all life and to dissolve the separation between self and other or subject/object. Merleau-Ponty would call it the 'Flesh' of the world. In a later part of the speech Tommolo says:

Tommolo: It's not going back to the 'Stone Age', it's flowing our soul back to the Beginning, the Dreaming, being one with the Presence of the undying Spirit. Why did them Old People of ours sit in the ashes and chant their chants? White men call it "yuckaiing"; but our Old One's know its calling the Spirit. (Gilbert, 1988:65)

Tommolo then *makes* Zeena dance, even though for a woman to dance is a breach of traditional culture. Her dancing is not reverting to the "old ways", but forging a new way of honouring what is still sacred in their culture; a way of seeing and being.

As the "Cherry Pickers" arrive to tell King Eagle of Johnollo's imminent arrival, the two youths are frightened away, but Chucksa and Toodles know that something has changed. "Blackfella business has happened here today" (67). They then realize that King

Eagle, the cherry tree, has died. They wait for Johnollo to arrive, saying he will know what to do, because he knows the old ways. The play ends with the news that Johnollo has been killed in a car accident after stealing a sheep and being chased by the police. There is an acknowledgement that the old ways are gone, but there is still hope. The young can maintain Aboriginal culture in the nuclear age if they remember what is sacred to it...the inexorable connection to spirit in the land.

In the 1987 revision of the play, workshopped during the First National Black Playwright's Conference in Canberra, the opening of the piece was expanded to include three non-naturalistic scenes as a prologue. The first scene is "Creation Time" when the creator, called "*I AM*" decides to break the mold from what he has done in other countries and to make the first Aboriginal man different. He says "I won't be so physical with this lot. I'll leave out the macho and concentrate on the SPIRIT" (Gilbert, 1988:6). *I AM* imbues the land itself with spirit and then creates the "1<sup>st</sup>" Aboriginal man and tells him that if he needs to know anything, it has been carved into the Dreaming for all time. But with the arrival of Captain Cook and the White Governor *I AM* sings a lament: "Stole my country, kill the kangaroo, now I live on bit o' land, like Jacky in the zoo" (17). These extra scenes are stylistically at odds with the rest of the play. The first scene is allegorical in that it aims to reclaim the magic of the past, while the two later scenes are more Brechtian and brutal in their approach to character and incident. Nonetheless, these scenes quickly contextualize the spiritual theft that has occurred in removing Aboriginal peoples from their land, while at the same time offering a potential solution.

Later in the play, Tommolo's determination to rekindle that sacred connection is Gilbert's main message and call to his people. The fantastic allegory of returning to pre-colonial times and reclaiming the spiritual magic of the dreaming is Gilbert's subversive tactic for reintroducing Indigenous cultures to the sacredness of the land, thus providing an

imaginative future. The Colonial past is not ignored or rewritten, but is overwritten with another story where the secret to reclamation is written in the land itself; “I’ve carved it all for you in the Dreaming, for all time” (Gilbert, 1988:8). Here, the Indigenous future is not written in words by Colonists, but is reclaimed allegorically through the many Indigenous creation stories; “Look back and look beyond history to know your country’s birth” (5).

As Michel de Certeau (1984) suggests, such an allegorical tactic “insinuates itself into the other’s place...without taking over in its entirety, [and] without being able to keep it at a distance” (Certeau, de, 1984:xix). When *I AM* reminds his people that he has built the Dreaming into the land “for all time”, he reclaims the Indigenous future within what de Certeau calls “a fabulous utopian space” (1984:23). For despite the Colonial destruction of the Indigenous way of life, the land is still there and will be in the future.

Gilbert’s tactic is to insinuate the sacred within a brutal, historical narrative, thus reversing the relationship of power in that narrative. Furthermore, this tactic constantly manipulates events in order to turn them into opportunities in the future. As de Certeau claims: “Whereas historiography recounts in the past tense the strategies of instituted powers, these ‘fabulous’ stories offer their audience a repertory of tactics for future use” (Certeau, de, 1984:23). By adding these three extra scenes, Gilbert offers an imaginative future for Indigenous audiences, reminding them not only of the colonial history of oppression, but of the sacred origins of their cultures inscribed into the land.

These additional scenes and Tommolo’s speech on page 65 epitomize what I am calling the ‘sacred experience’. It describes the experience for those who may have felt it before, but had forgotten or devalued it. The speech reinforces a way of seeing and being in the world that is “other” to quotidian materialism. What Tommolo is describing is the web; the flesh; the anterior of things. In 1988, I met Athol Compton who performed in the 1971 workshop production. I did not formally interview him about *The Cherry Pickers*, but

on our long drive to Kernell N.S.W. for the *Reclaim the Land Ceremony* (1988), he told me that during the workshop performance, they had to stop the show after Tommoló's speech because people were cheering and yelling so much. June Johnson, who played the role of Fanny and Ettie in this first production said: "I love this play because it's us. He [Gilbert] put into words what we Kuris feel and what we are" (Fotheringham 1987:70). Kevin Gilbert was the first Aboriginal to write and publish a play in English. In this very first outing, the sacred was centre stage.

### **3.2 PETER KENNA A *HARD GOD* 1973**

In the preface to the published script, Katherine Brisbane calls Peter Kenna's *A Hard God* "a work of maturity" (Brisbane in Kenna, 1974: ix). She later qualifies Kenna's "maturity" as the sole voice within the *New Wave* touching on themes of "conscience, spiritualism and religion [as] important things which the young writers had not yet touched on" (Brisbane in Palmer 1979:24). Barring Veronica Brady's (1991) interpretation of the play as a struggle between faith and experience, much of the contemporary and subsequent criticism of *A Hard God* deftly avoids considerations of the sacred (Kippax 1973:193, McCallum 1987, Rees 1978). Meanwhile Kenna himself admits a clear intention to write his own concerns about religion and the sacred into the play.

Had I not written the play I would have been capable of being shocked by it...by its attitude towards God and religion. I would say I was a fairly devout person myself, I am on a spiritual odyssey, and whereas I don't have a lot to do with formal religion now, my position in life in relation to God who has created my life is vastly important to me and so I would want my relationship with this God to be good at all times.  
(Kenna in Palmer 1979:74)

The enormous contrasts in the interpretations of this play bears testimony to the multiplicity of contentious issues it raises, selectively interpreted by critics and theorists in various time frames and cultural contexts. I analyze this work squarely from the lens of the sacred and how it is treated in the script. For me, *A Hard God* presents the microcosm of a

spiritual confusion that engulfed the Western World in the Post WWII era, but was particularly relevant to secular Australia. This confusion remains as complex as its articulation is simple: “What is sacred if not the church? Where do we now place our faith?”

Written in 1973, *A Hard God* revolves around three brothers Cassidy (Dan, Patrick and Martin), the grown children of devoutly Catholic, Irish migrants to Australia. As young men the brothers are displaced from their promised land by severe drought, and finally the death of their mother. At the top of the play, set in Sydney, 1946, only Dan (the least outwardly successful of the three brothers) has a home, solid marriage and any visible relationship to his children. Through bad luck and management, the other two brothers Martin and Patrick, are displaced from their homes, wives and faith. They turn to Dan and his wife Aggie for shelter. Aggie is a pragmatic and kind woman devoted to her husband, but she never forgets that the charity Dan extends to his brothers has not always been reciprocated, especially during the depression. The play’s subplot or parallel narrative traces the forbidden homosexual relationship between Dan and Aggie’s son Joe and Jack Shannon, a young man, also adrift and rudderless after the death of his mother.

The strength of the mother as a guiding principle is a strong theme in the play, represented by Aggie herself. Another of the themes, the polarity between extreme devotion and the loss of religious (Catholic) values in post war Australia, is also represented by women in a spectrum not far removed from *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (Summers, 1975). Monica Cassidy (Martin’s wife) signifies the extremes of religious devotion, but uses her righteousness to manipulate others. Sophie Cassidy (Patrick’s wife, never seen but only heard off-stage), signifies the Jezebel, the fallen woman, whose addiction to gambling and alcohol lead her to shun the sanctity of marriage by moving another man into her husband’s castle.

Patrick (or Paddy) is not entirely innocent in his own demise. Never questioning his devotion to Sophie, he has signed all his worldly possessions to her name. Penniless and homeless, he will still not divorce Sophie because: “We’re Catholics! I wouldn’t dream of disgracing the family with a divorce” (Kenna, 1974:44). Indeed, all of the brothers are totally devoted to the women in their lives. Their own moral, physical and economic security is fundamentally handed over to their respective wives. In this regard only Aggie proves reliable. The relationship between the brothers and their wives in *A Hard God* is representative of the real crisis between faith, pragmatism and hypocritical religious dogma in the post war era. Here we have in the Australian theatre, an attempt to portray the conflict between the nostalgic longing for in an imported (Irish Catholic) system of values and the cold, pragmatic reality of a society where those values no longer have muscle. Holding tenure-ship in the solid middle ground of suburban Australia, are Dan and Aggie, who hold a private faith, but an ultimately pragmatic view.

What is at the core of *A Hard God* is the crisis between the loss of structural and moral cohesion once provided by religious dogma (*eruditio*) and the ‘hunger’ for sacred experience (*divinatio*). In the first moments of the play, Joe tells his father that he is going to the Catholic Youth Organization and receives Dan’s approval. Later however, when Martin arrives and utters his first compulsive prayer “Oh, God forgive us our sins!” Dan tells him: “Pull yourself together. None of that.” Martin responds by saying “It’s only a prayer, Dan. Pay no heed to it” (Kenna, 1974:14). So very early in the play, we see the contradiction between the perceived need for a Catholic grounding in values and faith, particularly for the young, and the embarrassment at overt supplication to and a direct relationship with God. Martin’s agonizing prayers are more an expression of profound guilt and hopelessness at the loss of his son, than an expression of faith. Indeed, it is he who calls God, “A Hard God”, “We just have to stumble on blindly with his mercy raining

down on us like thunderbolts” (16). Despite his lack of supplication, it is Dan, who has the stronger, if less publicized religious faith.

DAN: God couldn't have meant that to happen.  
 AGGIE: You're forever telling me it's all God's doing.  
 DAN: Not that. I don't know who was responsible for that.  
 (Kenna 1974: 16)

Kenna points out the hypocrisy, of believing in an omnipotent, compassionate God who appears inconsistent in his treatment of humanity. This is a quintessential, post-war concern at global level, reflecting the postmodern condition, with its growing cynicism around religious grand narratives. Kenna places this tension firmly in the migrant Irish-Australian experience, but in so doing he conversely points up his self-confessed need for a “relation with God”. The much revered women in this play become a direct link to the sacred and the sacred experience, although this is presented from a safe, secular position.

Monica's “private telephone through to the Holy Ghost” (46) is responsible for her ultimate demise. When Monica finally sees the “Angels”, she is carted off to hospital, considered mad, an object of pity. Moreover, this illness seems to run in the family:

AGGIE: You know; I've always suspected Monica would go like that. I knew someone who knew her sister Eva. And Eva used to get up in the cold frosty mornings, go down to the orchard in her nightdress and swing on the apple trees singing hymns to herself. Of course, eventually she caught pneumonia and died.  
 (Kenna 1974:67).

As Kristeva and Clement point out, the sacred experience for a woman is the “more or less catastrophic or delicious distillation of flesh within the mind, and vice versa” (2001: 16). Furthermore, this direct communication with the sacred is an act of rebellion against the order of proscribed religion. In other words, it is dangerous. Monica's religious fanaticism is represented as equally destructive as Patrick's wife, Sophie's complete disregard for the values of the Church. Interestingly, Sophie survives as the only real winner in this tale.

Notable is Aggie's role as the messenger of these observations. Aggie is the voice of utilitarian reason throughout the play. She is the salt of the earth mother, who holds everything together: she sees clearly and speaks the truth. She is also representative of the mother that the Cassidy brothers and Jack Shannon have lost. Without their mother's guidance, they too are lost. Neither Monica, Sophie, nor Jack's Aunt can provide moral strength or emotional support to their men. Only Aggie acts as the rudder for Dan, because Aggie's religion is survival, Aggie's religion is Dan.

DAN: I've never asked you before Aggie. Not in all the years we've been married. What do you think about God? Honestly?  
 AGGIE: Honestly! I don't think I think much about him at all, Dan. I believe I've always been a good Catholic doing everything I was told I should...(but)....I was always too busy...just surviving. Do you know what Dan? I think you've been my religion. I've loved you above everything else in my whole life. (Kenna 1974:64)

Ultimately however, Aggie's love and survival instinct is powerless to combat her son's loneliness or her husband's cancer. In the face of this powerlessness, even Aggie turns to prayer. She does not pray to Jesus however, or even to God, but to a woman, a mother, the Holy Mary.

*A Hard God* tells us a great deal about the ambivalent role of religious faith in 1946 Australia, a tension still evident at the play's staging in 1973. It exposes the contradiction within a secular society, between the sacred experience, de-valued as fearful, illogical and impractical, and the perceived need for the values and faith of a Christian tradition (Coleman & White, 2006). Though couched in the vernacular of economic survival, it is indeed this contradiction which rips the family apart. The loss of sacred faith and values is commensurate with the loss of 'the mother'; she, who exacts a strict discipline but is always compassionate. Without the mother faith, these men are lost, but those who go too far into sacred devotion and experience are also lost. The struggle is the phenomenological struggle between the exterior/objective reality and the interior/subjective world of

perception and faith; between the rational and the irrational. Although dramaturgically, this play places its chips squarely on the robust and rational Aggie, ultimately the dice lands on her plea to the irrational; to that something “wholly other”, to the sacred mother.

Stylistically, this play sits firmly within the *New Wave* as social realism. It illustrates through dialogue and narrative, the ambivalence around religious faith and devotion in the post war period, where demands of the sacred seem to contradict the demands of practicality and survival. *A Hard God* never attempts to *show* us the sacred, nor to *evoke* a sacred experience in the audience. Rather the characters talk about their personal sacred or religion, which predominantly involves Catholicism. Nonetheless *A Hard God* asks some important questions: “What is sacred now?” “In what may we have faith?” “Can we continue to place faith on a religion that seems unjust?” Or, “do we place faith in a secularized sacred like the mother, the family or in Aggie’s case, the husband?”

### **3.3 PATRICK WHITE *THE HAM FUNERAL* 1947**

Although written in 1947, *The Ham Funeral* was not performed in Australia until 1961. Some of the psychological and spiritual themes of this play displayed an understanding of the Jungian based concepts of *anima-animus* and an expressionistic style resonant of Strindberg. It is perhaps the creative and philosophical precociousness of White’s earliest play that attracted so much resistance by the Adelaide Festival Committee in 1960, resulting in rejection. Nonetheless, under the stewardship of Dr. Harry Medlin, the play was finally staged, non-professionally, by the Adelaide University Theatre Guild, directed by John Tasker. While in *A Hard God*, the tension between religious faith and survival comprise the narrative *content* of the play, in *The Ham Funeral* this psychological and metaphysical tension is reflected in the stage architecture.

The set itself operates as a metaphor of the human psyche (Taylor, 1973). It is vertically divided into two levels connected by an archetypal staircase. The upper level corresponds with the Young Man's search for higher consciousness and even transcendence over the muck and muddle of the subconscious found on the level below. Although the cerebral world of higher consciousness is seductive, the Young Man must literally descend the stair to interact with life's physical realities. He must "grapple with, and so grasp, the figures in the basement if he is to be fully alive" and fulfill his own longing for completeness (Taylor, 1973:274).

This struggle is stated up front in the Young Man's opening monologue, situated outside of the play as he steels himself to enter it. He is invited into the play of life by the silent landlord, Will Lusty and his bursting wife, Alma. The Young Man descends to the basement for a tea of bread and rancid dripping. Here he enters the visceral world of a couple "wrestling" with life; "bodies knotting together...killing themselves...and one another", where we discover that the couple once had a child, but it died (White 2012/1985:15). The Young Man finds himself the unwitting commentator or chorus in the couple's tangle, and retreats to his higher domain via the resentful monotony of the stairs. He stands at the closed door of the room opposite his own, from behind which a GIRL (dressed in white) speaks to him with a tone as intimate, but distant as childhood. In the Programme Notes to the first production, White stated that the Girl was the Young Man's 'anima' (Colmer, 1984:58). The Young Man is frustrated by their separation from each other, saying that while she is so distant they can never "complete each other" (White, 2012/1985:18).

Their interlude is interrupted by the screams of Alma Lusty below. The Young Man descends again, this time to find Will Lusty dead. He takes it upon himself to find Will Lusty's relatives and invite them to the funeral. So he sets out, beyond the vertically

and psychologically defined boundaries of the house, into the street. White's stage directions are very clear here, as soon as the Young Man exits into the street "a drop falls, concealing the rooms of the lodging house" and the following scene, seven, is played "in front of the drop" (White, 2012/1985:24). Here, in the liminal world of 'passage', he encounters two sequined and feathered Ladies, scavenging in the bins for discarded morsels (White, 2012/1985:24). Amongst other things, the "Ladies" find a dead foetus and run away. At this point, the Young Man finds himself before the Relatives and invites them to Will Lusty's funeral.

Act Two opens at the funeral in the basement, with Alma Lusty "monumental in black" presiding over an enormous ham on the table. The Relatives, all "dotted about", form a chorus of taunting eulogies to Will, ultimately accusing Alma of murder. Meanwhile, upstairs, the Young Man converses again with the Girl. She reminds him of his obligations to life. He must go down and face reality; and play his part in the "great conjuring act". She argues that no matter how base that reality seems, "these people are as real and as unreal, as your own face in the depths of the glass" (White, 2012/1985:42). However, on entering the reality below, the Young Man can't tolerate the ridicule being meted out to the Landlady and dispatches the Relatives. They leave singing and laughing, speculating over the fate of the poor Young Man, now in Alma's fleshy clutches. Fleshy they are indeed, for Alma tries to seduce the Young Man in an overture that Taylor describes as "attempted rape" (Taylor 1973:273). The Young Man almost succumbs to the Landlady's advances, but finally pushes her away and flees to the stairs, leaving her drunk and humiliated.

Distraught at his own violence, the Young Man appeals to the Girl for answers, and here we have the most mystical, transcendent moment in the play, because she gives him one. Like a 'guardian angel' in the moment of his greatest conflict, the Girl tells him that

Mrs. Lusty is the winner here. Despite her gross and sludgy existence, hers is the body in which life beats and struggles. Through it all, Alma Lusty has retained her simplicity and innocence, those very things the Devil cannot destroy. Aching for proof of the Girl's existence, the Young Man bursts into her room and we, the audience, watch her disappear. She is *not* a reality he can embrace, but we (audience) have seen and experienced her as a character for ourselves.

The Girl may not be real, but nor is she a figment of the Young Man's imagination. She is representative of his inner searching, his anima, his conscience and consciousness; she is his guide. Furthermore, she has told him the truth he didn't really want to hear; that he must embrace the flesh he so detests if he wants to be "complete". He must mend the mind-body split and enter the world. The play ends with him doing precisely that. He says goodbye to Mrs. Lusty, steps out into the night and touches it.... "like a face" (White 2012/1985:60). Once again we have evidence of Merleau-Ponty's "flesh of the world" here; a profound entering into the reciprocity of life, where "touch" is the means of connection.

What is healing (*therapia*) and uplifting in this play, is that the Young Man does learn. Taylor suggests this locates *The Ham Funeral* within the realm of fable or as a "psychological morality play" (Taylor 1973:272). I suggest it also locates it in the realm of the mythic quest, where the protagonist must seek guidance from the supernatural or sacred in order to achieve some goal, in this case 'completeness'. There are resonances here with *The Cherry Pickers*, where "spirit" resides in inanimate objects and nature. As Brissenden suggests, "The ideal state is clearly one in which man can exist in fruitful communion with his environment" (1964: 246). When the Young Man enters the night and touches it "like a face", he is touching the "flesh" of the world. Spirituality does not exist

only in the mind; in the higher echelons of consciousness, but in experiencing the communion between the body, the mind, and all that is impure or profane in the everyday.

To compare the techniques used to present ideas of the sacred in *The Ham Funeral* with the two other texts in this chapter, it is evident that White's play, much like Kevin Gilbert's (1987) non-naturalistic prologue, enters fully into the world of the numinous without apology or judgment. *I AM* and *The Girl* are very much part of the *opsis* of each play and are presented as plausible characters. Contrast this with the way Monica is presented in *A Hard God*, where Aggie reports second hand that she has been carted off to an asylum for stepping into the irrational; for "hearing the angels". In other words, Gilbert and White describe direct experiences of the sacred via characters which cannot be disputed. As a result, White asserts that the Young Man is not mad. He has shown the Girl and made her speak a profound truth.

Structurally, the play is designed so that we believe in her, even though she is "wholly other" to the rational. She reminds us of something we have perhaps experienced ourselves, but have been ignoring in the fray of the everyday. As John Colmer says:

The structure of the play as a whole suggests that only after achieving some degree of psychic individuation can the young man accept the earthly world embodied in the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Lusty and confront life positively. (Colmer, 1984:59)

I would go further to suggest the young man has experienced some form of psychic intervention, he has made contact with the numinous and "the other", even if that "other" is articulated by White as his "anima". Most importantly this intervention is not ridiculed, but reinforced by White. It is interesting to note here, that John Tasker, director of the 1961 production, struggled with the 'anima' figure of the girl. He asked White to rewrite the character, but the author refused (Tasker, 1964:299). This suggests to me that the 'interpretive community' of 1961 Adelaide, was not fully ready for White's direct acknowledgement of alterity.

As evident in the writings of Kristeva, Clement and de Certeau, considerations of the fantastic, the irrational and the numinous can be subversive to hegemony. In the Australian post war era 1945- 75, that hegemony involved political secularism and the transference of matters spiritual and/or sacred from the public to the private domain (Coleman, E. B & White, K., 2006:1). Many of the plays of the *New Wave* bear testimony to this hegemony and mostly ignore the sacred. However, the plays of Gilbert, Kenna and White indicate dissatisfaction with a society that could *only* embrace the economic and the rational. These plays search for a way of expressing a larger reality; one that could embrace the pragmatic but could also acknowledge the “wholly other”.

I have selected these three plays for this chapter because they exemplify vastly different approaches to the sacred in the post war era 1945-75. For me, Tommolo’s speech and the revised prologue are effective in Gilbert’s *The Cherry Pickers* because the sacred is embodied and celebrated, not as an ancient relic, but as a living phenomenon. Similarly, in White’s *The Ham Funeral*, the Young Man’s relationship with his imaginary “anima” or guide is embodied and confirmed. There is no doubt about the reality of The Girl in his present; her wisdom is healing and actively contributes to his development. In short, the sacred or numinous is subjectively and culturally embraced as an intrinsic part of reality. Kenna’s play *A Hard God* is more reflective of the spiritual debate of the time; adopting a realist approach, but at the end of it, there is supplication to the numinous. In that moment when Aggie realizes she is powerless and prays to the mother, she surrenders to the irrational.

In practice, these playwrights were writing alone and then presenting their works for production. For their plays to be accepted their ideas would need to land on fertile ground; an interpretive community who were open to theatre discourses around the sacred. Patrick White’s work struggled in this regard. *The Ham Funeral* was produced more that

fifteen years after it had been written, and then only after controversy with the Adelaide Festival and John Tasker's call for the removal of *The Girl*. Kenna's work is firmly embedded in the *New Wave*, with a willing production company at Nimrod picking it up only seven months after it had been penned. Gilbert's work initially reached only a small community of urban Aborigines and did not receive the recognition it deserved until after the 1987 redraft in much different circumstances of play development. It is no coincidence that this redraft reflected a collaborative dramaturgy, championed by Brian Syron at the *National Black Playwriting Conference*.

In many ways these three plays come closer to my own creative projects because they were not created collaboratively, but were written from the impulse of the writer. The play scripts preceded the actors, directors and designers and for this reason it is possible to analyze how the sacred is treated in the content and style of writing. What I take from this as a practitioner is that although the plays I analyze in Chapters Four and Five were arrived at through collaborative dramaturgy and I posit this approach as an ideal development process for sacred theatre, it is still possible to describe the sacred experience as a solo playwright.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA 1975–2005

Between 1975 and 2005 Australian theatre practices were transforming for four main reasons. There were new training opportunities, a new focus on international audiences, the rise in Indigenous theatre and the rise in women's theatre. In this chapter I briefly contextualize these four key movements and their influence on sacred theatre in Australia. I then analyze three plays within this period: *Isis Dreaming* by Margaret Davis (1991), *The Seven Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman (1995) and *Still Angela* by Jenny Kemp (2002). I consider these three plays to be strong examples of sacred theatre as *therapia*. They are also worthy of consideration for their ability to evoke a transformational and even a sacred experience for an audience, through their attempted or accomplished use of vertical time and heterotrophic and liminal space.

My analysis of creative practice expands from those plays considered in Chapter Three, since I examine here both text and the production/performance. The analysis of *Isis Dreaming* includes unpublished, primary source material, based on personal correspondence and interviews with Margaret Davis. It also includes a close reading of the play and production video. Although I have only seen *Isis Dreaming* and *Still Angela* as recordings, I was an audience member in the 1996 production of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* in Adelaide. The plays in this section also differ from those considered in Chapter Three in that each was written and produced as a collaborative process, not by writers creating a script in isolation and then submitting it for production. In these plays, performance is an integral part of the dramaturgy, where spoken language shares equal semiotic status with the visual and performative elements. This new practice reflects the four main contextual developments in Australian Theatre discussed in the following section.

## 4.1 CONTEXTS

In Australian practice, the training, funding and development opportunities for theatre artists from 1975–2000 allowed and encouraged a view beyond the quotidian and the real. Theatre makers were encouraged to reach international audiences with universal rather than local themes, including the ‘sacred’ in content and also new visual and physical forms. The rise of contemporary Indigenous Theatre directly incorporated considerations of the sacred in relationship to land and heritage. It is evident from the analysis of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* to follow, that this did not occur in a mystical or mystifying way, but as a matter of cultural identity, respect and as a call to healing and unity. Finally, the rise in women’s stories and subjectivities in the theatre including a Jungian based exploration of myth and dream states allowed for an upsurge in the mythopoetic form, aiming for psychological healing and integration.

### 4.1.1 Training

From the early to mid-nineteen seventies, actor training institutions such as the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) introduced predominantly European theories of acting, directing and dramaturgy to students. Later, Flinders University was one of the first to introduce performance theory to students with the aim of producing actors and directors who were “not just agents of cultural reproduction but critical thinker-practitioners and cultural transformers” (O’Conner, 2001:49). The Flinders University Drama model was adopted in the eighties by many newly established universities, formed through a proliferation of amalgamations between colleges of Advanced Education and Vocational Training Institutions. There was also at this time, a mass exodus of theatre practitioners travelling to Europe for training and experience.

These included Kerry Dwyer, Lindy Davies, Jenny Kemp and Geoffrey Rush to name a few. Such practitioners brought ideas and techniques back to Australia, which would impact on the creative practice of the time. Most importantly for this study, the theories of Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, Schechner, and Lecoq around Sacred Theatre or Holy theatre began to infiltrate the training and working language of theatre practitioners. The introduction of the Laban-Malmgren system of movement into major training institutions gave students and practitioners a physical language that negated the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Meanwhile Lindy Davies' introduction of Impulse work to the VCA, adapted from Kristin Linklater, resonates with the idea that performance emerges from the solar plexus, not the head, and is centered in breath.

It is as though we are preparing a deep, still pond, filled with crystal clear water, and then into this pond we drop a pebble and the ripples pervade and pervade the water. In other words, we drop a word into the stillness of ourselves and the meanings resonate and pervade us until we find the impulse to speak from source. (Lindy Davies cited in O'Conner, 2001:56)

#### **4.1.2 International Focus**

From the mid nineteen eighties, Australian Theatre began to adopt a more international focus. This was prompted in part by new directives from funding bodies encouraging work that could be toured internationally (Milne, 2004:33) and through the development of Wendy Blacklock's touring production company *Performing Lines*. These new incentives towards international touring changed the perspectives of Australian theatre practitioners in two important ways. First, theatre companies who told stories through physical movement and strong visual images could cut across the text based barrier of the Australian vernacular. Milne categorizes this phase as a "Blurring of Boundaries", where physical theatre companies such as Circus Oz, Entr'acte and Legs on the Wall in Sydney and puppet companies such as Handspan in Melbourne and Terrapin in Tasmania were experimenting with physical and visual forms in rich and complex ways (Milne,

2004:355). More pertinent to this study, companies and directors alike began to turn their focus away from preoccupations of national identity towards more universal, mythical and psychological themes. These were increasingly explored in those fractured, non-linear and even non-narrative approaches derived from postmodern, liminal and postdramatic theatre.

Margaret Hamilton, in her excellent book *Transfigured Stages* (2011) looks at Australian *avant garde* aesthetics during this highly experimental period through the lens of Postdramatic theatre and the writings of Hans-Thies Lehman. In justifying the term “transfigure” in her title, Hamilton draws attention to the aesthetic transformation of figure or image of the body as an element of composition as opposed to the illusion of character. Her work considers the collaborative processes of Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch (Open City) who sought to break conventions of realism through the involvement of visual artists and multi-media in their work. She also focuses on Jenny Kemp’s use of dream and liminal landscapes, to counterpoint the narratives of everyday reality in Australian Theatre.

Australian theatre...reinforces the values of the mundane world through its form and content at the expense of the non-linear temporality of dream, myth and fantasy. (Kemp in Hamilton 2011: 87)

I will explore Jenny Kemp’s work *Still Angela* in more detail later in this chapter.

### **4.1.3 Indigenous Theatre**

During this epoch came the rise and rise of contemporary forms of Indigenous Theatre, giving voice to Indigenous stories in the post-colonial, mostly urban settings of major cities. Although scripted in English, many Indigenous plays of this era encapsulated and reinvigorated Indigenous culture and identity after a long period of repression. The impact and importance of Indigenous Theatre at this time has been well documented by writers such as John McCallum (2009) and Mary Rose Casey (2004/2012). Within the perimeters of this enquiry, however, few writers have re-introduced the sacred to the Australian theatrical canon like Kevin Gilbert (Chapter 3) and Wesley Enoch. Wesley Enoch and

Debra Mailman's *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (2001), my most immediate example of sacred theatre in Australia, is discussed in this Chapter.

#### 4.1.4 Women's Theatre

Although the flagship State Theatre Companies were still dominated by text and by men, the third important influence on theatre practice in this epoch was the rise of women writer/directors including: Jenny Kemp, Fay Mokotow, Kerry Dwyer, Margaret Davis, and Sue Ingleton (Fensham et al., 2005). In re-focusing subject matter and working processes, several women practitioners introduced elements of a subjective 'sacred' to their work. They began to incorporate concepts such as liminality, alterity, psychic space, meta-heterotopia, ritual, myth and altered conceptions of time into their writing and processes. Many were interested in the relationship between the female psyche and myth, and/or in Postdramatic or Liminal narrative structures. These were not simply abstract and fractured, but as Whitmore suggests, ultimately achieved a sense of "unified whole":

...the collective moments when analysed diachronically, reveal patterns of emphasis and de-emphasis of sign systems and signifiers that constitute the collaborative unity of the aesthetic event. (Whitmore, 1994: 219)

Despite deliberate policies to incorporate women into mainstream practices, opportunities for women directors to work in Australian State Theatre Companies were limited. Even more diminished was their inclusion as writers of new works in that forum. (Fensham et al., 2005) As such, women practitioners were less likely to have access to "mainstream" forms of production. However, many became *auteurs* in highly collaborative workshop processes, telling their own stories through exploring their own subjectivities. With this exploration came a re-imagining of so called 'reality', 'temporality' and 'cosmology' associated with the mythopoetic style. Jenny Kemp's work exemplifies the mytho-poetic, with multi-layered realities and surreal "psychic landscapes" (Fensham, 2004, Tomkins, 2005).

Kemp engages with the quality of dreams, memories, fantasies and myths as much as the representation of domestic or social reality. Her stages are rich in surrealist imagery and play with the possibilities for illumination within darkness. She uses repeated actions and ‘logical’ sequences of movement and music. And there are pauses to examine the shadows that lie under the surface of ordinary events. (Fensham, 2004: 54)

The increased representation of female subjectivities, including myth, dreams and non-rational perceptions of reality, was highly influential in introducing ideas around the sacred, and more importantly the sacred experience to Australian theatre audiences. One other beneficiary of the new vigor in Women’s Theatre was Margaret Davis.

#### **4.2 ISIS DREAMING BY MARGARET DAVIS (1991)**

##### **SACRED THEATRE AS THERAPIA**

*Isis Dreaming* by Margaret Davis aspires towards many of the characteristics of sacred theatre described in Chapter Two. These are: theatre which aims for psychological and spiritual healing or *therapia*; theatre which incorporates ritual in order to affect a shared experience or *communitas*; theatre which reclaims a subjective expression of female spirituality through recognizing and honouring the Goddess (Irrigaray, 1993: 9-21), and theatre which acknowledges a subjective non-patriarchal experience of the sacred (Clement & Kristeva, 2001).

The play was first performed in August 1991 at the Performance Space, Sydney and produced by Performing Lines. The production was directed by Margaret Davis who also choreographed the piece in collaboration with Julie-Anne Long. Music was composed by Deborah Bookbinder and the dramaturge was Beverly Blankenship.

When I first approached Margaret Davies about including *Isis Dreaming* in this study, she (like many others) was resistant to the term ‘sacred theatre’. However, in both written correspondence and an extended interview conducted on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012,

Davis was clear that *Isis Dreaming* was intended as a form of healing; “a journey of integration...a process of individuation” (Interview, Davis, 2012 a).

I didn't start out with the idea of the Goddess and her manifestations, but rather with the need that everyone has to integrate all parts of their personality - and this then led me to the wonderful studies done by Jungian scholars Nor Hall and M. Esther Harding into women's mythology. ...  
(Correspondence, Davis, 2012 b)

Davis was also interested in using ritual to create what she calls the “shared experience between audience and actors”, acknowledging that this goes back to the roots of drama itself (Interview, Davis, 2012 a). Davis attributes her interest in the “shared experience” between audiences and actors to another of her mentors, Mike Alfreds, who had founded a company called *Shared Experience* in England in the 1970s. Alfreds had asked himself the question “Why do we go to the theatre?” He concluded that audiences look for a sense of community and a sense of communal release. I will apply some of the concepts around the “shared experience” or *communitas* and the theoretical ideas around ritual and ludic deconstruction in the following analysis of the play.

*Isis Dreaming* combines highly choreographed movement sequences with a poetic narration to tell the epic story of Isis and Osiris. The script is presented in a split page format, where spoken text is written on the left side of the page, and detailed movement sequences are set out on the right. This format indicates that language and movement are non-hierarchical and intricately connected. There are scenes with dramatic dialogue and interchange between characters, but the notable feature of this work is that no one actor plays the same role throughout the performance, including the main protagonist *Isis*. This signifies Isis as an Everywoman whose mythical journey towards reclaiming her sacred power is a healing journey that Davis considers all women need to take.

The stage of *Isis Dreaming* is a circle surrounded by curtains and the first image we see is a full moon. The actors perform a ritual dance in homage to this moon and offer food

to the audience. The ritual dance establishes a series of motifs or signature movements for three pairs of characters: Isis/Osiris; Isis/Nephthys and Isis/Set, taking role distribution away from specific actors and placing the audience reading of character on stylized movement.

Although there is no character breakdown or description in the published script, reflecting that no one actor plays any one role, I think it is necessary to at least outline the four main characters and to remind the reader of this well-known ancient Egyptian myth. *Osiris* is King of Egypt and the first born son of the God Nut. He is married to his sister *Isis*, the first born daughter of Nut and Goddess of health, marriage and wisdom. *Set* is the second born son of Nut and considered to be the God of Chaos. He is also married to his sister, Nephthys, the second born daughter to Nut, Goddess of death and rivers. So, they're already a rather tightly knit family unit with an inbuilt power struggle waiting to erupt.

In this myth, Set is jealous of Osiris, murders him and sets him afloat on the river Nile in a specially made casket. Isis is devastated by the loss of her husband and searches to find his coffin. When she finds it, she hides it in some marshes and goes to find her sister Nephthys. But Osiris also finds the coffin and cuts Osiris' body into thirteen pieces, scattering them around Egypt. Isis sets off with Nephthys to find the dismembered parts of Osiris' body and manages to do so, except for one part, the phallus. Using her magical powers, she breathes life back into Osiris, and makes love to him one more time, conceiving her son, the God Horus. Horus sets out to avenge his father's death. Many battles ensue between Set and Horus and Horus eventually rapes Set. There are various endings to this story in the traditional myth.

In the hands of Margaret Davis, the story ends with the Goddess Isis reclaiming her power and celebrating life. *Isis Dreaming* explores the dream state as a place of knowing, the sacred role of mother and the ecstasy of resurrection through sexual union. This play

sits squarely in the genre of mytho-poetic, a re-imagining of the cosmos and a restructuring of the patriarchal symbolic order. This occurs through use of gesture, ritual and the ludic deconstruction of reality during dream sequences.

Funded through the first Fay Mokotow Memorial Fellowship, the play was created through a collaborative process between Davis and actors, who worked primarily with physical exercises and an exploration of dreams and dream logic. Influenced by her reading of Esther Harding (1970) and the emerging feminist theories around the Goddess and pre-history, Davis and the actors began to explore the idea of a central myth, not only the Isis myth, but also that of Ishtar and other Babylonian, Sumerian and Egyptian mythology. In such mythology, Davis noticed that: “The mother is the primary force and there is a son, often, or a partner, and this partner is sacrificed and dies and then there’s a resurrection” (Interview, Davis, 2012 a).

Originally, the project was called *The Moon Tree*, but then the Isis myth, broken into seven clear episodes, became a framework for exploring various dream states. Actors began exploring each of the Isis episodes as if it were a dream they had.

So we used writing, we used movement; we used a lot of improvisation. We then found ways to look at various people’s versions and to form a, you know, a dramatic scene from them, if you like. We used a dialogue for exploring all kinds of things, vocal work. So that was a two-week workshop and then from that I developed it further and got a creative development grant from the Australia Council. Worked on it some more. So, very much, although I’m the writer of *Isis Dreaming*, it did arrive from this collaborative process. But it was a very physical process and very much, you know, there are words in the final script, images in fact, that came from workshop participants, not all of whom were in the final production, in fact only two were, after six had worked on it. (Interview, Davis, 2012 a)

After this initial workshop, Davis began work with Theatre of the Deaf in Sydney, who were experimenting at the time with a form of story-telling called Visual Vernacular, using mime and gestural language, rather than words. This later became a major influence on *Isis Dreaming*, as gestural motifs or “signature” movements became the denotation for character. The development of *Isis Dreaming* continued with assistance from Wendy

Blacklock who applied successfully for N.S.W. State funding for her company *Performing Lines*, to produce the work. And so the process resumed...

In the second workshop we worked with a choreographer. (Julie-Ann Long) And we were always looking for symbolic gestures for the symbols in dreams, but we knew from the Harding work, the Jung work, the Hillman work, not to give these simplistic significances.... We knew that certain symbols were archetypes and so we tried to find a physical language for those; a physical language for representing the moon, the idea of worshipping the moon was there right from the beginning. What did it mean? What did the power of the moon mean? So the use of physicality and bodies in space and tableau work came on very early in the workshops and then we just, in choreographing them, we threaded that together. (Interview, Davis, 2012, a)

The influence of symbolic gesture, Jungian psychology and experimental physical theatre is evident throughout *Isis Dreaming*, but it is perhaps the intention to ‘heal’ which is most crucial. In a note preceding the published script, Davis makes it clear that all of the actors, four women and two men, are “different aspects of Isis herself... although the men are more usually identified with the male figures Osiris, Horus and Set” (Davis 1991: ii). This convention of all actors, principally the women, playing Isis at various times is integral to the process of individuation Davis was aiming for in the piece.

.... to be a whole person a woman needs to acknowledge, you know, the male parts of the psyche, the angry parts, the mothering parts, everything needs to be equally honored. And those parts that are just shaved off because it’s too difficult to deal with them in life are just going to come back to bite you. You know, you are going to have someone come and knock your head off if you’re not prepared to acknowledge your own anger. (Interview, Davis, 2012, a)

So there is a deliberate intention throughout the development process not to simply create a play, but to create a play that would promote psychological healing for women. This is reflected in the structure of *Isis Dreaming* which closely follows the three phases of human development outlined in M. Esther Harding’s (1970) *The Way of All Women*.

Harding (1970) describes the three main phases of psychological development to be: the *naïve*, the *sophisticated* and the *conscious*. Isis’ own journey progressively moves through each of these stages in a steady trajectory from the naïve to the conscious.

Harding's first stage, *the naïve*, is one of intuitive union with nature, corresponding in mythic terms to the Garden of Eden before one has partaken of the fruits of knowledge. As we first meet Isis in her dream state, she is making love with her brother/husband Osiris by a river, but there is a warning that this naïve state of love cannot last.

After Osiris is killed, Isis' *naïve* dream-state is over. Isis must depart from the naivety of the garden, to participate in the world, to find the body of her husband and to enter Harding's second stage of development, *the sophisticated*. This stage marks the emergence of the ego, the awareness of personal power, choice and individuality, where choices in life direction and objectives are based on separateness from others; awareness of the differentiation between male and female, of differences in power based on class, economy and perspective. Most importantly in this stage is the sense of delusion and repression which may occur, if a woman cannot reconcile the difference between the dream-like states of the *naïve* to the brutal reality of the sophisticated.

It is at this stage that Harding recognizes the greatest struggle for women, particularly in the realm of love and partnership. For it is in this stage that the projections of animus/anima are strongest. Both men and women arrest their ability to see reality and instead project the idealized blueprint of their desired partner onto each other. In this instance the ideal lover becomes a tyrannical ghost not only dominating the way men perceive and therefore treat women as objects, but also dominating and objectifying the woman's perspective of a man.

Harding devotes an entire chapter to a psychosis she calls "The Ghostly Lover", where women's fantasies and strong affiliations to the perfect man, whether this be through idol projection or addictive memory to a fallen or lost beloved, preclude the woman from seeing reality. They cannot accept the fallibility of real men before them, because they are blinded by their own fantasies/memories/projections of perfection. After

the death of Osiris, Isis fully finds herself in the “brutal reality of the sophisticated”, searching for her ghostly lover in a post-holocaust landscape, and shadowed by her own animus, named Anibus, the black dog, son of her own husband and sister. She sets out to find each piece of the fragmented Osiris, to reconstruct him as it were, but in the end she acknowledges that the black dog shadow has taken her husband to the underworld. In so doing she enters the third stage of development becoming conscious of her own power to create life.

Harding’s third stage of psychological and personal development is the *conscious*. She attributes the recognition of this state to Jung, and quotes his definition of this state as one where:

His [sic] personal ego no longer dominates the scene, his personal satisfactions fade into relative insignificance and he becomes aware for the first time of the drama of inherited forces within himself. (Harding, 1970:24)

Both Jung and Harding define this stage as the development of a supra-personal value; something beyond the ego driven state of survival, towards the higher value of relationship itself; the essentially feminine Eros as opposed to the masculine Logos. “The concept of Eros could be expressed in modern terms as psychic relatedness, and that of Logos as objective interest” (Jung, 1964:254). The main point of *consciousness* as a final reconciliation and integration of perspectives from the female perspective is that it relates to a return to relationship, rather than rationality. To achieve healing and wholeness then, from a Jungian perspective, one must recognize that the ultimate best of humanity is relationship/connection, not separation/competition.

The final act of *Isis Dreaming* corresponds to this *conscious* stage of development, demonstrated by Isis relinquishing Osiris to the underworld and instead, caring for his child Horus. Even when Seth’s antagonism towards Horus escalates to rape, Isis cannot bring herself to punish her brother. Horus is so furious at his mother’s compassion that he wrests off her head. But Isis, now recognizing her own power, grabs the horned head of a

newly sacrificed cow and attaches it to her own torso. In this act she seizes her power as the true Goddess of creation and life. She recognizes, however, that wielding her power cannot be an act of revenge, but must be an act of mercy and integration. The play finishes with the words “I want you all”.

It is no coincidence that the mythic structure of the play adheres closely to a Jungian psychological trajectory, which in turn was based on the analysis of archetypal characters and myth. As Joseph Campbell observes, the mythic structure was also venerated by Plato and Aristotle as one of tragic catharsis of emotion through pity and terror, precisely the psychological counterpart of the purgation of the spirit affected by ritual.

Like the rite, tragedy transmutes suffering into rapture by altering the focus of the mind. The tragic art is a correlate of the discipline termed, in the language of religion, “spiritual cleansing” or “the stripping of the self”. Released from attachment to one’s mortal part through a contemplation of the grave and constant in human sufferings— “correcting”—to use Plato’s felicitous phrase, “those circuits of the head that were deranged at birth, by learning to know the harmonies of the world” (Timaeus 90D), one is united, simultaneously, in tragic pity with “the human sufferer” and in tragic terror with ‘the secret cause’. (Campbell 1959:50)

When Isis reattaches the horns from a recently sacrificed cow to her own body, she literally rearranges “those circuits of the head” which prevent union with what Campbell calls “the secret cause—known not in terror but in rapture” (Campbell, 1959:51). She embraces and becomes the terrible and magnificent power of the Goddess. Isis’ healing goes beyond the *conscious* phase described by Harding. Her healing through rapture transforms her into an all-powerful, divine being beyond all knowledge and form.

Ritual is incorporated into this production as a highly choreographed group movement. Repetitive gestures and shapes establish the signature motifs identifying characters as they change roles. Ritual and repetitive movement also distinguish the transitions between storytelling and dream sequences. However, apart from the occasional sharing of food, audience members are not participants in this ritual movement. They are

mostly passive observers. As discussed in Chapter Two, the sacred experience affected by ritual comes as a result of “ludic deconstruction” in the liminal state; the rearrangements of the “circuits of the head” away from the rational to the symbolic.

While there is most definitely a “ludic deconstruction” for Isis in this drama, I’m not convinced that the observed ritual, particularly Isis’ rapturous, energetic finale, becomes a shared experience for the audience. As Richard Schechner has shown, the efficacy of ritual to evoke a shared experience or *communitas* is dependent on two things: *participation* in the ritual and the convergence of symbolic and *actual* event (Schechner, 1976:205). In other words, the ritual must have significance to participants in that it refers to something of social value for them. As Brook has noted, without this symbolic significance the ritual becomes empty.

Davis’ attempt to address female individuation (and sacrality) reflects a strong social value for female audiences, but we are never really drawn into the ludic deconstruction undergone by Isis. I suggest it is because the ritual sequences incorporated into *Isis Dreaming*, are too culturally and socially exotic for audiences to fully engage. It is too easy to witness this production as Schechner would call a “tourist” or “the cultural zoo approach” (1976:214). In some ways this speaks to the problems outlined by feminist theorists in constructing a new symbolic language, where a new world view is inaccessible to the established symbolic order. There are moments of efficacy in *Isis Dreaming*; however, I do not believe they are achieved through the incorporation of ritual. Rather, what evokes a sacred experience in this piece is the effective use of poetic language and dream logic.

Those episodes of *Isis Dreaming* which are played out as poetic and erotic dream sequences deliver a real sense that we are in the highly symbolic world of the surreal. They are logically and temporally fluid. Images and objects magically transform to take on a

new significance. This has the effect of dislodging the anchor or referent to any reality, for as in dreams, time, space and the meaning attributable to objects become elastic and released from a fixed point of reference. The convention of many actors playing the same character is successful in portraying the Everywoman aspect of Isis, particularly in moments when several actors speak or move in unison as Isis. However, this convention becomes alienating when those same actors also become the storytellers, breaking the synchronic dream moment and telling us through direct address, the diachronic sequence of events in the epic story.

These same actors are constantly moving between subjective and objective modes of expression using the familiar Brechtian technique of *verfremdung*. To some extent this engages the subjective/objective body in performance, requiring advanced skill levels from actors. However, the inconsistency in modes has the cumulative effect of undermining the experience of those dream or ritual episodes in the production. The intended shared experience which can be evoked through an Artaudian “voiding of thought” or disruption of every-day logic is overwhelmed by the didactic storytelling. We are constantly being woken up from the poetic dream experience and being asked to digest rational and logical incident.

Furthermore, the shift between dream episodes and diachronic storytelling is characterized by changes in tense. While the poetic images spoken by Isis keep us in the present; “My lover and I are in the gardens. It is sunny, the grass has just been cut”; the story is narrated in the past tense, ripping us out of *witness present* where we may participate, into the logic of *fait accompli*, where we may only ever be passive observers. “Brigit: She stuffed a lettuce leaf in his mouth. Set was inordinately fond of lettuce. And what of Nephthys? They argued about her but did not include her” (Davis, 1991:5).

In short, the technique of *verfremdung*, where we are unsettled by disrupted modes of expression, belies or undermines the creative intention of *communitas*, the shared experience. Indeed, I would suggest *verfremdung* is the antithesis of *communitas* because it effectively separates us from a shared experience where the object-subject, or Buber's (1922) "I- you" (Ich – du), is dissolved. There is a distinct difference between the kind of disruption or interruption possible through *verfremdung* and the ludic interruption or deconstruction of secular, mundane space-time which occurs in ritual and which can result in *communitas*.

Where ludic deconstruction *reconfigures* causal networks at a non-rational level, awaking participants from their delusion of rational reality and separation, effectively *inviting* them to enter a state of communal trance, *verfremdung* exposes or lays bare causal networks at the rational level, inviting audiences to look at their torpor and effectively waking them up (Willet, 1957:99, Reich, 1970 and Brooker, 1994:109). In Davis' poetic dream states, rational reality is dislodged, surpassed by symbolic images and gestures, but then conversely the storytellers rip us out of the dream. This suggests that even though Davis had aspirations towards the shared experience, the work did not go far enough to release itself from the constraints of story and rational logic. Therefore, the audience becomes trapped in a double bind/schizophrenic relationship with the piece. They are invited into and then turned away from full participation in the ludic deconstruction of the rational.

Margaret Davis' *Isis Dreaming* is an attempt at theatre as *therapia* through the use of a mythic journey, ritual and the evocation of *communitas*. It also successfully employs heightened poetic language, illogical dream/liminal states and symbolic images to convey an alternative, non-rational reality and to present a female subjective experience of the sacred. These states are undermined, however, by rational story-telling, "cultural tourism",

moving between tenses and most importantly *verfremdung*, halting or alienating audiences from direct experience. My analysis of this work has allowed me to isolate similar problems in my own creative process, particularly in the writing of *Wyrld* (Chapter Seven).

### **4.3 THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEVING BY WESLEY ENOCH AND DEBORAH**

#### **MAILMAN**

*The 7 Stages of Grieving*, co-written by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, was first performed by Deborah Mailman at Metro Arts Theatre in Brisbane, September 1995. It was produced by Kooemba Jdarra and directed by Wesley Enoch. When I saw the production in Adelaide in 1996, I left the theatre with goose bumps. I had been transported, if not transformed. This play, looking at personal and cultural grief had acknowledged a perception and perspective of the world that I had often intuited, but had been rarely validated in my everyday life. Here, I had just seen a piece of theatre which not only reiterated my *own experience* of the connectivity between myself and the world around me, but had in some strange way articulated why this experience had been so consistently denied.

*The 7 Stages of Grieving* was unequivocally then, my first Australian example of theatre which could evoke a sacred experience in an audience. This was not emotional catharsis, nor psychological healing, nor was it a revelation of the oppressive history of indigenous Australians. This was a piece of theatre which provided the phenomenological shift of perception theorized by Merleau-Ponty. Carmen Taylor describes the effect as one which reminds us:

...in a flash of recognition what we feel we must already have comprehended, but had forgotten precisely owing to our immersion in the visible world.  
(Taylor, 2012: xvi)

It is not surprising to discover that this kind of transformative experience was indeed the intention of Enoch and Mailman in the creation of the play/performance. In his Sixth

Annual Rex Crampton Lecture of 2000 (Ginters, 2001), Enoch articulates his great passion and belief in theatre as a site of transformative experience through the power of telling stories. I believe this also aptly describes sacred theatre:

The people and conversations, stories of events passed down to us, being part of something that changes your life and shapes you differently, sitting in the theatre after a show has finished still nailed to your seat because you don't want the feeling to escape. Those kinds of things change you. I don't think you even have to feel it first-hand. Sometimes when you hear a story of someone in the right place at the right time and they've been witness to something incredible... you can still get that zing up your spine, that hairs on the back of your neck, that thud in your chest, that shudder, the thing that sends us back to the theatre in search of what it is, what's important, what's interesting. You don't even know it's happening. It's changing you... It's also about joining a community, a communion or coming together, creating some shared reference points, empowering symbols, gestures or metaphors, building up a language for a community. The language we speak in theatre is emotional...theatre is the experience that exists between people, it doesn't exist within the witness. It's a shared thing...It builds up our humanity by giving us a reference point or a shared experience which can transform an intellectual concept into an emotional reality. (Wesley Enoch quoted in Ginters, 2001 pp 5-10)

*The 7 Stages of Grieving* is premised on the five stages of grieving outlined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) in *On Death and Dying*: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Using these conditions as a template, Enoch and Mailman paralleled them to the seven phases of Aboriginal history: Dreaming, invasion, genocide, protection, assimilation, self-determination and reconciliation. This very simple framework, which integrates storytelling, song, dance, projection technologies and vivid stage images, creates a form of cultural as well as theatrical hybridity which has the overall impact of a complex and holistic experience in the theatre. Helena Grehan claims that the play “was the first great Aboriginal work to mix traditional and contemporary arts to create a new culturally hybrid form of performance” (2001: 318). The script and production of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* have already been well documented by Marc Maufort (2000), Grehan (2001) and others. Here, I will look closely at those elements in the play which openly acknowledge the sacred and evoke the transformative experience.

In this monodrama, Mailman plays an Indigenous Everywoman, acknowledging the grief of herself and her people through the telling of many stories, without ever linking these into a deliberate linear narrative. The opening image is a large block of ice, suspended above red earth, and projected onto a backdrop. Throughout the entire performance this ice melts; we see and we hear it dripping, disappearing before our eyes. We experience something solid transforming into liquid, melting away. In front of the ice, the main performance space is a black, charcoal square, surrounded by a ring of white chalk, suggesting a postcolonial shift of power in this space. Even before the complex web of stories begin, we have entered a space conducive to a different perspective of reality; one that is not fixed, and one that is centrally black. “It is about owning a black space...we are no longer the fringe, the white is the fringe in this place” (Grehan 2001:109).

The performance begins with an acknowledgement of the land and Aboriginal peoples of the land. Then there is grieving, sobbing and the inscription of space through English words such as “Grief. Grieving. Sorrow. Loss. Death. Pain,” ending in the words, “Nothing...I feel nothing” (Enoch and Mailman 2001: 282). This is then followed by a purification of the space through the ceremonial burning of leaves, followed by a song for “the spirits that have gone before” (278). Maufort suggests that these scenes illustrate Jeanne Delbaere-Garrant’s (1995:249-263) notion of mythic realism. In her analysis of Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, Delbarere-Garant distinguishes ‘mythic realism’ from magic and psychic realism as a pre-colonial form of story-telling where landscapes are not passive, but active, “invading, trapping dragging away” (252). For her, the landscapes themselves tell the stories to the humans, until someone finally receives them. She also outlines three additional features of ‘magic realism’: psychic, mythic and grotesque where magical events emanate from the environment itself. “The reference to

spirits presupposes the vision of a world in which there is no separation between the physical and the supernatural” (Maufort, 2000:106).

However, this opening sequence of scenes in *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is more than an expression of mythic realism. The purification of the space comes *after* the inscriptions of grief in English. The ritual of burning the leaves and singing to the spirits reaffirms a different way of seeing and being in the world. The burning of leaves not only purifies the space, but the song to the spirits *asks permission* to tell the stories of grief. This positions the spirits of the ancestors as entities to be respected and revered in the present. They are not ghosts, not dead, but right there in the space with us and need to be rightly acknowledged. The fact that they are acknowledged and appealed to in the Kamilaro language, *not* English, is a further destabilization of colonial power. As the play unfolds, colonial power is shown to be more insidious than simply political and judicial. It exerts itself as a decimation of sacred relationships in Indigenous culture.

In the first monologue “Nana’s Story” the woman (who is never named) tells of the communal grief at the passing of her grandmother. As she and her family gather around the grave, they burst into song:

...the words of which were unrecognizable. But the tune soared above us with the kingfisher...(she reflects)...My sister maintains that she knew first. In the middle of the night the sound of a bird singing had woken her and she sat rigid till the morning ring of the telephone. She answered “I know”. (Enoch and Mailman, 2001: 208)

This is the first point in the play where there is discernable acknowledgement of a psychic connection between humans and nature resulting in a different form of knowledge.

Maufort suggests that the grandmother symbolizes ancient Aboriginal values, “laid to rest for eternity”. He claims that the bird singing of the death of the grandmother suggests a profound unity of human beings and nature “reminiscent of the time of the Dreaming” (Maufort 2000:106). Maufort speaks here of the “Dreaming” as if it were in the past.

However, the point of the scene and the worldview it describes is that the Dreaming is not

in the past. It is, like the spirits themselves, right here and now, vibrant and alive. As Gilbert proclaims in *The Cherry Pickers*, the Dreaming is right there in the land, always accessible. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* primarily reveals the vibrant and constant presence of a way of being that is *not dead*, though not visible. Questions of perspective, indeed concepts of truth, keep reasserting themselves through the non-linear narrative and constant juxtapositions between humour and history; between image and word; between ways of being in and perceiving the world.

Rather than mythic magical realism, I suggest that this scene in particular indicates that form of perception born of the “reversibility of sensing” central to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “Flesh” (Chapter One), where the boundary of the ‘self’ expands to include the flesh of the world. The duality of subject-object dissolves with *reversibility*, the idea that whatever I look upon and touch, is also looking back at and touching me.

Conversely, if it touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside. If it touches them and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968:130)

The bird and the woman communicate because they are of the same element, flesh; “a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (Baldwin, 2004:6). Within this scene there is no boundary between self and other, the woman and the bird, because they are the same style of being. Or as Rothfield describes it, the usual distinctions collapse under the notion that “my flesh is intrinsically related to the flesh of others and that of the world” (1994:77-87). Reversibility of sensing is a form of perception, communication and knowledge involving the dissolution of the boundaries between self and other, between subject/object. Such dissolution of separateness suggests a profoundly sacred relationship, indeed, communion. If the human relationship to nature, land, animals and trees is a reversibility of sensing, a communion of flesh, then to sever

this relationship would be an act of spiritual violence and the source of overwhelming grief.

The destruction of “reversibility of sensing” becomes the most powerful source of grief in *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, not only through storytelling, but by the use of projected images upon the woman’s body. In Scene 8, as the woman speaks her native language, letters of the English alphabet are projected onto her, penetrating her clothing, skin and body. She is porous to the invasion but there is no reversibility; her native language has no impact on the relentless English letters. Grehan calls this a process of inscription and notes that at one point the performer becomes frantic, attempting in vain to prevent her body being used as a surface. “Her actions could be read as an act of self-protection or defiance in response to imposed codes” (Grehan 2001: 110-111).

These imposed codes objectify the woman as “other”; there is no reciprocity and no reversibility of sensing here. The dominant subject/object culture conquers her and in the subsequent “Invasion Poem”, the woman recounts that she is “forced to feed upon another tongue” (Enoch and Mailman, 2001: 283). This is not simply the domination of one language over another, but the systematic erasure of a world view, of a way of perception and being.

I lie painfully sleepless  
 In a landscape of things I know are sacred.  
 Watching unsympathetic wanderings.  
 To wonder is to think  
 To wander is to walk.  
 (Enoch and Mailman 2001: 283)

The difference between walking unsympathetically and thinking in wonder is the difference between objectifying and communicating. Communicating implies reversibility, dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy, where there is a relationship with and acknowledgement of things that are sacred. It is this sacred relationship of reversibility that

has been denied by white colonial culture. In the world of the play, this communion has not only been denied, it has been denigrated and desecrated.

This is poignantly reiterated when “Aunty Grace” arrives from London for Nanna’s funeral with her suitcase full of imported things. Aunty Grace has left her native Australia and disconnected from her family. Her family photographs had been removed, as when someone has died. She is the only member of the family who does not cry at the funeral. When she visits her sister’s grave, however, she suddenly empties her suitcase and fills it with red earth. Finally, she cries; she grieves. In the expression of this grief there is healing and in filling her suitcase with earth, there is reclamation of the land and her heritage. There is renewed connection. Maufort claims that: “The final scenic image reaffirms her link with the landscape, that is, with her Dreaming” (2000: 107). But what does that mean? Dreaming in Maufort’s own estimation is a thing of the past. But what if Dreaming isn’t the past? What if Dreaming is a way of seeing and knowing? Not a mythical past, but a perceptual state, achievable in the present through the expansion of the boundaries of the self to include the flesh of the world. What if whatever I look upon and touch, reciprocates? What if it is also looking at and touching me? If that were the case, then Dreaming is a vastly more complex set of relationships than simply a mythical idea of the past.

Dreaming could possibly be a way of being in the world, which acknowledges sacred relationships in the *present*, between *vibrant* entities, whether those entities are rocks, birds, brothers or spirits. It is a possible shift in perception, from the subjective/objective to a notion of reversibility where the “I-thou” relationship may dissolve into the Flesh of the world. This allows the “I” to emerge from within a different kind of knowledge and understanding. I suggest that this is the source of Aunty Grace’s

healing. She finally acknowledges a way of being and seeing that has long been denied to her; she finally *dissimilates* from a western view.

The connection between family, land and nature is recounted in this play as one of deep complexity and integration. Every element of the relationship is vital to maintain the delicate balance, but no one element is sacred as such. It is the relationship itself that is sacred, more importantly the reversibility of that relationship. To destroy the communion of relationship is a more profound source of grief than to lose an element through death alone, for the spirits remain. Nowhere in *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is this more evident than in scene 16, “Home Story”, where the woman humorously fails to explain the complex kinship systems of her people via the western logic of dissection. This scene parodies the attempts of Western, mostly structural, anthropologists to classify and categorize complex indigenous social relations into taxonomies such as: moiety, totem, kin group, language group, marriage groups and distribution of labour. Using this system, the woman makes neat little piles of dirt to try to illustrate the complexity of relations, punctuated by the words, “Are you with me?” In the end, she too is completely confused. She takes the dirt to the white fringe and simply says “Now imagine when the children are taken away from this. Are you with me?” (Enoch and Mailman 2001: 292).

The obvious reference is of course to the stolen generation and this has an immediate impact on the audience who audibly gasp. This is confirmed by an audience member cited in Grehan:

The most remarkable part of the work was the stark realization of the decimation of a system of family, love, connectedness, a crime perpetrated upon Aboriginal people in Australia. (Grehan 2001:113)

For white audiences, the crime is the destruction of family, a concept well understood by colonial authorities. But the biological family structure is only one in this complex system. Although removing the children is devastating, destroying the spiritual connection between

humans and the environment is just as violent and culturally destructive. As destructive as the Woman rubbing her hands through the piles of sand and destroying all evidence of meaningful connection.

For me, the most spine tingling line in the scene is: “Are you with me?” Like all good jokes there is a trope; the obvious is not the point. Sometimes the joke-teller will say “Do you get it?”, because if one doesn’t get it, one is outside of the logic of the trope. “Are you with me?” asks of the audience, do you see more than the obvious here? Much like the fragile eco-system of Australia itself, in the complex web of indigenous relations between family, land and animals, if you take any element away from the reciprocity, the entire system collapses. In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the first thing removed are the people from the reciprocal relationship with nature, the land and the spirits; the next is the removal of children from their mothers. It’s the same sacred relationship that has been desecrated. A way of *being* in the world has been desecrated. Are you with me?

Through its open acknowledgement of the flesh of the world, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* powerfully evoked an experience for me in 1996 that I am calling a ‘sacred experience’. It reminded me of a way of being and perceiving that I knew deeply and had experienced often, but this way of perceiving is considered irrational in Australian secular society. It’s an experience and mode of perception where the boundaries of the ‘self’ dissolve, as for example, in meditation, and where a different form of knowledge comes into consciousness. This kind of knowledge or *gnosis* is easy to push aside in the pursuit of everyday survival, but to do this one has to shut off the *reversibility* of sensing. One must grow a tough outer skin and eventually feel nothing. Crucially, “I feel nothing” is the last line of the play. This takes us back to Merleau-Ponty’s first point of departure in his life-long development of the concept of ‘Flesh’, emerging from his first writings around “Double Sensations” where the right hand touching the left hand can alternate between the

functions of “touching” and “being touched” (Merleau-Ponty 2012/1945:95). To deny the Flesh of the world is equivalent to cutting off one’s left hand. The grief may be indescribable, but there is a lingering sensation that the hand is somehow still there.

*The 7 Stages of Grieving* is my primary example of *Sacred Theatre* in Australia. For me, it approaches the sacred in *content*, as *therapia* and as a transformational *experience* for an audience. That was certainly my experience. By reclaiming a denied world view of the sacred, this play provokes a phenomenological shift in perception which is not only profoundly moving, but affirming and healing. It creates the opportunity for a re-orientation and re-integration of one’s connection not only to the “other”, but also to the self. The intention of the piece was to achieve this kind of integration “for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, acknowledging a sense of recognition and shared history” (Enoch and Mailman, 2001:274). I would argue that the impact of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* goes far beyond its intended audience. Although I may never share nor comprehend the indignities of black oppression in this country, while watching this performance in 1996, I did share in the sense of loss around a way of perceiving and being in the world. I felt the affirmation that my left hand is not lost, only denied.

As a creative practitioner I need to ask the question: “How was this achieved?” The answers are complex and the list is long, but the first practical technique held within the content of the play is simply the *acknowledgement* of the sacred within the many stories of the narrative, this is key. There is no one story that tells of the sacred; the sacred is incorporated gradually by many small and a-causally related scenes. The sacred is small in incident but vital to representing a larger cosmological view by way of synecdoche. The second is the multi-semiotic and hybrid nature of the production: the slowly dissolving ice, the projections, the stage space with its piles and lines of dirt. All of these images are highly integrated so that the *opsis* (what we see) and the narrative combine to form a ludic

deconstruction of reality as it is perceived in the west. There is a juxtaposition of opposites, we hear grief and see beauty at the same time, resulting in complexity and paradox, the terrible and the exquisite, the sublime. Finally, the generous, honest and uncompromising performance of Deborah Mailman brings warmth to our world, while tearing it apart. Here is another juxtaposition of opposites. Mailman zips open her body, exposes the cruelty of her cultural past, the beauty of her individual soul and asks “Are you with me?”

#### **4.4 *STILL ANGELA* BY JENNY KEMP 2002**

In the late 1970’s, Jenny Kemp was a founding member of the performing group *Stasis*, an offshoot of the APG, who developed a distinctive performance style focusing on the voice and “a direct connection between the body and the imagination of the actor” (Fensham, 2004:53). In 1983 Kemp became interested in the potential of theatre to represent alternative realities, adapting D.M Thomas’s *The White Hotel* for the stage. This work, which centred on a woman’s psychic premonition of her own death, challenged the Freudian analysis of her condition as hysteria, through juxtaposing the rationality of the outer world with the subjectivities of the woman’s inner world. The production was noted for its rich visual images and poetic writing and marked the beginning of Kemp’s long preoccupation with “the internal worlds of memory and dreams, and their interaction with the outer world of reality” (Minchinton & Kemp, 1998:76).

Based on her own dream material, Kemp wrote and directed *Good Night Sweet Dreams* (1986) and *Call of the Wild* (1989), working closely with artistic collaborators to weave text, space, time and image into a theatrical world which could map a symbolic, psychological state (Fensham, 2004:55). In rehearsal, Kemp engaged actors in impulse work, based on rhythmic tension between the actor’s inner conviction and the (externally

induced) kinesthetic response, in order to heighten sensibilities between the inner and outer worlds (Fensham, 2004:58). With *Call of the Wild* Kemp formulated her visual iconography based on the work of surrealist painter Paul Delvaux. She also explored places of transition such as trains, arches and doorways, to represent the liminal spaces of dreams, fantasy, memory and myth.

These structures are liminal spaces, thresholds between places rather than fixed locations, so that the setting is never a known place but rather a long-forgotten house or detail from an urban location. Patrice Pavis has called (these spaces) ‘vectors’, delineating more particularly the places of memories or myths within the narrative of the piece (Fensham, 2004: 66).

When Fensham mentions Pavis (2003: 17-18) in this quote, she is referencing his discussion of “vectors” as signifiers which do not delineate or signify only one meaning, the dichotomous sign-signifier relationship. Rather they open up a possible network of meaning, constructed incrementally through a sign’s relationship to other signs within the theatrical work (Pavis, 2003:17-18). In *Call of the Wild*, Kemp’s use of liminal spaces such as arches, doorways and trains, have a wider, archetypal association with the memories, dreams and myth visually referenced in the play itself.

Kemp’s subsequent works, *Remember* in 1993 and *Black Sequin Dress* in 1996, commissioned for the Adelaide Festival, continued her exploration of internal worlds or the “psychic landscape” through complex and closely choreographed repetitions and simultaneous action. Both of these works, but particularly the latter also explored the concept “vertical time” which allowed for a layered or cyclical conception of time rather than linear (Fensham 2004:57). Kemp also describes her work as a commitment to “internal action” and the portrayal of an “internal landscape”:

My focus at the moment is on internal action: what’s happening and able to happen within an internal landscape. Often theatre has been concerned with external action... to create the space for a relationship with internal action I’ve had to address time. To become internally active, society’s linear time frame needs to be arrested. We have to depart from cause and effect, beginning, middle and end; to stop travelling in a horizontal direction and open up a vertical time frame. In vertical time we exist in a space where past, present and future coexist; a space where there are states of being to do with memory,

dream, reflection, emotion, imagination simultaneity and psychic phenomena. My interest in these areas is primarily an interest in the creative capacity of the psyche. James Hillman says: “We gain breadth of soul and wider horizons through vertical descent, through the inwardness of the image. (Minchinton & Kemp, 1998:76)

In *Black Sequin Dress*, for example, such an opening up of the “vertical time” entailed interrupting time; stopping action, slowing it down and reversing and repeating it; making a particular moment in time a point of focus where a multitude of otherwise overlooked signs or inner impulses could be ignored. Time, as a point of focus, becomes stratified rather than being structured as a linear sequence of progression.<sup>1</sup>

Following from twenty years of practice and research, Kemp’s 2002 work *Still Angela* brings together and develops her focus on inner and outer realities, liminal spaces and vertical time, into a piece that represents the psychic landscape as a place of healing and individuation. It is for me, a piece which corresponds to what I am calling Sacred Theatre as *therapia*. It also reiterates the ideas of a sacred *experience* as one which affirms our relationship to our sensed self or selves in the face of projections by ‘others’. This experience, as that in *The 7 Stages of Grieving* occurs as a result of a new awareness or perspective about the relationship between self and self, self and other and self and the world. *Still Angela* evokes an experience in which: “an audience might find themselves seduced into exploring images or feelings that have been repressed or restrained by dominant social structures” (Fensham, 2004:61).

*Still Angela* begins with stillness; a moment of expanded awareness; a moment of reflection in time and space which crystallizes the past, present and future and refracts the three personas of Angela onto the stage. Angela 1 is a woman in her late 20’s, Angela 2 is in her early 30’s and Angela 3 is in her early 40’s. The production directed by Jenny Kemp and produced by Playbox Theatre was first performed at the C.U.B Malthouse, in

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<sup>1</sup> In her dramaturgy Kemp considers 5 aspects of time: Span, Stage time, Character relationship to time, Domestic time and Dream time. Unpublished workshop notes from Catherine Carter 2013.

Melbourne, April 2002. In the Programme Notes and preface to the published play, Kemp acknowledges her inspiration from a poem by Jodie Graham (1994): “sit still, sit still the lively understandable spirit said, still, still, so that it can be completely the now” (Kemp 2002: iii).

At the top of the play we find Angela 3 on the day of her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, sitting still in the kitchen, noticing the details of her present; kitchen utensils, a blowfly, a back door. From this stillness, earlier versions of herself enter her consciousness. Angela 1 (late 20’s) recounts the shopping list, the laundry, the mail. Angela 2 (early 30’s), notices that life revolves around eating, work and recreation. Then she notices a spider on the wall: “so still it could be dead” (Kemp: 2002:2). Angela 3 concludes that something important is eluding her. If she remains still, she might discover what it is. The tension between stillness and stagnation is palpable. This is followed by a sequence of sorting and sifting through memory, spatially represented as three corridors, with the three Angelas moving through them at noticeably variant and interrupted rhythms. There are moments of uncertainty, turning back, retracing steps. Notably, Angela 3 is slow, still and jostled by the others, as if being jolted into remembering something she has forgotten. The Mother and Father characters become peripherally present. Eventually Angela 3 cannot go on and is forced to look at herself in her late 20’s, while simultaneously dreaming of the desert. Over a series of short scenes, it becomes clear that Angela 1 has a frustrating relationship with her partner Jack, who doesn’t actually seem to see her. While Angela 2 is increasingly conflicted between what she sees (in the mirror) and who she actually is. As she walks along the path of her childhood, she asks herself “Am I six forever?” (11).

This highly choreographed opening sequence sets up the disparity between the pragmatic visible world and the one lurking under the surface, the inner world of the psyche. For while the three Angelas grapple with different aspects of their lives, each

forcing them into a different rhythm and persona; ultimately all three aspects are *still* Angela. She is simultaneously a girl of six, a woman in her late twenties and another woman in her early thirties turning 40, each existing in a vertical layering of time within the space. “The vertical and horizontal dimensions of time and space thus operate as vectors that link the myth with reality and the past with the present” (Fensham, 2004:57). Each Angela remains present on the stage, but it is often when Angela 3 turns her attention to a particular aspect of herself, that it becomes the focus of a diachronic sequence or scene. So there is a halting and repetition of time, as several diachronic sequences are presented synchronically and heterotopically; a layering of non-linear memories jostling for attention.

In Sections Two and Three, Angela 3 boards the Ghan for a long awaited trip to the desert, while Angela 1, heard as “voice over”, reflects that she “has not yet fully embarked” (Kemp 2002:15). Angela 2 remembers her mother’s death, and becomes the nurse who ushers herself as a six-year-old child to safety. Meanwhile, the father builds a garden path in the same space as the train. Both the train and the garden path are liminal spaces; transition places not only between one state of being and another, but also between time frames. This path, lain progressively throughout the play by the father, represents not only a liminal entree to the past, but as the father is building it, the path becomes the direction he has made for Angela’s future.

As Fensham (2004:62) points out, the father/daughter path is the unconscious motif that dominates Angela in the everyday; the domesticity of the relentless dishes; her dedication to work; the opportunity to marry a man who ultimately can never see her, but only the projection he has created for himself. Angela is subconsciously aware of her own objectification by her partner, “I hope you’re not masturbating on me” (Kemp 2002:6). The path that her father builds, occupies the same stage space as the train to the desert.

This is the same liminal space, the psychic landscape where Angela walks, “leaving behind the child of patriarchy, as she constructs an unknown future for herself” (Fensham, 2004:62). It is here, trapped in the liminal state between two landscapes, that we begin to recognize Angela’s real struggle. She can never fully enter into the inner landscape of her own construction; the mytho-poetic world, but she must “still” negotiate the patriarchal world of the everyday. As Angela 2 observes while speaking to her other self, “The truth of the matter is that there are two landscapes, Angela. One always on top of the other” (Kemp, 2002:19).

Tompkins highlights that this “psychic landscape” of the desert, or the “psychic space” of Angela’s inner world, grows to be more extensive than the conventional, domestic reality in the second half of the play.

Once Angela visits the desert, the layering of spaces appears to be reversed. The psychic space has a transformative effect on the character of Angela: after Kemp’s characters inhabit psychic space, they are subsequently more able to negotiate the fully realized and mapped physical space. (Tompkins 2005:194)

Angela 3’s full immersion in the desert occurs in Stage 5 of the play; entitled in the script ‘The Impossible Task/Ant Nature/The Domestic World is Laid Out in the Desert’ (20). Here, some of the domestic physical objects and scenarios of the everyday reappear, but they are re-contextualized and re-inscribed by their surreal existence in the Simpson Desert. This re-contextualization is a deliberate ludic deconstruction of the rational everyday and Kemp makes it clear in the stage directions that the intension is to *privilege* a reading of the ‘psychic space’. Although this sequence repeats some of the text from Section One, the form is changed totally. This is reflective of Angela’s new energy and clarity found in the desert. Now there is some space, distance between things, and the ability to feel things physically. There is more of a sense of Angela being “embodied” (Kemp 2002:20).

Angela 3 sits in the desert and watches as Angela 2 rushes around looking for her keys, burning her tongue, haggling with Jack over the car; and Angela 1 walks along the path of her childhood, remembering “I’m six today” (25). As Angela 3 finds stillness, Angela 1 remembers herself grabbing the girl on her sixth birthday, the day of her mother’s death, and rescuing her from drowning. This is the second time we have seen the adult Angela rescue her own little girl. This could be a reference to the Jungian based archetype of the child, later developed in popular and analytical psychology as the ‘inner child’<sup>2</sup>. Or, it could be a profound statement about the nature of time itself, not simply as a staging device, but as a philosophical concept. For if indeed time is not linear but vertical, then it must also be reversible.

Vertical time does not only provide a portal from the past to the present; it also provides one from the future to the present, whenever that present occurs. From the standpoint of the present, all time is available at once. So, not only can Angela go back in time and remember events as a passive observer, she may also enter the past from the future as an adult to *assist* herself as a child. This suggests that the past is not the only influence in our continuous present, but that the future is also an influence. The future may visit us to assist us in vortex moments; those moments of heightened awareness, stress or ecstasy where a continuous perception of time is interrupted.

In his earlier work, Merleau–Ponty touches on the phenomenology of temporal perception where time is created by the body as past, present and future:

In every moment of focussing, my body ties a present, a past and a future together. It secretes time, or rather it becomes that place in nature where for the first time events, rather than pushing each other into being, project a double horizon of the past, and future around the present...Here there is indeed an invocation, but not an experience of an eternal creativity. My body takes possession of time and makes a past and a future exist for a present; it is not a

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<sup>2</sup> It is well documented that Kemp drew on Jungian theories around archetypes, as well as the (Jungian based) writings of James Hillman and Australian psychologist Peter O’Conner. See Fensham (2004) and Minchinton & Kemp (1998)

thing, rather than suffering time, my body creates it. (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 2012:249)

In other words, time is interpreted by the bodily experience as being sequential and linear; it is not a “thing” which exists outside of experience. However, if this sequential interpretation is interrupted in moments of heightened or altered perception (vortex moments) a reinterpretation may occur. The experience of time can be vertical: simultaneously infinite, immediate and reversible. If we expand Merleau-Ponty’s idea of ‘Flesh’ to include time, the experience may look like this: What I look at and touch in physical space, looks back at and touches me, *and also* whatever I look upon and interpret through my body’s perspective of time, past, present and future, may interact with and influence my body. This suggests not only the possibility of premonition or precognition, but the idea that a future self may interact with and guide a past self. Heidegger calls this “The ecstatic unity of temporality”, the possibility that there can be “a being that exists as it’s there”, that may be perceived through clarity (“clearedness”) and is grounded in *care*.

We understand the light of this clearedness only if we do not look for innate, objectively present power, but rather question the whole constitution of being *Dasein*, care, as to the unified ground of its existential possibility. *Ecstatic temporality clears the there primordially*. (Heidegger 1953, 2010:334)

Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* refers to the essence of being which is not an objective entity such as a soul, but an essence that becomes aware of itself by engaging fully in the world with what he calls “care” but could also be called “presence” in the moment. To be fully present and fully engaged in the immediate environment allows the being to know itself outside of temporality. Being there fully in the moment allows for a heightened perception of the self in time.

During Angela’s vortex moment of stillness in the desert, she witnesses and experiences this “ecstatic unity of temporality”, simultaneously infinite, immediate and reversible. She enters into a ‘sacred’ experience’, which sometimes may be spontaneous,

but is more often realized in the meditative state, which also calls for “being there” in the moment. In Hindu religion it is called *Samadhi*.

In Samadhi there is no such thing as ‘time’, that is, the sequence of events. There, all is ONE, at the same moment, if we can say so. No past, no future, only the glorious eternal PRESENT, extending into infinity. (Sadhu 1967:31)

If for example, time were to be represented as a three dimensional geometric form rather than a two dimensional linear sequence, then that form could be a pyramid; three sides touching at the same apex with each side representing past, present and future. If we try to define time by looking at only one of the sides, we lose the three dimensional perspective of the form. From each face we can only ever access the logic of a two dimensional perspective. If, however, we climb to the top of the pyramid and look down upon it, we suddenly see all three facets of the form at once: past, present and future connected at the apex. To see all sides of the pyramid at once, simultaneously, creates a new perception of “truth”. When Angela visits the desert, she climbs to the apex of the pyramid. She gains a new perspective and a new perception of time and reality.

Angela witness and experience the reversibility of time in this vortex moment in the desert, as do we, the audience. She also witnesses the ludic/symbolic deconstruction in space of those everyday objects that have come to dominate her life. Those dirty dishes which seem so unimportant to the unconscious Jack (Kemp, 2002: 23), ultimately attract ants: creatures who normally live in their own substratum; a landscape beneath the surface, not unlike the psyche. Overwhelmed and exhausted by her domestic concerns, Angela 2 can no longer attend to those little things that keep the ants in their rightful place. Instead, they erupt, like the psyche all over the kitchen and nothing can contain them. The chess board, upon which Angela is consistently and tactically beaten in the social contract (Kristeva 1986:471-484), becomes her source of strength when she is guided by her dead mother to “use the horse”. This is a parody of that famous line from *Star Wars*, “Use the force”. In other words, she is being guided to engage in logic outside of the rational. The

Horse does not move in a straight line, but jumps, one forward and two to the side, utilizing an alternative tactical logic and rhythm: one, two three, one, two three. This is a rhythm not unlike the cha cha, a move Angela also learned from her mother: “Back forward one two three. Forward, back cha cha cha.” Here is a movement and rhythm outside of the linear rationality of her partner Jack, but it is one that he may neither diminish nor dominate. Using the alternative logic of the horse as a tactical device, Angela is able to conquer her rational obligation to the social contract. “Angela 2: The Horse forward, one, two, one, two, three. Check-mate” (Kemp, 2002:30).

Angela’s time in the desert is a *vortex* of vertical time and symbolic/ludic deconstruction which precipitates her shift in perception towards healing and individuation. Badiou calls such structural interruptions of time “momentous events”, characterized by temporal schisms or a “breach of time” which does not belong to the narrative which normally sustains it. Rather, these events bring into focus “the void of the situation”, the hole in logic which requires the subject to reinvent a new way of being “according to the event” (Badiou, 1999:38). Adrian Kear’s study on the ethic of interruption in performance posits such “momentous events” as portals to a different kind of “truth process”, a ludic reconstruction of the way both the subject and the observer audience begin to perceive reality (Kear, 2004: 99-110). Kear suggests that in these momentous events, there is a radical re-construction or reconfiguration of the logical relationship between self and self, self and other and self and the world (including time and space). This reveals a truth which changes not only a person’s *perception* of the truth, but also *the person* who understands this truth.

Kear and Badiou are describing a transformative experience in the theatre, brought about by interruption of the everyday logic. But the interruption they speak of is quite different from Brecht’s *verfremdung*. In *Still Angela* there is no interruption to the

suspension of disbelief; rather the interruption of logic is so radical that the audience are invited into a completely different world. Here we are drawn fully into the mytho-poetic construction of a woman's psyche; there is no more liminality. Through her momentous event in the desert, both Angela and we as audience can no longer deny the alternative landscape. It has re-shaped us; we have seen things there that we cannot un-see.

When Angela returns from the desert experience via the liminal train, she is joined on the journey by her 'previous' selves, who celebrate life together, drinking chardonnay, eating steak and fish and chicken. On the day of her fortieth birthday, Angela 3 celebrates with a fancy dress party, embracing the non-linear, a-causal absurdity of life. She returns from the desert with a new perception of reality; a healing of her fractured selves and with new inner resources. As Kemp herself says, "a tiny movement in the psyche is a huge rebellious act" (in Fensham 2004:62).

Outside me is the night  
sky the universe,  
The big picture.  
(Kemp 2002:41)

There is a great deal more to be said about the relationship between vertical time, ludic deconstruction and the sacred experience. However, to bring the focus back to this section, I need to ask, "Has this play in particular used ludic deconstruction and vertical time to evoke a sacred experience for an audience?" Regrettably, I did not see a live production of *Still Angela*, and so am reliant on the singular perspective given in a DVD recording (2005). However, even in that limited arena, there are definite moments where the layered narratives in the script, combined with deliberate choices in the *mise-en-scene* (visual and performative) come together in a moment of understanding or realization where the unity is larger than the sum of its semiotic parts<sup>3</sup>. This undoubtedly occurs during Angela's time in the desert. Fensham (2004:60) suggests that this semiotic unity is:

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<sup>3</sup> Meyrick, Julian calls this a "turn" within P.

“the aesthetic condition of synchronicity that is fundamentally important to Kemp.” Here, Fensham draws from Marie Louise von Franz’ exploration of synchronicity:

For the synchronistic way of thinking it is essential to watch both areas of reality, the physical and the psychic...(it is) a certain moment in time – which is the uniting fact, the focal point for the observation of this complex of events. (von Franz,1980, cited in Fensham:2004:60)

Jung’s full exploration of synchronicity will be discussed in Chapter Five, but briefly, the concept describes a series of a-causal events where symbolic coincidences and notations link these events metaphorically. In *Still Angela* the synchronicity of seemingly disparate images and narratives comes together throughout the desert sequence, resulting in a satisfying unity. This unity is a-causal, but emerges when a carefully constructed synchronicity of time events (past, present, future) meaningfully coincide with key symbolic images such as the ants, the chess board and the vastness of the desert sky. No one of these elements is given prominence throughout the play, but at this vortex moment in the dessert (Stage 5), they speak to each other to reveal a greater meaning. Standing still in one of the most sacred places in Australia, Angela witnesses the fractured interfaces of her reality collide in time and space to reconfigure a web of meaningful complexity in which she, like the spider, is held.

I have watched the recorded performance of *Still Angela* many times, both in private and in the company of others. Although I cannot speak for my fellow audience members, for me the sequences in the desert effected an experience of realization and remembrance similar to (though not as powerful) as *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. I believe that my experience was diminished by the viewing format of a recording, and that attending a live performance would have elicited a much stronger response. Nonetheless, the deliberate privileging of an alternative perspective of reality and the careful synchronicity of time and images had the effect of reminding me of something I deeply knew but had somehow buried; something resonant with great beauty, harmony and unity.

Although I can't claim to have had a 'sacred experience' while watching *Still Angela*, it reminded me of a sacred experience. Within the context of situating my own creative practice in Australia, I felt that I had bumped into a fellow traveler, who had approached the sacred many years before me, and to a great extent, had laid the path.

#### 4.5 CONCLUSIONS

Several key concepts and practical techniques have emerged from the Artistic Audit in this Chapter towards the writing of sacred theatre. First, collaboration between writer/director, actors and designers and music makers is key to developing a script that is not language focused and moves beyond the rational. Such collaboration may incorporate non-naturalistic movement and images into the overall semiotic experience for an audience. The collaborative process allows a multiplicity of views and the ability to step into alternative and liminal states of being away from the rationality of language alone.

Second, the acknowledgement of non-rational states of being through dream, conflicting psychological layers and disconnected stories allows audiences to make their own symbolic configurations (ludic reconstructions) of those aspects of life largely unacknowledged in the everyday. This may be achieved through a mythic construction or through the liminal presentation of paradoxical states. What appears to be counterproductive to the evocation of *communitas* in these states, is narration style storytelling and the Brechtian technique of *verfremdung*, both of which shift audience response from experience to analysis.

Third, reinforcement of ways of being and seeing through a reversibility of sensing, in the liminal state, in the structuring of time, or in the open acknowledgement of communication between animate and inanimate 'things', points to an underlying web or

anterior system or intelligence beneath the material. This speaks to an underlying unity and connection between all things and the dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy.

Although this may seem like a list of employable techniques, it is not as simple as that. Not all of these techniques and processes are used in the same way and not all have the same effect. Whatever the application or efficacy of these techniques, two clear points emerge which point to sacred theatre. The first is *therapia*, an aim to redress or heal and the second is the aim for an alternative unity. Through the a-causal sympathy of events, incidents and symbolic references, there is the assertion through these pieces that there is another world bubbling underneath; that this world is intelligent and furthermore, that it is sacred.

## CHAPTER 5: PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA

### BRINK PRODUCTIONS

In this Chapter I look at the wider creative and theoretical principles of Adelaide based theatre company Brink Productions as an ideal framework for practice. I then focus on *When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell as a case study in both dramaturgical process and writing. This play and its production, along with *The 7 Stages of Grieving* was one of my first and immediate examples of Sacred Theatre in Australia, both as *therapia* and for its ability to evoke a phenomenological shift in audience perception, or what I call a ‘sacred experience’. It does this using a highly sophisticated dramaturgical/production process. There is also rigor in the writing, employing complex principles such as vertical time, synchronicity, meta-heterotopia, vectorization of signs and the paradoxical coexistence of both an Aristotelian and non-teleological plot structure.

The focus of this chapter differs from the previous two chapters because here, I explore practice that I have not been able to fully incorporate into my own creative process. Rather, this chapter outlines a working methodology for future practice. In other words, it provides a way forward towards the possibility of sacred theatre beyond my own creative works. The three plays I analyzed in Chapter Four were all achieved through a process of collaboration. In each of these plays the writer was also director or performer of the piece. Brink’s process takes collaboration to a different level, where the contributions of skilled collaborators are finely honed into a working script by a consummate writer and then reintroduced in the rehearsal/production process. Such a process was simply not possible in the writing of my own works, especially in the academic environment, where such integrated collaboration is difficult to examine. Nonetheless, I believe Brink’s collaborative dramaturgy provides an ideal framework for future practitioners.

Brink's work enters the realm of sacred theatre for me, particularly within its collaborative dramaturgies, because it resonates with Brook's definition of the term (Brook 1993:59). That is, Brink attempts to bring the invisible into clear, if fleeting view, or as Lyotard (1983:82) puts it: "to witness the unrepresentable". This is not always successful, but the attempt is consistently there to transcend reality; to weave the net that might catch the golden fish and to find the ingredients which might make it possible for theatre alchemy to occur. Furthermore, Brink's work deliberately and sometimes directly produces liminal spaces and heterotopias, thereby challenging notions of reality through reconfigurations of time and space. The work also frequently disrupts narrative in order to reconstruct the relationship between cause and effect, pointing to a larger story, where connections between lives and events may be oblique, repetitious and symbolic but are always profoundly there. In short, Brink shoots for the sublime; in Kantian (1978) terms, the artists strive for a kind of 'negative pleasure' characterized by disquiet. (Interview, Drummond, 2013).

### **5.1 BRINK'S DRAMATURGICAL PROCESS**

Brink Productions is well known in Australia for its collaborative dramaturgy which has resulted in works such as *This Uncharted Hour* (2007) by Finegan Kruckemeyer, *Land & Sea* (2012) by Nicki Bloom, *Thursday* (2013) by Bryony Lavery and *When the Rain Stops Falling* (2008) by Andrew Bovell. Chris Drummond, the artistic director of Brink Productions is the driving force behind the company's collaborative process. When I first approached Drummond in 2012 to interview him about his creative ambitions and processes, he expressed skepticism about the term Sacred Theatre. However, he admitted that his own theatrical ambitions aspired to "transcendent" theatre: theatre that transcends and cuts across reality. Naming and defining such theatre becomes important in

contemporary funding contexts because, for Drummond, the development of such theatre requires a stringent process of collaboration and therefore funding models which support such development.

Drummond made three salient points in our early conversation around Sacred Theatre, which alerted me to the difficulties I might encounter in my research. The first was the term ‘sacred theatre’ itself, which he suggested was problematic not only because of its association with religion, but also because it set up an audience expectation that could be misleading and difficult to achieve. The second point was that in the attempt to create ‘transcendent’ theatre, it was necessary to have collaboration between theatre makers, rather than the author writing in isolation. Finally, he pointed out that it is difficult to maintain momentum for collaborative theatre in Australia because it is more expensive than mainstream practice, where companies engage a writer to produce a script, which then serves as a blueprint for production (Interview, Drummond, 2012).

Our second and formal interview (9<sup>th</sup> April 2013) continued on from this preliminary discussion, starting with the creative aims and collaborative approach of Brink Productions. Once again Drummond shied away from the term and genre of Sacred Theatre, preferring to describe his ideal theatre experience as a “communion” between the stage and the audience. Despite using the term “communion” in Brink’s 2012 mission statement, Drummond admitted that even this word was loaded with religious connotations.

There’s a certain discomfort in acknowledging that what I would set out to do is create communion or a sense of the sacred, but the truth is that is my private compulsion. I just don’t feel comfortable about naming it like that because once you tell somebody you’re going to give them some kind of quasi-spiritual experience, you’re dead in the water before you begin. And it’s arrogant and all of those things. But the truth is...that’s what I fell in love with when I fell in love with the theatre. That feeling when you’re in the audience and there is some kind of chemistry or energy that passes between the actors...that strong sense of complicity. There is a kind of hum in the theatre that is unlike anything else. (Interview, Drummond, 2013)

Brink's 2012 mission statement was titled "A theatre of imagination where the memory outlives the experience" (Drummond, 2012b). This title articulated for Drummond "a sense of lift in the work that lingers without using quasi-religious words" (Interview, Drummond, 2013). The full statement also described Brink's creative process of exploring "the space between devised and authored theatre" as a collaborative dramaturgy, incorporating "rich performance imagery....group creation and the intellectual and philosophical articulation of great writing" (Drummond 2012b). The statement concluded with an ambition for the audience: "We believe theatre to be a mutually creative act between artists and audience that can conjure a blinding communion which outlives the moment of experience" (Drummond, 2012 b). This suggests that the aim is for immediate communion and that the experience transcends the everyday. In other words, within a specific or several moments of performance, the connection between the audience and actors elicits a phenomenological shift in perception and this shift occurs as a sudden realization or 'epiphany'. Drummond's reticence to use quasi-religious terminology, however, is reflected in the current web statement which no longer references the audience experience as "blinding communion" but "surprise, delight and revelation", also commensurate with the idea of 'epiphany' (Drummond, 2016).

The current statement reiterates Brink's collaborative process which, as we shall see, involves the egalitarian collaboration between image/design, image/performance, intense group contribution and superlative writing. For Drummond, although this process can be immensely challenging, it is one which allows many layers to evolve in the work:

Those unintended layers that come out of a devising process, that sense of disjunction and exploring liminal space, while also trying to marry it with the poetry and clarity of great writing. (Interview, Drummond, 2013)

This process creates a different kind of work than either a great writer or group devised work can normally achieve on their own. Drummond's stated influences towards this kind

of process come from, amongst others, Peter Brook and Robert Lepage. Lepage refers to a “connection” between ideas, events and actors that transcends its makers and transforms or “cooks” the many ingredients of performance into something greater than originally intended (Lepage in Dundjerovi, 2007). Drummond himself talks about a “current of energy” that passes between actors and audience, when everyone is in the “zone”, acknowledging that the performance space itself is crucial to fostering this “current” (Interview, Drummond, 2013).

The key to Brink’s collaborative process is that all creative participants, including designers, writers, actors, musicians, director and choreographers, come with nothing prepared, so that all participants have the opportunity to respond equally to an initial idea, which is never fixed. Practitioners come to an empty space with a readiness, openness and willingness to play, imagine, think and generate material. It is only after intense group collaboration that individual artists are invited to work by themselves, on their own specialist areas.

The difference between this process and other group devised work is that the generated material is then given over to specialists to develop. So there is a designated writer, designer, composer etc., unlike Theatre de Complicité or Le Page’s EX MACHINA where the ensemble takes responsibility and is credited for all devised work. After some material has been fixed, such as a few written scenes, the collaborative team reconvenes for a workshop. Some things are discarded (songs, scenes, characters, design elements), while others are kept, developed in the workshop and then taken away by the specialist artists to further refine. Even during the final rehearsal process, the work is in a state of development. This process became established as Brink’s standard practice during the 2007 development of *This Uncharted Hour* by Finegan Kruckemeyer. They began with no story as such, but they worked with the evocative title and some pre-existing poetry by

Kruckemeyer. As the script developed, a structure emerged based on the Eurydice myth, while music and song became an integral part of the production and script (Interview, Drummond, 2013).

Similarly, the development of *Land & Sea* (2012) began without a firm story in mind, indeed it was the stated intention of both Drummond and Nicki Bloom to “start from nothing”. They were both interested in the ideas contained within Douglas Hofstadter’s (1979) Pulitzer Prize winning book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, which deals with Bach’s ever rising canons, Gödel’s conceptual loops and Escher’s optical illusions. Bloom was also interested in exploring liminal spaces and open time. She came up with a story idea roughly based on *The Tempest*. Her idea was that these characters would keep entering different worlds which in turn would lead to another world and another and another.

With this as a starting point, they entered the rehearsal room and began working with grids. Drummond then asked the actors to explore a tangible memory where they had felt they were in a liminal space (Interview, Drummond 2013). Through collaboration between designer Wendy Todd and lighting designer Geoff Cobham, the set emerged as a circle of gauze touching a sandy floor. The gauze could be raised up to reveal a new world and upstage doors opened to reveal yet another world, a hotel room. Sparse furniture was set in place to represent a café downstage. The set was fluid and ever changing. Once again music by Hilary Kleinig and song were embedded into the rehearsal process and eventual production.

Most interesting in this process is that the creative team were open to persevering with the concept of liminal spaces and the fluidity of worlds unfolding into other worlds, without any causal or evident narrative relationship between them. Although the power dynamics between the characters remains consistent across the worlds within the play, the

context and personas constantly change, giving a sense that we are dropping in to a series of disconnected episodes. This is indicated in the script as: “a radio shifts between frequencies, picking up on quick grabs of music, foreign languages, static, radio talk” (Rehearsal Script 2012: 3). Such a-causal tumbling of worlds is described in the Brink publicity as a “strange loop”. “Reality expands and contracts. Time and space are not what they seem as multiple fragments of the same story twist and tunnel into a kaleidoscopic world of wonder and absurdity” (Publicity Brochure, *Land & Sea*, 2012).

The aim of the piece was never to fix a story, but for the audience to experience the liminality of abstract loops and repetitions across a series of unfolding worlds, where the referents to reality were constantly in flux. This kind of performance is extremely ambitious and suggestive of Susan Broadhurst’s (1999) definition of a “liminal performance”, outlined in Chapter Two. Many of Broadhurst’s theories are based on Victor Turner’s (1990) continuing explorations of the liminal as an unformulated cultural imagining:

Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage, but a striving after new forms and structure. (Turner, 1990:11-12)

Broadhurst suggests that Foucault’s (1972) theories around ‘discourse formation’ are central to re-theorizing the liminal aesthetic. Foucault outlines four main relations between “statements” which create a discourse: the first involves their connection to the same object, while the second reflects the form and type of this connection. The third relation is the conceptual architecture presupposed in the connection and forth, the “hunger” of thematic unity which selectively eats only those statements that will feed its own premises. In order to create a new discourse, it is necessary to deconstruct and actively disrupt the expected or established relations between statements and actively reconstruct them according to different principles. Creating new discourse through liminal performance was precisely the ambition of the creative team on *Land & Sea*. At the time of our interview,

however, Drummond was still actively questioning whether he had found the right semiotic balance to achieve this ambition. Nonetheless a courageous attempt had been made.

## **5.2 CASE STUDY: *WHEN THE RAIN STOPS FALLING* BY ANDREW BOVELL**

*When the Rain Stops Falling* by Andrew Bovell premiered to critical acclaim at the Scott Theatre, University of Adelaide on 28<sup>th</sup> February, as part of the 2008 Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts. The piece was commissioned, workshopped and originally produced by Brink Productions as a collaboration between actors, writer Andrew Bovell, visual artist Hossein Valamanesh, director/dramaturge Chris Drummond and musician Quincy Grant.

Originally inspired by Tim Flannery's (1994) *The Future Eaters*, the script and production benefited from an important five-year gestation period resulting a play where the synchronous delivery of past, present and future lifts us out of the everyday, linear perception of time. It transports us into an awareness of something more akin to Jung's (1960) idea of synchronistic "clusters" and Lehmann's (1997) unity outside of "logos". The effect is an audience experience of epiphany, unity and connection, which corresponds to my definition of sacred theatre as *therapia* and as theatre which can evoke a phenomenological shift in perception.

As with several of the other plays I have examined, the published script of *When the Rain Stops Falling* is not so much a blue-print for production, but a transcription of the production, where the semiotic interplay of language, choreography and design are integrated into the writing itself. For this reason, an analysis of the Brink development process is crucial to an understanding of the way this play works. In the next section I explore the complex dramaturgical process which culminated in *When the Rain Stops*

*Falling*, focusing specifically on the writing: plot structure, language, placement of information and visual clues (including very important props).

Consistent with Brink practice, collaboration came early in the process, with a stated intention that no one element would dominate in the overall development of the piece. When Drummond first approached Bovell, Valamanesh and Grant in 2004 it was a bleak time in world politics. People were still coming to grips with 9/11 and a new order of terrorism which had created a shift in perception around the safety and security of living in the West. On top of that, there was the growing awareness of climate change and a sense that as a species, humanity had not only the capacity, but the apparent will to destroy itself and the planet. Drummond’s question around this time was: “What faith could we hold for humanity?” (Drummond, 2009: viii). With these ideas in mind, the Brink collaborators began a conversation around a piece of theatre, roughly called the *Extinction Project*, that could explore “humanity’s relationship to the planet, to the unknown and to one another” (Drummond, 2009: viii).

From the outset, the idea of “conversation” was the driving force. In “conversation” there could be a cross-fertilization of input and a construction of initial concepts, without the domination of any one voice, element or form. As Bovell describes it:

It was a broad and open idea, and in fact he [Drummond] was very encouraging at the outset for us – for me, not to write, to hold back. Because what we were trying to do is create a process that allowed, say, Hossein’s art to be as important as important as the words. (Interview, Bovell, 2013)

The conversation soon expanded to include core Brink actors who, in a series of short workshops over several weeks, exchanged ideas, stories, visual images, music, and writing. The group focused on topics such as potential extinction, nothingness, loved and unloved places, and the idea of searching for something lost. Bovell wrote a few scenes around the act of eating fish soup. This idea came from his admitted reverence for the

symbolic act of people sitting down and eating together, but also from his childhood memories of fishing in an abundant sea. It seemed to him that fish weren't so plentiful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and so rather than eating a whole fish, fish soup became a symbol of scarcity. "So... everybody is eating fish soup. And it is a way of nurturing, but what it's also saying is that our capacity to nurture one another has been diminished to this" (Interview, Bovell, 2013).

Stylistically, Bovell had entered the workshops with a clear idea that he wanted to play with the superimposition of time, the layering of time. Valamanesh was impressed with this notion and started to play with a visual representation of layering time and place through the use of gauze scrims and tables, while Grant worked with layering in the music composition. The central image of the play emerged from this experimentation, three tables representing three different times, and the idea of action from different times happening synchronously on stage (Interview, Bovell, 2013).

Moreover, Bovell noticed that within the stories the participants were telling, there was a common theme of people's relationships with their parents, or, if they had children, their children. There seemed to be a yearning for a deeper understanding and relationship between generations across these various stories, but so far nothing had been "fixed". Almost on the last day of the workshops a breakthrough occurred. Bovell realized that there was a temporal shape emerging to the work if he could establish a generational relationship between these independent stories. "I realized this guy was this guy's grandfather" (Interview, Bovell, 2013). The dynamics of this inter-generational relationship became the fundamental "shape" of the play. Not long after these initial workshops, Bovell travelled to Paris where he attended an exhibition exploring madness and genius. One of the paintings in this exhibition was *Satan Devours His Sons* by Goya, and he was struck with the idea that "if the child is the future, if the parent is the past; we

are devouring our own future” (Interview, Bovell, 2013). This concept had strong resonance with Flannery’s title *The Future Eaters* and Bovell realized that he had found the central theme of his play: a father devours the future(s) of his sons.

In Australia, Drummond was preparing for a three-week workshop with the whole collaborative team, including actors. At this stage he thought the process would be primarily physical-image based and so had invited Rowan Marchingo, a choreographer from the Sydney based company *Legs on the Wall*, to work with the team. There was still no text, but Bovell felt uncomfortable about turning up empty handed. He wrote three scene fragments including one of a parent and child having a meal of fish soup and a monologue from a scientist.

Bovell worked directly with the actors to improvise scenes around various relationship structures such as a married couple with opposing objectives: where one wants to get out of the relationship and the other is planning a surprise trip. From such an improvisation, actor Paul Blackwell came up with the idea of a man needing to get off a bus because he had left his hat. As we shall see, the hat becomes a key symbolic notation in the final script and production. This is how Chris Drummond describes the dramaturgical process:

And so the idea of the process is that...you’re generating all those connections, generating experience, generating the moments of communion, I guess. That everybody has that shared discovery and we all get it...But we’re also navigating through this forest and using the writer’s impulse to choose the path through the forest...There’s the theory that you’re getting both, that you’re both opening up but you’re also feeding into the author’s need to own what the story will be. (Interview, Drummond, 2013)

After this workshop, Bovell settled into the writing process. From the wealth of material he had taken from the long collaboration process, he knew that he wanted the play to begin in the future and work back into a layering of time. He also knew that this play was a cross generational story around an unknown history. In the first act of writing, he

found Gabrielle York's voice, the man who lived in 2039, and from that he made a series of wonderful discoveries:

...The fish falling out of the sky, a phone call from an estranged son, the obsessive cleaning of the flat – it just made all these offers that I could then pick up later in the other... [scenes]. (Interview, Bovell, 2013)

### 5.3 THE SCRIPT/PRODUCTION

*When the Rain Stops Falling* is a huge composite story, spanning eighty years, 1959 - 2039, four generations and two continents. The narrative structure seems predominantly acausal and nonlinear, so it has the initial appearance of a Postmodern or Postdramatic text. However, under closer scrutiny, it is clear that there are indeed two structures at work in this play. The first and last scenes, which comprise the defining action of the plot, have a clear Aristotelian unity of time and space. This action takes place in less than twenty-four hours in one place, and bookends all the other time frames/locations and stories. A man, Gabriel York, in Alice Springs (2039) receives a phone call from his son, Andrew, whom he hasn't seen in over twenty years. Gabriel York invites his son to lunch, but he doesn't have any money and is anxious about what he will feed his son. Miraculously, a fish falls from the sky during a rain storm. The following scenes are a complex exposé of a family history. At the end of the play Gabriel's son Andrew comes to lunch in Alice Springs, dines on the fish, is joined by the ancestors we have met in the intervening story and is given all the mysterious props or relics of his heritage. Gabriel and Andrew meeting for lunch is the defining action of the play. Despite the beautiful complexity of the intervening historical narrative, this defining action: the context (why speak now?) or shape (Tugwell 2012) follows Aristotelian principles of unity of time, space and action. It is this unity which gives the play cohesion in the face of a seemingly disrupted spatio-temporal order.

Within the bookends of this unity, we traverse an intricately woven tale, where we meet Gabriel York's father, mother and grandparents in England. We gradually learn that

it is the actions of Gabriel's grandfather, Henry Law, that have impacted on four generations. The structure of this intervening tale incorporates the journeys of three generations of characters across two continents. Their stories overlay and interweave as a series of a-causal episodes which shift diachronically, though not linearly between 1959 and 2013, while synchronically overlapping in time and scene location (place) through a visually heterotopic employ of theatrical space.

Most evident in these intervening scenes is that even though they follow the non-hierarchical and a-causal structure described by Hans-Thies Lehmann as Postdramatic Theatre (2006), or indeed the non-linear, fracturing disunity of the postmodern aesthetic, the overall plot construction still delivers a very sophisticated unity. This is not an Aristotelian unity or the "the logocentrism of telos" described by Lehman (1997:64). Rather it is the glimpse of a non-causal and seemingly illogical web of relationships that point to the "anterior of things"; a "wholly other" to the logical and rational.

Through repetition of metaphoric props and references (the rain, the hat, the off white paint, umbrellas, bowls of fish soup, people drowning in Bangladesh) and through specific placement of information within the linear discourse of the storytelling, Bovell draws his audience into a series of small and subtle realizations or "epiphanies". Indeed, Drummond claims that by the end of the final writing process, the word coming most from Bovell's lips was "epiphany" (Interview, Drummond 2012).

My memory is that once Andrew really broke the back of the puzzle of the play he went through this exciting and quite heady phase where the discoveries (or epiphanies) were coming thick and fast. Of course, this is not uncommon for a creative process but I remember it very clearly, perhaps because of the resonance to the themes and also because it was such a complex play, that there appeared to me to be a lot of them! (Interview, Drummond, 2013)

On closer analysis it becomes clear that the structure and quality of these 'epiphanies' is not in any way random. They are, in fact, carefully and deliberately constructed to provide a series of 'moments' of realization which ultimately lead to an experience of healing and

unity. The interrelationships between these seemingly unrelated incidents and metaphors follow what Jung (1960) defines as “the phenomenon of synchronicity”, an occurrence which Peat further describes as “the coincidence in time of two or more causally unrelated events which have the same or similar meaning” (1987:23).

Jung’s model for the structure of a synchronistic series of events was developed in collaboration with the physicist W. Pauli. This model presents an alternative paradigm of connectivity to that proposed by the objective, linear cause-effect paradigm found in pure science. They argued that should a-causal, subjective values be found to occur across seemingly unrelated incidents, such as the connective principle of phenomenological ‘meaning’ through contingency, equivalence, metaphor or repetition of object or image, then these incidents could be considered to be related through the principle of synchronicity (C.G Jung and W Pauli, 1955). In other words, a cluster of unrelated events, over a specific period of time, may become coincidentally connected in meaning through the consistency of symbolic notations to the event, such as objects, images, words, numbers or sounds. Jung’s famous example of symbolic notations which connect a-causal and seemingly unrelated incidents in a cluster of “meaningful coincidence” is that of the scarab beetle (Jung, 1960/1973:22). I suggest that the non-causal structure of synchronicity is precisely the structure used in *Rain* to affect a series of epiphanies or moments which lead to an ultimate web or unity between seemingly disconnected incidents and metaphors.

Bovell claims not to have been familiar enough with Jung’s theories to have consciously incorporated them into the play, but he acknowledges that the idea of synchronicity has informed his work “forever”:

So if you go back to...*Speaking in Tongues*, and I even go back to a play that I wrote as a student, called *An Ordinary Dream about a Journey North*, a lot of the themes in *When the Rain Stops Falling*, and the form of synchronicity of different moments at different time, having some kind of relationship that cannot be understood at the time, and yet all come together to make some sort of sense at the end, was something I was working on right back in my early 20s. Now, *When the Rain Stops Falling* is probably the most successful, the most

sophisticated execution of that, or realization of it. But yeah, that idea of synchronicity, connection... I was not consciously referencing Jung or anyone in particular. I just hadn't read enough of that to -- and fortunately -- because I think if I had, I would have been too conscious and too deliberate in what I was doing. (Interview, Bovell, 2013)

Significant symbolic notations towards synchronicity appear in the very first scene of *When the Rain Stops Falling*, which opens with a cacophony of semiotic clues about the world we have entered. The first notation is the weather, the rain itself. Gabriel York, played by Neil Pigot, is one of a crowd of people walking in a defined choreography which serves to represent randomness and disconnection. Downstage centre there is a projected image of rain and a small puddle. We hear thunder, rain, and a crescendo of discordant music. Then, three simultaneous actions occur: Gabriel York drops to his knees at the puddle and screams; an older woman, Elizabeth Law, played by Carmel Johnson, falls to the ground; and a fish falls from the sky. Although we don't know it yet, we have synchronicity and connection.

These three seemingly unrelated actions are in fact essential clues to the world we have entered: a world where time is synchronous (vertical) and where nature is in crisis. We are in *The Future Eaters*, where the past has gobbled up and pre-determined the future and where the future cannot escape its connection to the past. The torrential rain becomes an important symbolic link between each of the subsequent scenes of the play, while the props introduced in this first scene are significant connectors between characters disconnected in time and place. They become increasingly important symbolic notations throughout the play.

This scene also establishes that the stage space itself is to be used as a meta-heterotopia: a conscious and deliberate heterotopic space which symbolically notates connection between seemingly disconnected places. As discussed in Chapter One a heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real space, several places or sites that are in themselves incompatible. Foucault observed that the heterotopia achieves an absolute

break with a naturalistic sense of time and in effect creates a sense of non-linear or vertical time. At its full capacity heterotopias can also function as heterochronies. However, the use of space in *When the Rain Stops falling* is not simply a heterotopia at its full capacity. It is a meta-heterotopia in that the space is deliberately used as a ‘symbolic notation’ to meaningfully connect disparate locations, times and events. The space itself is utilized as the glue which *reconfigures* the relationship between events, time and place, away from a causal teleology, towards “meaningful coincidence” or synchronicity. As an audience, we are as yet unaware of the complex symbolic notations in this opening scene. They are, nonetheless, all vitally there, only to become reinforced in scene three, where our ‘semiotic training’ really begins.

In scene three, “Rooms”, we see the arrival of all characters around three large tables, representing three locations and time zones. These are delineated in time and space by the three large, rectangular, but transparent scrims and a window frame. One by one each character arrives, hangs their coat on the coat rack, walks to the window and looks out. They proceed to the bathroom (off) then re-enter the stage, cross to get a bowl of soup, and sit at a table. One table in particular (centre) is the focus of action. It is here that all characters, from all times and locations end up, sitting in unison and eating fish soup. This image is reprised in the last scene. The semiotic threads that will ultimately knit this play together are built into this scene: the table, exchange of objects (hats, umbrellas, plates); non- narrative, a-linear, a logical, physical architecture...and music, not words. The characters are ritually connected even before we know their stories, through their repetitive actions of entering, eating, going to the bathroom and looking out of the window in synchronistic time. It is in effect a ballet of unity before the times and locations fragment into their own disparate realities. The structural shift away from an Aristotelian unity into a-causal synchronicity begins with the words “How’s the soup?” spoken by the older

Elizabeth Law (7); the character who fell to the ground in Scene One. At these words all the other characters exit, except Elizabeth and her son Gabriel Law, played by Yalin Ozucelik. The words London 1988 are projected on to the scrims and the sequence of separate stories begins to unfold.

I wanted to detail these opening scenes in particular, for the way they set up the symbolic notations crucial for the overall synchronistic unity of the work. I have briefly described Pavis' vectorization of signs in Chapter Two and referred to this theory in my discussion of Jenny Kemp's work in Chapter Four. However, I believe Pavis' 1997 theory most aptly illustrates the semiotic dynamics occurring in *Rain*, especially the idea that each sign begins to accumulate meaning in relation to other signs within the world of the play. The carefully constructed network of relationships *between* signs in both Bovell's script and in the production design creates an overall meaning or perceptual impression larger than the sum of its symbolic parts. These semiotic networks are gradually built throughout the production so the final piece of information or meaning drops in as an experience of sudden realization or epiphany. Moreover, this sudden realization is one of connection and cohesion between causally unrelated incidents as occurs in Jung's analysis of synchronicity.

So, how are vectorization, the symbolic notation of a-causal incidents and the gradual process of epiphany built into *When the Rain Stops Falling*? By the time Elizabeth Law asks the question "How's the soup?" which launches the play into the family history, the audience have already been given several important symbolic notations to read the space. We have already begun to anticipate that the theatre space itself will not be realistic, but symbolic, and that these people are somehow connected by this space.

In the following scene between Elizabeth Law (older) and her son Gabriel Law, several symbolic clues from previous scenes are repeated in action and dialogue. First,

they are eating fish soup. Second, she has recently painted the flat (off white). Third, we discover that she has recently had a fall, establishing Elizabeth as the woman who fell in scene one. Gradually, as we are assimilating these connections, new symbolic pathways are being laid: “there are people drowning in Bangladesh” (7) and we get a sense that this is an estranged and dysfunctional relationship. Gabriel is searching for an intimacy that Elizabeth has banished from her life; why? At this point, a younger Elizabeth Law (played by Michaela Cantwell) enters the room like a ghost, without interrupting the current action. She eats fish soup at the same table with the other characters... until Henry Law, also played by Neil Pigot enters, shaking his umbrella and following the ritual movements of previous scenes.

Once again the clear delineation of space/time is documented by the projected text: “London 1959”. The other characters exit and we are now in this world of Elizabeth and Henry in 1959. Within the scene, there is a further reinforcement of the symbolic notations of fish soup and the catastrophic effects of the weather on peoples around the globe: “people drowning in East Pakistan” (10). These notations are deliberately placed vectors designed to connect the separate scenes symbolically across time and place. Bovell consciously employed a “musical structure” of repetition of phrases in order to progress multiple events simultaneously.

What is happening here is that these four time frames firstly begin as separate stories and I’m gradually bringing elements from each into the other....and eventually they all come together into one event. (Interview, Bovell, 2013)

The differences in time and place are clearly marked by factual information projected onto the scrims... Alice Springs 2039, London 1988, London 1959. These clear demarcations serve to separate the incidents and characters, so that no causal or linear inference can be made between them. Our rational deductions are interrupted as the relationships between sign and referent, place and time are inverted and reconfigured towards a different kind of logic: the symbolic logic of the world of the play itself. We are

being cleverly re-trained in “how to read the signs”, while, most importantly, our phenomenological perceptions of time and space begin to shift.

The most beautiful, singular example of the vectorization of signs composed as a synchronistic structure is established in when Henry Law tells Elizabeth that a woman followed him from the train and gave him a hat, thinking it was his, but he doesn't wear a hat. At this point Joe Ryan (played by Paul Blackwell) enters the space, shakes the water from his umbrella and coat and hangs it on the hook. Henry continues to describe how the woman thrust the hat into his hands and he felt obliged to take it. Joe goes into the bathroom. Elizabeth asks what happened to the hat and Henry takes it from the hook and puts it on his head. Joe comes out of the bathroom and touches his head, realizing that his hat is not there. At this point Elizabeth tells Henry she is pregnant and as they are discussing this rather unwelcome piece of news, Gabrielle York (older, played by Kris McQuade) enters the space. Immediately we are in Joe and Gabrielle's flat in Adelaide in 2013 and Henry and Elizabeth simply exit the space. Joe tells Gabrielle he has lost his hat. We have seen Joe wearing this hat in scene one and take it off in scene three. It is given to Henry in London in 1959 but lost by Joe in Adelaide in 1988, a logical impossibility. This same hat will be found on a park bench in Adelaide and end up in Alice Springs 2039 in the final scene of the play.

This hat, first discovered in an improvisation exercise, gradually becomes a consistent symbolic notation in a cluster of a-causal events. These events are deliberately separated in time and place, so that any rational or logical connection is impossible, but the hat connects these events in the audience psyche. The characters themselves can never make this connection. However, as the web of vectorization and synchronicity weaves itself throughout the play, the audience become increasingly embroiled in its marvelous design. Gradually, our perceptions transform from perception (cognition) to an *experience*

of sudden realization of connection: epiphany. We become engaged in a phenomenological shift in perception, where the overall meaning of the theatrical performance is larger than the sum of its symbolic parts.

As the narrative connections between events in the play begin to strengthen, the vectorization of symbolic notations becomes even more sophisticated. The signs themselves begin to disappear, leaving only the signified. For example, the window through which the younger Elizabeth Law looks so frequently, the same window at which we first meet the younger Gabrielle York in 1988, is flown out at the mid-point of the play. Characters continue to look out of this window, but it no longer has a physical presence on the stage. Furthermore, from this point in the play, there are no more projections delineating time and place, but the scenes move fluidly from one to the other in the same space. Once again, this was a deliberate dramaturgical choice by Bovell and Drummond.

By that stage in the play the delineation of time doesn't matter. We've gone beyond that, somehow. So it was about trying to find the structure that firstly used time to help us ground ourselves in the story, and then gradually let the need for that understanding go, and so that all these timeframes could swim around each other, because I was looking for how those moments of the past impact upon the present, and the present impacts then on the future. (Interview, Bovell, 2013)

Through symbolic notation, the narrative connections rapidly reveal themselves. They are peripatetically structured, so we begin to piece together a family history, without anticipating its tragic epicenter. The narrative itself is a vectorization, a network of relationships carefully constructed, so we don't realize we are embroiled in a complex web. It is also a study in the construction of synchronicity, where the connecting links in both the symbolic notation and narrative information grow steadily, then collide towards epiphany. All at once, we realize that the actions of Henry Law in London 1968 and in Australia in the same year have impacted on his immediate family, the family of strangers, their sons and in turn on those sons.

In the final scene, we return to the defining action of the play: Gabriel York's Room, Alice Springs 2039. Gabriel York finally meets his estranged son Andrew (played by Yalin Ozucelik). They talk about the terrible weather and the fact that people are dying in Bangladesh. Gabriel tells Andrew they are having fish for lunch and exits. As Andrew stands looking out of the (disappeared) window, all the other characters (except Henry) enter, take a plate and sit at the long table. Gabriel York comes back in with a suitcase. One by one Gabriel takes each of the significant props of the play from the suitcase. He passes each prop to one of the "ancestors", who in turn pass it along until it reaches Andrew.

Finally, Gabriel gives Andrew the postcards that his father received from his own father, Henry Law. The last words on the last postcard are "Forgive me". Gabriel looks at Andrew and repeats the words. "Forgive me". He tells his son he doesn't know what all of these things mean, only that "somewhere at the end of this mess is where you belong" (Bovell, 2009:58). The audience knows very well what all these "things" mean. Each of these props has been imbued with so much symbolic and synchronistic meaning throughout the play, that the passing of these objects between characters becomes a rite of reconciliation and healing. This is a ritual of convergence between the symbolic and *actual* event in which the audience are participants, because only the audience know the symbolic significance of these objects (Schechner, 1976:205). Gabriel exits to get the fish and one by one each of the "ancestors" place their hand on the hand of the person next to them until they are "joined across time and continents". Gabriel returns with the magnificent fish, places it on the table and he says "Listen....The rain has stopped" (Bovell, 2009: 58). All characters sit around the table and eat together...not fish soup, but a large, life sustaining fish that has miraculously fallen from the sky.

We have journeyed with these characters and this complex family across time and place, but it has never been an ‘epic’ journey, for the goal was never obvious and the trajectory not linear. Rather, there is a simple request from a young man to his father: “I was wondering if I could see you?” (2). His request unravels a synchronistic web of events; a complex weave of symbolic notations within the unifying force of the space itself, towards reconciliation, towards healing. It was the intention of both Drummond and Bovell to find “hope” in what seemed like a hopeless curse of the past on the future. For Bovell that hope lies in Andrew, who he considers to be the most courageous character in the play.

He comes and he makes a change and you have a sense of reconciliation. But it’s a pattern of abandonment and estrangement handed down to generation to generation, and then somebody reaches out and says, “I’m not prepared to repeat this pattern. I don’t even understand what it is. But I need to understand.” And so he makes contact with his estranged father, and there is some kind of meeting and you go: “At last, these two are going to have some sort of meaningful relationship”. (Interview, Bovell, 2013)

This meaningful relationship is there for all of us. It is the meaningful relationship between disconnected, sometimes tragic events; between generations; and to a set of ‘objects’ that appear insignificant. The play and production of *When the Rain Stops Falling* reinforce that we are all connected, something we may have forgotten. Despite our attempts to disconnect from each other, and the planet, we are intricately and symbolically embroiled in a web of meaningful relationships. Often we can’t see this web; it is disguised, secret and invisible. It is sacred. When we sit in a theatre and that complex and beautiful web of connection is not only brought to the surface of our perception, but indeed *shifts* our perception of ourselves and our relationship to each other. I argue, that this is a sacred experience and that we, all together, have participated in sacred theatre.

**PART THREE:**

**CREATIVE WORKS AND PRACTICE AS RESEARCH**

**CHAPTER SIX: Creative Practice and Process: *Bird***

***Bird*: Play Script by Sheila Duncan 10,791 words.**

**CHAPTER SEVEN: Creative Practice and process: *Wyrd Song***

***Wyrd Song*: Play Script by Sheila Duncan 9,686 words**

**CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusions**

## **PART THREE: CREATIVE WORKS AND PRACTICE AS RESEARCH**

My initial approach to writing sacred theatre was to write three plays looking at the aspects of sacred perception, sacred place and different forms of sacred knowledge. These plays were to be *Bird*, *Dreamhouse* and *Passionflower*. However, after a year of research and reflection, I decided to abandon *Passionflower* as a creative project and focus instead on my own experiences of the sacred. The play *Bird* was to be developed as a play around perceptions of the sacred, while *Dreamhouse* was to be about place and the concept of reincarnation.

In the following two chapters I will move away from the analysis of other Australian artists to focus on the analysis of the practice and processes that have informed my own creative work. In Chapter Six I outline the creative development of the play *Bird*, which culminated in a small public reading on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2014 at the Flinders Drama Centre. After this reading I wrote one further draft of the play *Bird* which I include in the second part of the chapter.

In Chapter Seven, I analyze the creative processes and practices that have informed the writing of the play *Wyrđ Song*, which was at first called *Dreamhouse* and then *Wyrđ*. I incorporate the script of *Wyrđ Song* into Chapter Seven. In addition to the play scripts, some audio-visual material is included within the analysis. These may be found at links provided, or in the appendices to this thesis, as indicated.

## CHAPTER SIX: *BIRD*: CREATIVE PRACTICE AND PROCESS

### 6.1 *BIRD*: THE BEGINNING.

In 2010 I decamped from Adelaide to the rural town of Wirrabara in the Southern Flinders Ranges, South Australia. It was around this time that I began contemplating a PhD. I was teaching at the University of South Australia with a weekly commute to work, entailing a drive of around three hours each way. On one of these trips to Adelaide, a bird flirted dangerously with my windscreen, and was nearly killed. It shook me up for the whole trip. Why had this bird risked death to linger so dangerously at my windscreen? By the time I arrived in Adelaide I had the basis for the play. A woman is driving through the Flinders Ranges, a bird flies into her windscreen and she crashes. She is devastated that she has killed the bird, but the gruff local farmer who finds her is not so sympathetic. He takes her to his house, to call for help. But the bird has flown into the heart of the woman and steadily throughout the rest of the play, she turns into the bird.

The writing of *Bird* began with a poem, where the protagonist Elise hits the bird on the road. In the next scene she is assisted after the car crash by a farmer, Kevin, whose character I based on my own next door neighbor in Wirrabara. In early drafts of the play, Kevin was to take Elise back to his house, but this was too static a location and I struggled to get them to talk to each other. After quite a bit of experimentation and many dead ends, I decided I needed to develop the character backgrounds for Elise and Kevin.

Elise was to be a Romanian refugee who had been brought to Australia by her Romani mother to flee the Ceausescu regime. I chose Romanian because I had once toured for a year with a Romanian puppeteer. She was fiercely anti-Ceausescu, but also held an interesting non-Christian world-view, aligned to animism. She was highly sensitive to energies in the land, people and animals, without apology for her perceptions or beliefs. She was also highly critical of the ways in which both orthodox Christianity and the

Romanian state had tried to stomp out the ancient beliefs of the Romani minority (or gypsies). Her world view struck me because it seemed to parallel some of my own parents' beliefs around spirituality, including that all of nature contained spirit, even inanimate objects such as rocks. I wanted a character whose migrant background would confirm the validity of her experiences in the bush, as mine had done. However, given that *Dreamhouse/Wyrd* would be about the Pict/Scottish world view, I did not want to repeat this in *Bird*.

Kevin on the other hand, was to have no faith, no spirituality and little trust in humanity. As I have mentioned, I took his speech pattern and gruff, no-nonsense approach from my own next door neighbor. However, I felt there needed to be a story behind his gruffness, just as I eventually discovered with my neighbor. I decided on another true story (experienced by a friend) as a character history. Kevin's daughter had gone missing in the bush, and then one day he arrived home from a day's work on the land to discover his wife had packed up the house and left him without a word of warning, or a forwarding address. In *Bird* I wanted to put these two characters together to explore their differences in temperament and world view, but ultimately Kevin would be convinced of the spiritual dimensions of life by witnessing Elise turn into a bird.

At this time, my approach to the work was still based on my tacit knowledge about plot, character and action. As a result, the emerging script was too naturalistic, reading more like the television drama *Home and Away*. My use of the word "action" here derives from Stuart Spencer's (2002) definition, which can be simplified as "What does your character want?" The protagonist (*agon* being the Greek word for action) *wants* the action, while the antagonist *wants* either the opposite or something different altogether, thus creating conflict. Such basic principles of drama are very well documented and frequently used by playwrights. However, to write a play in the academic environment, I was

challenged to go beyond the basics. The feedback I received from my supervisors on the early drafts of *Bird* was that the opening image was strong but then it deteriorated into television drama. My supervisors asked me to challenge *form* and to go “beyond the verbal” (Duncan, Journal 2012). The suggestion was made that I concentrate on ‘perception’ with this piece and how the character’s perception of the sacred changes as she changes from a woman to a bird. The message was clear, I was trying to achieve a new outcome, a sacred experience in an audience, but I was using my old tools of the trade. In short, if I wanted to write theatre that would evoke a sacred experience in an audience, I would need to acquire, or even invent some new tools.

As I have outlined in the Introduction, this corresponds with Paul Carter’s idea of material thinking “where the artist actively undercuts or changes the accepted logic of production in order to achieve a new form (Carter, 2007:22). The suggestion to concentrate on perception in this piece was a good one, but I wasn’t exactly sure how to put this into practice. What I did know, was that I had to get rid of naturalism. I had to abandon my usual approach to mapping out a play using plot, structure and “what my character wants”.

Among the first premises of *Bird*, was the idea that certain places in nature have an energy and power that may be perceived by those who are sensitive, for example those who have the gift of *divinatio*. Such places are sacred, not simply because cultural or religious knowledge has informed us that they are so, but because they exude a particular energy. In “The Rings of Gaia” (1991), William S Becker and Beth Hagens correlate the principles of ancient geometry formulated by Pythagoras and Plato with the ancient mapping systems of Egypt, Alexandria and the Mediterranean. They incorporate the geodesic principles of architecture and geometry formulated by Buckminster Fuller, to argue for a geodesic model of the Earth. This model speculates that the planet is

crisscrossed by 16 rings of magnetic energy (one of which is the Equator) which form 120 identical right hand triangles in a planetary grid. The right angle crossing of these rings, which the authors call “The Rings of Gaia”, occurs at major spiritual and mining hotspots in the world. These include Stonehenge, The Pyramids, the mouth of the Indus River, where Hindu Culture is said to have originated, Chernobyl, Alberta Canada (site of Canada’s richest oil and gas reserves) and “Africa’s Stonehenge” in Zimbabwe, where the first hominoid fossils were found. The only site in Australia where these rings cross is Wilpena Pound in the Flinders Ranges, South Australia. I wanted to introduce this research into the play, to tie the idea of the Rings of Gaia crossing at Wilpena Pound with that of sacred places and a bird’s possible perception of magnetic fields.

Wilpena Pound is believed to sit on a rich seam of uranium deposits, which runs all the way up through the Gammon ranges and Arkaroola National Park. The area is rich in Indigenous sacred sites and is currently protected as a National Heritage Site. The Beverly Uranium mine, however, is just outside the protected area, with plans to expand. As mentioned, I live in Wirrabara and at the time of writing *Bird*, there was much local concern about the specter of uranium mining in the Flinders Ranges, especially at sacred land sites. That concern continues today, with the area around Wilpena Pound now being marked as a potential nuclear waste dump by the federal government.

My compulsion to include factual evidence into the creative works has created an ongoing tension throughout my creative process. I believe this tension has been exacerbated by the confusion I felt around research-led-practice. I felt frequently torn between proof and possibility, objectivity and subjectivity and research and fiction. Following my compulsion towards “proof” by research, I decided to test the Rings of Gaia hypothesis by drawing a line across a map of Australia following these so called rings.

Both latitudinal and longitudinal lines hit some of Australia's biggest mining sites including Broken Hill, Roxby Downs and major sites in Western Australia. The longitudinal line also runs through the Maralinga atomic testing ground. I began to speculate, that if a mining company followed the Rings of Gaia, they would find some kind of rich mineral deposit, including uranium, which, not coincidentally, would be situated on Indigenous sacred land. I developed the story idea that Kevin's land could be situated on ancient sacred ground, but since it was now private land, it could be explored without needing to negotiate heritage laws. This allowed me to integrate some of the story ideas from my abandoned play *Passionflower*. One of these stories centered on the energetic knowledge which could be found in Indigenous paintings. In the story such knowledge was being appropriated by a mining company as a resource for exploration. I also introduced three new characters; Sophie, a woman who had been commissioned by Heathgate Mining Co. to paint the landscapes along the North-South latitudinal Ring of Gaia; her boyfriend and art curator Stephen; and Andrew Marshal, the marketing manager of Heathgate Mining at Beverly, South Australia.

Another element I wanted to incorporate into the play was multi-media, including projected images of art work expressing the concepts of *Sacred Geometry* (Robert Lawlor, 1982). In his research, Lawlor examines the geometric structures of form and proportion that recur in both natural and human phenomena. He claims that the geometric patterns in nature have become intrinsic to human concepts of order and beauty, based on our limited sensual perception of dominant vibration frequencies, within a much broader spectrum.

The content of our experience results from an immaterial, abstract, geometric architecture which is composed of harmonic waves of energy, nodes of relationality, melodic forms springing forth from the eternal realm of geometric proportion. (Lawlor, 1982:5)

Lawler compares the consistent formulation of geometric patterns in art, architecture and mathematical geometry from around the world. I wanted to show some examples of this in

*Bird*, through staging an art exhibition curated by Stephen, Sophie's boyfriend and manager. Of particular interest were the video images of geometrical symmetries generated from electronic sound frequencies on sand. In these videos, random sand particles form themselves into highly patterned geometric shapes determined by the vibration frequency applied to them (Lawlor, 1982: 86).

**IMAGE 1. Electronic sound frequencies on sand. Access to Images on USB**

**provided.** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS67HA4YMCs>

In the play script of *Bird*, this image/video is the focal point for the dialogue between Elise and Cale in Scene 11. A link to this video is also provided in the script.

The intention of incorporating these images was twofold. First I wanted the images to reflect Lawlor's claim that our perception of beauty is based on dominant, energetic vibrations in nature. Second with the sand vibration image, I wanted to represent the idea that forms change in response to different frequencies of energy. I also thought these images would introduce a dynamic visual aspect to the play, rather than a static set design. One of the great benefits of writing a play in the academic environment is that one can write for technologies that perhaps might otherwise be impossible, due to budget constraints. In writing *Bird*, I took the opportunity to abandon my usual concerns around design budget and venue practicalities, to incorporate multimedia technologies that I was not yet sure existed.

I knew that the South Australian artist Rita Hall had created a series of aerial landscapes in the nineteen seventies, showing the land from a birds-eye perspective (often from a hot air balloon). I thought Sophie's paintings could be based on this work and contacted Rita Hall to ask her permission. I had also seen Kseniya Simonova's sand animations, several years before. I knew I didn't want the character Sophie to paint real paintings, but that they should gradually emerge on a projected screen, as animated

images. I invite readers to view this beautiful animation. This is an example of my vision for how the painted landscapes could be presented on stage.

**IMAGE 2: Kseniya Simonova's sand animations. Access to Images on USB provided.**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=518XP8prwZo>

The next draft of *Bird*, written in January 2013, had a story line something like this: Elise hits a bird on the road in the Flinders Ranges. She meets Kevin and as they exchange histories, Elise turns into a bird, confounding Kevin's pragmatic system of belief. Meanwhile in the city, Sophie has been commissioned by a mining company to paint a series of landscapes of the Flinders. As her paintings develop Sophie discovers that Elise has been captured in her paintings and is trying to show her the bird's eye perspective of the land. Finally, Elise reveals to Sophie that she is Kevin's missing daughter. In this draft, Sophie and Elise would meet in the "liminal world" of the paintings. Eventually Sophie would be reunited with her father, while Elise became a bird.

This was a very underdeveloped story idea and it was flawed in many ways. The presence of the mining company *Heathgate*, had become a major influence on the shape of the play. Despite my intentions, the work was turning into a didactic, political statement. At a supervisors' meeting about *Bird* in early 2013, it was clear that I had let my need for a logical story dominate yet again. The connection between Sophie and Elise, by contrast, didn't make sense. It presented like a massive contrivance, so that I could neatly tie everything up by having Sophie and Kevin meet at the end. Elise had disappeared as the protagonist of the play. The comment I wrote in my copious notes was, "She has turned into a device to serve Kevin and Sophie's story" and that the play needed "more poetic resonance and less fact" (Duncan, Journal, 2013).

Shortly after this meeting, my confusion about research-led-practice versus practice-led research reached its most critical and painful point. I began to realize that I

had misunderstood Haseman's (2006) *Performative Research* paradigm. I had misinterpreted Haseman's idea that the research should be expressed and contained within the creative artefact, to mean that research was to be incorporated into the play as content. Although this went against much of my tacit knowledge as a playwright, I had decided to bend my own rules because this was a research-led-practice project in an academic environment, not a commercial play. To this end, I had included far too much research material into the play. I had even written a whole scene of dialogue where characters discussed the theoretical contentions of Heidegger around the "essence" of art. I even referenced Heidegger 1971 in the script! This may seem ludicrous in hindsight, but such extremes are indicative of my utter confusion and anxiety at the time, around practice based research: "Was the creative artifact to *express* new knowledge or to *be* new knowledge?" and/or "Was new knowledge new form, new content, or the analysis of the process?" When I am clear about the rules of a creative process, including writing, I have no qualms about breaking these rules. When I am not clear, I am like a newly blinded person in a foreign metro tunnel, clinging to the railings as my only point of reference and terrified of letting go. I decided I needed to familiarize myself with this new territory. I needed to do more research around creative practice methodologies if I was to understand what was expected of me as a creative practitioner in the academic environment.

It was through this research, that I discovered Barrett's (2010) "What is an Author" discussed in the Introduction. Two clear points and two clear models emerged from this reading. The first was that I should situate my own work within the "Artistic Audit" of Australian practitioners. What kind of play did I want to write and what era and therefore audience did I want to write for? The way things were going, I could have been writing a documentary or a docudrama, which was not what I wanted. My aim was to write a play that could evoke a sacred experience in a contemporary audience. Therefore, I needed to

situate myself within those artists who had done so in this century, not the last. However, after reading Barret's second "Dispersed Selves" model, I realized that the problem went even deeper. *Au fond* my tacit knowledge as a playwright was not adequate to express my "lived experience" of the sacred. As Barret (2010) points out, when the "situated knowledge" cannot match the "lived experience", one needs a further methodology outside of the Foucaultian model. Barret's solution to this issue lies in Paul Carter's (2007) notion of "discursive momentum" and "material thinking" and so I began to engage with this theory in earnest.

## 6.2 MATERIAL THINKING

As I have discussed in the Introduction, Carter's second condition for practice led research as "discursive momentum" leads to a new symbolic form or new "invention". This involves the artist entering into a process of experimentation, collaboration and negotiation which Carter calls "material thinking"; where "materials" can be "documents, images, sites, animate bodies or the situation itself..." (Carter, 2010: 22). When I interrogated the "material thinking" of my own creative work, I realized that although I had amassed a small arsenal of theoretical and artistic techniques or tools, I had not begun to actively use them in my own work.

From my brief analysis of the sacred experience, I had created a list of characteristics in my reflective journal which included: outside of oneself, part of something bigger, wholly other to the mundane, transcendental, liminal, epiphany, phenomenological shift, communion, a double consciousness, voiding of thought, alternative reality, altered state of consciousness, celebration, ecstasy and connection. Although this list was incomplete it gave me an idea of the kind of experience I was hoping to achieve in the writing. In addition, I had mapped out some preliminary trends in

creative practice that I considered to be successful in *evoking* a sacred experience, particularly from the analysis of *Einstein on the Beach*, *When the Rains Stops Falling*, *The Seven Stages of Grieving* and *Still Angela*. My list of successful tools or techniques included: dislocation, disjunction, myth, dream logic, collaboration, ludic deconstruction, symbolic gesture, energetic current, non-linear, juxtaposition, a-logical, a-causal, synchronous time, synchronicity of symbols, meaningful coincidence, non-teleological, liminal space/time, choreography, image, design, precise semiotic clues, poetic language, open space and open time (Duncan, Journal 2012). Furthermore, contrary to those pedagogical tomes written around *Story*, (McKee 1997), neither Bovell's *Rain*, nor Kemp's *Still Angela* had begun with a story outline. I discovered later that this process of anti-story had been integral to many other of my examples of Sacred Theatre; Le Page, Theatre de Complicité, and in some cases Peter Brook. Story was not the starting point for their work, but gradually emerged through process.

Apart from engaging in material thinking, I was also participating in what Haseman calls "reflective practice"; where the artist/practitioner must constantly gauge and evaluate if the work is achieving its own intentions, and if not, to ask why not? (Haseman 2010: 152). As Haseman points out:

With its emergent but nevertheless systematic approach, practice-led research promises to raise the level of critical practice and theorising around practice in a more rigorous and open way than professional practice alone is able to achieve. (Haseman 2010:156)

As a result of this reflective practice, I could see that both my situated knowledge and practical toolbox had expanded from where I was at the beginning of the research, but I was still holding on to old techniques. My research question needed to change from "How do I write sacred theatre?" to "How do I utilize these specific techniques to write sacred theatre?" Also by this time I had completed enough research to understand Hans-Thies Lehman's concept of Postdramatic Theatre, with its a-causal, non-teleological structure,

especially evident in *When the Rain Stops Falling*. I was also aware of the ways in which the concepts of liminality and vertical time could be expressed poetically on the stage, evident in Jenny Kemp's *Still Angela*. I decided to abandon two familiar techniques; causal plot with a goal driven protagonist and a logical representation of time. Instead I would actively apply techniques to the creative process such as liminality, vertical time, heterotopia, poetic language, and non-linear/a causal structure.

This may sound like a fairly straightforward strategy. However, I found it extremely difficult to break my old writing habits. Without giving my characters a teleological aim (a want), there was no conflict, or dramatic tension and the characters were simply too nice to each other. My journal at the time is full of anguish and self-doubt. "How do I write a play without a story?" (Duncan, Journal, 2013). I fell into a state of despair about my whole thesis, my ability to write plays and debated whether my true calling might perhaps be a nice job as a check out girl in Woolworths. Then something shifted. I decided to actively stop writing scenes that made sense and to stop writing about a sacred experience. Rather, I decided to write by having a sacred experience and see what would happen.

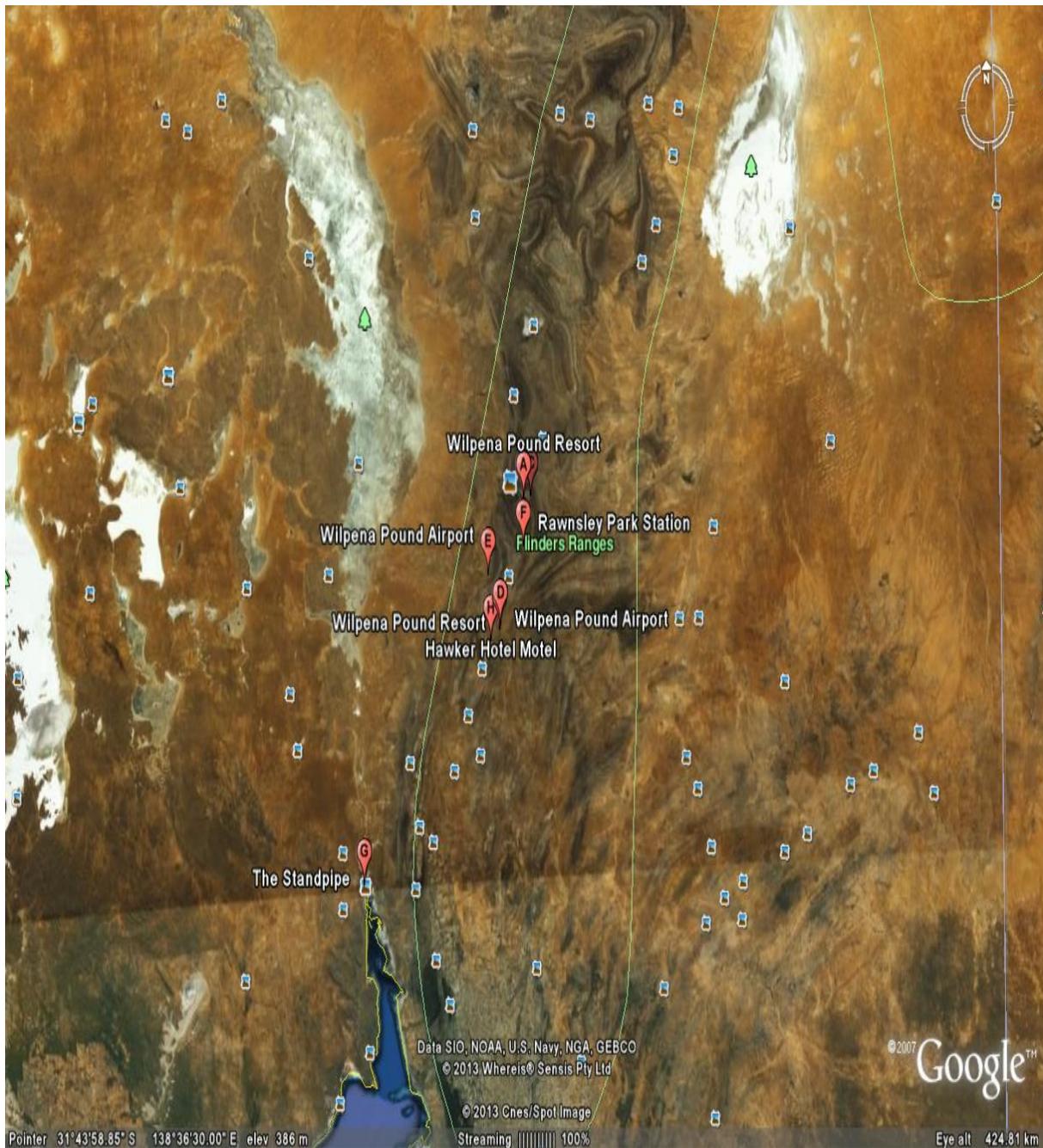
The best way I know how to have a sacred experience is to meditate. This is what I did. I grabbed my 'watcher at the gate' and wrestled her into a box. I meditated for an hour and then I wrote for an hour, all day and every day for two weeks. I was disciplined about it. I did not let my rational critic or 'watcher' interfere with the process. I did not judge, question the work, or worry about structure, time or logic. I was not restricted by the mechanics of a theatre venue. I didn't worry about cast size, set, plot, character consistency or growth, obstacles, conflict, and I especially ignored the golden rule "What does your character want?" I simply wrote a series of disconnected scenes and images, based on what I had seen in meditation. In short, I allowed myself to make a "Mess".

### 6.3 THE LIZARD

One of the tasks I set myself in meditation was to become a bird and to fly. I asked myself; “What does a bird see?” Interestingly, the image which consistently arose was that the land around the Flinders Ranges looked like a giant lizard, which was being wounded through mining in the region. Time and again I would see the lizard and often this was distressing, because it seemed the lizard was in pain and pleading for help. One day I decided to search Google Maps to see what the satellite photograph of the Flinders Ranges looked like. I was astounded to find that the Gammon and Flinders Ranges do indeed look like a giant lizard with a long spine and tail stretching down to the Adelaide hills. This was a goose bump moment in my research. **See Image 3.**

Another frequent occurrence in meditation was that I would have conversations with what I call ‘guides’. I have had this experience many times in over thirty years of meditation practice and I recognize three main figures. One of these is Piedmont, a shriveled up old man with black skin who basically thinks I’m an idiot. He laughs at me all the time, especially when I’m anxious. At these times he refuses to speak to me until I “remember” who I am. It is this guide who would say things like, “If you think of flying you will fly, if you think of dying you will die.” And “If you fear it, it will harm you. If you love it, it can never harm you” (Duncan, 2016, *Bird*, Scene 7). I introduced the character of Atma into the writing, and I made Atma a celery munching lizard, with no reverence for the so called ‘divine’ but an authority based in the world of spirits. Many of the instruction scenes between Atma and Elise in *Bird* come from conversations I had in meditation with my cranky, crinkly, black guide.

**IMAGE 3:**  
**Satellite Photograph of the Gammon and Flinders Ranges.**



This image is taken from Google Maps/Satellite.

<https://www.google.com.au/maps/@-31.2508801,138.1521396,195037m/data=!3m1!1e3:>

I decided to incorporate a monologue of my own experiences as a child aged between five and eight years of age, growing up in Whyalla, South Australia. Our house was right on the edge of the bush and I used to give myself the challenge of walking further and further every day. I would frequently hit what seemed like a wall of fear, and I would instinctively sit down and wait for permission to keep going. It would come in the way I have described in the monologue, as if everything was holding its breath and waiting. Then suddenly everything would move again. It would feel like a celebration and everything seemed to be laughing. I also used to sing at the top of my voice on these excursions, usually Cilla Black or Dusty Springfield songs. This was the only time my singing would not provoke the usual chorus from my family and even neighbors several houses away, "SHUT UP!" Many years later, while studying a Post Graduate degree in Aboriginal Studies, I learned that 'singing up the country' and waiting for permission, was a traditional way for travelers to cross into country that was not theirs. Nonetheless, Elise's monologue about walking through the bush, waiting for permission and discovering the "laughing things" is my own story (Duncan, 2016, *Bird*, Scene 3).

The voice from on top of the wardrobe is also a true story. When I was about nine years of age, I was sent to my room in disgrace and was crying my eyes out at the indignity. Suddenly I heard a man's voice coming from the top of the wardrobe saying "Don't cry, it will be alright. I am with you." It was so startling, I never forgot it. Then, over twenty years later, I was attending a personal growth workshop and we had to regress to a traumatic childhood memory. That memory of being humiliated and crying was the first one that came to me. Then the facilitator said, "Now I want you to say to your little child 'Don't cry, it will be alright. I am with you.'" That same voice was the one I had heard on top of the wardrobe more than twenty years *before*.

After a month of writing without a structure, based on meditation practice and the incorporation of real life stories, I had a series of disconnected scenes which moved between past and present without any logical connection. I had decided to combine the Sophie and Elise characters into one, even though they logically existed in separate time and space. I think I may have been influenced here by Kemp's *Still Angela* and buoyed by her courage to show the same character at different ages, heterotopically in synchronous time. Although this seemed totally incongruous to my logical mind, by the end of this meditation phase, Elise was the sole female protagonist of the piece, thus giving the piece a more subjective slant. Now, Elise's liminal world became the painting itself, and she could step from her studio into the painting to find herself in the Flinders Ranges story with Kevin.

I had also built Elise's mother, Madeleine, into the story as a plausible character who was dead, although I deliberately tried to avoid presenting her as a ghost. Madeleine was frightened of these "laughing things" and warned Elise about going to the Flinders Ranges. Madeleine was also the source of Elise's history as a migrant, thus removing the need for Elise and Kevin to have a conversation about it. In this early draft, the story of Madeleine's flight from Romania, with Elise born on the plane to Australia was quite detailed. In later drafts it emerged that Madeleine had worked for Kevin Morgan as a housekeeper after the disappearance of his wife. It was during this time that Elise had met the laughing things in the bush. I also introduced the character Cale, the troubled Indigenous Liaison Officer who had been educated by Heathgate. He found himself in the difficult position of having to negotiate between his Adnyamathanha people and his employer. I based Cale's character on research around the subjugation of Indigenous knowledge systems in the negotiations for the Beverly Uranium mine just north of Wilpena Pound (Marsh, 2010). However, I tried my best to keep this comprehensive

research out of the story. On meeting Elise, Cale would immediately find a compatriot spirit, with whom he could speak easily in an illogical, poetic language.

By April 2013 I had submitted a draft called *Bird and the Triangle* to my supervisors with a rough story line as follows: Elise travels to the Flinders Ranges to begin research for her painting commission but she hits the bird on the road and meets Kevin. This experience triggers memories of being a child in the bush and discovering the “laughing things”. As she remembers this, she paints in her studio, but realizes that she has inadvertently captured the spirits of the land including the lizard Atma, in her painting. While developing this painting in her studio, Elise steps into the painting and finds herself in the Flinders landscape, to resume her story with Kevin. She is prevented from walking through the gorge by the tree spirits and so she must learn to fly. Back in her studio, and then an art gallery, she negotiates her relationship with Stephen and the Beverly marketing manager. In the end, she enters the painting for the last time and transforms into a bird. I considered this draft to be incoherent and unstructured. Nonetheless, my supervisors thought this draft to be in a “good place” and the recommendation was that I should bring “*Wyrld/Dreamhouse*” up to the same standard (Duncan, Journal, 2013).

I did not return to the writing of *Bird* until September 2014, when I had procured Flinders University Research Higher Degree Project funding to workshop the play. This funding would allow a three-day workshop with Flinders Drama Centre students, with Dr. Anne Thompson as director; dramaturgy by Verity Laughton and design input from video artist/lighting designer Nic Mollison. This funding was also intended to support the services of an aerialist Jo Naumann Curren to explore the physical potential of Elise turning into a bird.

The workshop was an important step in my creative process towards writing sacred theatre. First, in order to test the aim of evoking a sacred experience, I needed an audience.

Thus, a reading for invited guests was scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2014. It was hoped that the public reading would allow me to gauge the audience reaction to the work.

Second, I had found in my artistic audit that most of my examples of Australian practitioners who had successfully produced sacred theatre, had done so in a collaborative process with actors and designers. Although I did not have the means to replicate a full collaboration, I hoped that this workshop would allow me to develop the play with the benefit of seeing and hearing actors in space and time.

#### **6.4 WORKSHOP: THE NEXT PHASE OF *BIRD***

Immediately after the Flinders University Research Higher Degree Project Funding of \$2800.00 was approved in September 2014, I sent a slightly amended draft to dramaturg Verity Laughton for assessment and suggestions. I called this Draft 2 (27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2015). In her feedback, Verity's very first question drew me firmly back into basic practice. "What does Elise WANT?" Despite all material thinking, I don't think there is any way to escape this fundamental question of drama.

Verity also provided detailed commentary and suggestions on the writing of the piece, right down to the use of personal pronouns. She suggested I write a beat/action account of the script in order to ascertain the objectives and actions of each scene. I promptly provided this according to my understanding of the term as I had used it as an actor. However, this did not really capture what Verity was after; that through line which Stanislavski famously called the "super objective", initially for a character but also very useful for a writer. After a series of redrafts and carefully annotated feedback from Verity, I brought the draft to a stage where there seemed to be only a few remaining issues. These centered mostly on the "logical discrepancies" and "chronological inconsistencies" of the piece.

I think that the only real ‘problem’ left is that a number of the chronologies, both within the scenes themselves, and in the script overall, have bled together. This is not surprising because part of what you are aiming for is the evocation of a sense of the eternal present. But it makes the narrative line hard to follow. (Correspondence, Laughton, 2014)

Verity wrote a lengthy chronological outline of the play in order to try to understand some of the inconsistencies. This pointed up some of the underlying flaws in logic that still characterized some aspects of the piece; for example, Elise’s ability to fly *before* turning into a bird. We met and discussed these issues at length. I then wrote two more drafts, trying to clarify the issues raised by Verity’s main questions.

As Director, Dr. Anne Thompson also provided a considerable list of questions that she hoped would be addressed in the workshop. Although these pertained to the writing, they were also relevant to how she could direct actors. “Who is Elise speaking to in the first monologue?” “Who are Elise and Cale talking to on page 40?” And most importantly, “How can the last scene between Kevin and Cale happen if the play is about the movement of Elise through time and place?” (Duncan, Journal, 2014). Many of Verity and Anne’s concerns revolved around the same issue; what is the through logic of this piece? In my enthusiasm for non-causality, the liminal space of the paintings and non-linear time, I had ignored the focus of the piece, which must be logical if not mundanely rational. The many disconnected worlds I had created in *Bird* were magical, but they were not consistent. They did not form one world with its own logic, such as that in Bovell’s *Rain* for example. I needed to ask: “What does my audience need to know and learn in each moment through a continuous present, so that at the end they have *this* experience?” At the time of writing I was intuitively aware of these issues. However, with the workshop looming and the actors needing a draft, I had to write quickly and don’t feel these issues were fully addressed.

In the theorizing of my own attempts to elicit a sacred experience through the creative works I have realized that the deliberate restructuring of scripts away from the rational and teleological are effective to a certain degree. However, this is not a completely

random or illogical process. Before I move on to a description of the workshop process, I would like to refer briefly to my analysis of *Einstein on the Beach* in Chapter Two, and the more detailed analysis of *When the Rain Stops Falling* in Chapter Five. After analyzing the structure of these works by Robert Wilson and Andrew Bovell, it is clear that although the diachronic arrangement of images and text *appear* to have no causal or teleological connection, these works are even more deliberately structured than some traditional drama. Brook (1968) theorizes that the mere disruption of logic is an empty trick which ultimately becomes devoid of meaning for an audience. It is not simply a question of removing linkages and leaving it up to the audience to participate in the search for correspondences. The semiotic clues and order of events necessary for an audience to have a specific experience are chosen and placed with almost immaculate precision. The work may seem fractured and disconnected, but under analysis, it is clear that a very strong logic indeed is at work. It may be non-teleological and a causal, but this does not mean it is random.

On the contrary, the structure of *Einstein on the Beach* and *When the Rain Stops Falling* are highly sophisticated in that their arrangements of images and incidents are meta-metaphorical. They ask an audience to make connections where all direct pathways between the signifier and the signified have been deliberately erased. This means that other, more complex logics of signification have been employed. They correspond to Lyotard's notion of the sublime, not because they are non-rational, but rather like a mathematical equation by Gödel, or a fugue or ever rising canon by Bach, they are structured to a logical complexity that seems inconceivable for average human intelligence. They are *über* logical. The random, non-logical genius appears to have occurred by accident, but it is the result of months and years of dedicated work.

I was hoping to accomplish in three days, what these masters achieved over years of practice and collaboration. Clarifying the logic of *Bird* was definitely the first necessary

step. On the first day of the workshop, the actors: Holly Langridge, Taylor Wiese, Tiffany Lyndall-Knight, Scott Perry, Chiara Gabrielli, Jermaine Hampton and Robert Greenwell did a cold, first-read with stage manager Yvonne McAulay taking notes. Verity Laughton, Dr. Anne Thompson and I also took copious notes. After a short break, Anne asked us to break the story down chronologically, so that everyone knew the order of events, even if this wasn't present in the script. From this exercise alone, it was evident that there were some serious logical discrepancies in my thinking. One example of this was that in Scene 4: "The Road", Kevin tells Elise to walk through a forest of trees which she cannot see. This represented a huge inconsistency in Kevin's character. I had written him to be a pragmatic man, devoid of mystical perception. Therefore, he should not have been able to see the spirits of trees which had been cut down a hundred years before. It simply didn't make sense. Such a character inconsistency also resulted in a plot inconsistency. This small glitch in the logic could snap an audience out of their suspended disbelief and put them into analysis mode.

At the end of the day I went home and completely restructured the first half of the play, shifting the sequence of scenes and rethinking the tree scene. In the new draft, the new order of events clarified the story flow, but most importantly I switched the ability to perceive the tree spirits from Kevin to Elise. Elise could see the trees, but Kevin couldn't. This made a sudden difference to the logic and meaning of the play and by the second reading on day two, the remaining issues were easier to identify.

These issues were nonetheless enormous, requiring the rewriting and restructuring of the end of the play. Anne Thompson made the executive decision to abandon the attempt to incorporate an aerialist into the last day of the workshop. This would simply be unworkable if the play was still not finished. Nic Mollison (video artist) was to arrive the

following day and the actors had not yet rehearsed with a finished script. This pressure was exacerbated by the public reading of *Bird*, scheduled for 3.00pm that same day.

I went home with the intention to re-write the remaining scenes of *Bird* by the next morning. What was I thinking? I wrote till 3.00am but could not finish the last few crucial scenes. I arrived at the workshop at 9.00am looking like the lizard in my own play. Verity Laughton, stepped up, took me under her wing and over the next four hours we worked together on the last few scenes. I agreed to cut the final scene between Kevin and Cale which introduced the idea that Elise had been killed in the car accident, suggesting that she had been dead throughout the play. By 1.00 pm we finished the rewrite. The actors had a mere two hours to prepare for a public reading at 3.00pm.

This public reading was necessary in order to gain valuable audience feedback on their experience during the reading of *Bird*. Since one of my stated aims in writing the play was to evoke a sacred experience or a phenomenological shift in perception, I wanted to discover if I had been able to achieve this. Ethics Committee regulations required that I gather audience response data via a survey. This would standardize the gathering of data since all audience members would be asked to answer the same questions within the same time frame immediately after the reading. However, since these audience members were mostly invited guests, the survey could never really claim to be an objective sample.

Further, Nic Mollison's four animated paintings had become crucial to the visual reading and the timing of the script, so these also needed to be tested. Nic Mollison did an amazing job of transforming photographs I had sent to him of the Flinders Ranges into computer generated, animated short films. These showed the gradual development of the landscapes painted by Elise within the play. It is important to reiterate here, that Elise never literally paints on canvases. Based on Kseniya Simonova's sand animations mentioned above, I wanted her to stand at a light box and as she moves, the paintings

animate behind her. The idea was that some of these animations would play gradually during the time Elise creates them, while others, such as the image/painting of Kevin's hut would pop up quite quickly. Nic had tried to turn the satellite image of the Gammon and Flinders Ranges into an animated painting of a Lizard, but the resolution was too low on the existing photograph. Therefore, he used an illustration by Rita Hall, with her full permission. (See USB Folder: Appendix Two: a, Animations, The Lizard 05:57).

Nic arrived on the last day of workshop with the intention of building the animated paintings into a reading of the play. However, given that script was not completed until 1.00pm, he had little time to rehearse and basically improvised the playing of images as the reading progressed. Nonetheless, his projected animations worked beautifully and with the use of lighting, it seemed possible to achieve the effect that Elise was moving in and out of the paintings, thus finding herself in a different time frame and location. This was an important effect to achieve, since I wanted the paintings to be the liminal state between life and death in which Elise was caught. When she steps into the landscape paintings, she finds herself in the Flinders Ranges, transforming into a bird. In this state, she develops a perception of the land that is outside of human capabilities. When she is back in her studio and actively painting the landscapes, she finds herself in her domestic/urban environment. Here she needs to negotiate the real world of relationships and business.

## **6.5 COMPUTER GENERATED ANIMATIONS BY NIC MOLLISON**

In Scene 3 of *Bird*, Elise is burying the bird, when she finds herself back in her studio. As her mother, Madeleine sings to her (Appendix Two, b, Song Extract), she begins to create a painting on a light box, facing the audience and recalling an experience in her childhood of meeting the “laughing things” in the bush. I hope the following snapshots give an impression of Nic Mollison's animations and how they contribute to the

timing and design of the script. The full animations are provided with Nic Mollison's permission. (USB. Folder: Appendix Two, a, Animations DVD, 1. The Road.)

**IMAGE 4:** The Road Animation at 00.21 secs.



As Elise paints, she sees that the “laughing things” have entered her studio. They entice her back into the landscape and she finds herself at the grave of the bird. The animation freezes, lights change and the painting becomes the set for the following scene between Elise and Kevin. It is here in Scene 4, that Elise meets Atma, the Lizard.

**IMAGE 5:** The Road Animation at 00.52 secs.



At the end of Scene 4, Kevin tells her to follow him up through the gorge, to his house, but Elise can't move. She is paralyzed by fear. Kevin leaves her and she finds herself back in her studio painting a wall of cliffs and trees.

**IMAGE 6:** The Road Animation at 02.12 secs.



Atma follows Elise to her studio and tells her she does not have permission to paint the trees.

**IMAGE 7:** The Road Animation at 04.10 secs.



Elise begins another painting, *The Gorge*. (Appendix 2: *Bird*, a, Animations Bird DVD, Quick Time. Title 2: *The Gorge*.)

It is difficult to convey how much these animated paintings contributed to the reading itself, but they did give me confidence that the hybrid combination of animation and live performance could carry a logic where Elise could easily traverse locations and time frames through the mutability of the paintings.

## 6.6 *BIRD*: THE READING AND SURVEY

The public reading on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2014 went extremely well, despite the limited rehearsal period. Anne Thompson distributed the actors evenly amidst the audience who sat in a circle, so the audience space and performance space were one and the same, providing echoes of Schechner and Grotowski. This had a wonderful effect, for instance in the scenes with the “laughing ones”. Instead of these spirits coming across as frightening or sinister, the audience became surrounded by the sound of laughter, which made them laugh in turn (*Bird*, Sc. 3). This was the effect I had aimed for. Anne’s approach also left a central performance space free, so that actors could fluidly move into and out of the space without clunky scene changes. Tiffany Lyndall-Knight had researched an old Romanian folk-tune whose melody fit perfectly with the lyrics I had written. It brought a haunting, melancholic atmosphere to the song. An audio/visual recording of this song is provided on the USB: (Appendix Two: b) Song Extract Audio Visual). A full recording of the reading may be found on USB: (Appendix Two: c) Bird Full Movie of Play Reading.)

After the reading, audience members were asked to fill in the survey forms.

Audience members were invited guests who were predominantly personal friends, family or colleagues who had shown interest in the project. For this reason, the survey cannot be claimed as empirical “data”, nor was this the intention. The main purpose of the survey was for me to garner the audience response. Actors involved in the reading were also surveyed. In total, 22 participants contributed to the survey, the full data for which is available in Appendix 1: Bird Reading Survey Responses. Survey questions (1-3) aimed to provide demographic data pertaining to the religious or spiritual beliefs of participants and were not designed to draw any direct correlation between spiritual beliefs and the outcomes of the play. It is clear from the survey totals, that the participant contingent was quite varied. Questions 4-6 aimed to test the use of the term ‘sacred’, and its application to

an experience in the theatre. Although the data from Question 4 indicates a statistical trend towards people having experienced either ‘realization’ or ‘reverence’, there is hesitation in Question 5 around calling this a ‘sacred’ experience. In Question 6 however, there is a trend to suggest that many had experienced a state of realization and reverence in the theatre. From question 7 to 9 the intention was to test the audience experience provoked by the reading of *Bird* in particular.

I think it would be fair to say that the play did not resolutely evoke a sacred experience for the audience, or a memory of a sacred experience. However, it did impact on the way audience members thought about the sacred in their lives and brought moments of realization. Interestingly by Question 10, the audience responses suggest that *Bird* has the potential to evoke a sacred experience, most strongly through the use of Poetic and Visual languages. Perhaps by the end of this survey, the use of the word ‘sacred’ had become less problematic for the audience? Although this limited sampling cannot be conclusive, I think it indicates a general mistrust of the word sacred to describe an experience of reverence and realization, particularly in a theatre. It does suggest however that some audience members are willing to entertain the possibility of having a sacred experience in the theatre, if it is well executed. According to the survey, *Bird* did not go far enough in this regard, but the audience comments seem to belie this outcome.

In their qualitative comments, many audience members contradicted their own quantitatively based survey results. I accept that my survey questions, written in 2012, were not sufficiently detailed to gauge a true reading of the play’s impact. Nonetheless, many people enjoyed the play, and claimed to have had a visceral experience through the reading. Some claimed that the term ‘sacred’ blocked their survey assessment of the play, perhaps by pre-empting and naming the experience. Interestingly, most survey participants could see the potential for the play to evoke a sacred experience, given a full production.

Some were intimidated by the largess of the theme of sacred in the Australian context. The majority, however, appreciated that the topic had been broached. Overall I think the main outcome of the survey was a consensus that the play was thought provoking, well written and had evoked a visceral, if not sacred experience for most viewers.

The workshop process, including the lead up to it with detailed input from dramaturge Verity Laughton, was highly valuable but much too short. Three days with actors is simply not enough. In retrospect I think the funds could have been more effectively allocated to the dramaturgy of the piece, where the inconsistencies in the script could have been addressed before the actors came on board. As it was, they never really got the chance to move the piece. Given the undeveloped state of the script before workshopping, there simply wasn't enough time. This reflects that perhaps my ambitions for the workshop were not realistic. Although the contributions to this workshop process from highly accomplished artists and theatre practitioners was extremely valuable, it could not truthfully be regarded as collaboration. Collaboration has emerged as a key contributor to the process of writing *Sacred Theatre*.

## **6.7 POST WORKSHOP REDRAFT AND REFLECTION**

This workshop process certainly ironed out many of the logical inconsistencies in the script, but as each issue was resolved, more flaws were revealed. One of the feedback suggestions from the workshop was that I should be less specific about naming Heathgate Mining (at Beverly). In a redraft in early 2014, I changed the mining company name to *Horizon Futures*. I was also dissatisfied with the ending, which seemed too rushed. Without the scene between Kevin and Cale, I felt as though we never discovered the consequences of Elise's transformation for the other characters. They were simply a device for Elise's story. I played with reintroducing this or an alternative scene between Cale and

Stephen, but my attempts only reinforced the question: “Whose story is this?” In the end, I decided it simply had to be Elise’s subjective story. Therefore, I removed these scenes once and for all. I also took on board some of the criticisms of the Jason Marshall character because he was clearly the most stereotypical and narrow minded character in the play. As an experiment I changed the gender of the Marketing Manager, Jason Marshall into a woman, Jacinta Marshall. This does not fully address the two dimensional nature of this character. However, I felt as though the pressure she was under to deliver a product in a male dominated industry gave her a vulnerability that the male character did not have. I also liked that the role distribution would now be four women and three men. Potentially one more job for a female actor!

In many ways, *Bird* emerged as a monodrama with extra characters, which is perhaps all it could ever be, because the perspective of the piece is subjectively a woman’s experience of an alternative reality: the sacred. It is *my* experience of the sacred. As I have shown, the subjective experience of the ‘feminine sacred’ has been theorized by Irigaray, Clements and Kristeva. It has also been dramatized by no lesser playwrights than Marina Carr and Jenny Kemp. I believe the research I have undertaken into the feminist theorizing of the sacred, gave me the confidence to write the play solely from Elise’s perspective. This means that secondary characters in the play are only ever shown from her perspective. They are not always three dimensional and they do not have a journey outside of their relationship to Elise. I have written a similar kind of play before, *A Solitary Choice* (Duncan, 2008). This play is a highly subjective monodrama about a woman’s struggle with abortion, which has toured nationally and continues to be produced internationally. I am not afraid of the female subjective voice; however, my research into Feminist theory gave me extra courage in pursuing this voice in *Bird*. I made the deliberate choice not to view the subjectivity of the play as a problem, but rather as its strength.

*Bird* was never intended to be a commercial play; it is truly creative practice as research. My research journey has complemented and augmented the play development in ways that are not always possible in commissioned work. In short, *Bird* gives voice to a female character that experiences a strong and plausible perception of the sacred. She is trapped in the liminal world between everyday life and transformation. That transformation is not intended to read as a lamentable death. Rather, I hope it represents the freedom to fly and to see “the laughing things” inhabiting what others perceive to be an exploitable, inanimate landscape. Through the process of writing *Bird*, I have encountered many obstacles, mostly of my own making. However, by recognizing the challenge of writing an alternative world view, particularly a woman’s view of the sacred, I have gained the courage to pursue my own vision. In this regard I am indebted to many other writers who have gone before me.

#### **6.8 BIRD: A PLAY BY SHEILA DUNCAN – 10,791 WORDS.**

Please find following draft number 10 of the play script *Bird*, completed in February 2016. This play is written in industry format, using Courier Final Draft 12 with double line spacing, which approximates to 1.5 minutes of stage time, per written page. As such, the current draft of 65 pages would play at approximately ninety - one hundred minutes.

# *Bird*

*A play*

*by Sheila Duncan*

*Draft 10*

*2016*

© Sheila Duncan 2016  
15 Callistemon St.  
Wirrabara S.A. 5481  
[shehaswings@gmail.com](mailto:shehaswings@gmail.com)

## **Cast of Characters:**

Elise Petrescu: 35, an artist.

Stephen Richmond: Early 40's, Elise's partner.

Madeleine Petrescu: 60's, Romanian, thick accent. Elise's mother.

Kevin Morgan: Early 70's. A Farmer

Atma: A Lizard.

Cale Coulther: 30's, Indigenous Liaison Officer for Horizon Futures.

Jacinta Marshal: 40's, Marketing Manager for Horizon Futures.

## **The Set.**

The main feature of the "set" is a large screen/scrim onto which are projected a series of continuously developing (animated) paintings. Elise steps in and out of these paintings. Other projections are listed below.

There are two essential pieces of furniture; a bed and a painting table/light box where Elise actively creates the work that is projected onto the screen. This work is a pre-recorded animation, see "Notes on Projections". Elise never attempts to actually "paint" as if on a real canvas.

The central performance area transforms depending on the scene and should be kept free of furniture. Essential props are: A back pack; sticks of celery; a large portfolio; a sketch pad; a lamp; an ipad/computer; two coffee cups.

## **Notes on projections.**

The video projections are:

1. The Road: The unrecognizable beginnings of a landscape that eventually becomes the Gorge.
2. The Gorge: A three to five-minute animated progression of the painting of a high cliff Gorge in various stages, up to the final stage where the Gorge becomes populated by trees. This animation becomes "still" at certain points in the play.
3. The Lizard painting: A three-minute animated progression of the painting of a giant Lizard based on the satellite image of the Gammon and Flinders Ranges.
4. Kevin Morgan's House. A quickly animated, partial sketch of an old colonial stone cottage.
5. Projected images of Indian Mandalas; Tibetan sand sculptures; Japanese Zen calligraphy and the drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci.
6. A moving image of geometric symmetries created by sound frequencies on sand. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS67HA4YMCs>

**BIRD:**

**Scene 1. Vast open sky.**

*ELISE, 35. Ephemeral creature, wonder if she's really there. She gasps in delight.*

Elise: Bird...

Trusts the eddy current.

Thrusts into the seductive air.

Spirals up and soars,

Twists free of earth's force.

She darts, floats, twirls and flutters,

Feather tail steering her...

Free.

She goes further, faster,

Shoots higher, swoops lower,

Whirling and whistling down

Toward the steady ground

To see...

Me...?

To see....me.

*Elise gasps in horror.*

Recognition in her eyes.

She flaps and grapples up.

Wings fail and falter,

futile against the windscreen.

Her neck snaps on glass.

Connection.

I see you. I know you.

I see you. I know you

**Scene 2. A Road. Flinders Ranges. No Projection.**

*Elise holds a dead bird in her hands. She weeps.*

Elise: I'm sorry.

*KEVIN enters, running. Early to mid-seventies. Salt in his beard.*

Kevin: Hey you! I saw you!

Elise: *(To bird)* I'm so sorry.

Kevin: You hit my fucking tree!

Elise: *(To bird)* I'm sorry.

Kevin: Drove straight into it.

Elise: *(To bird)* Why did you do that?

Kevin: What...?

*Beat*

Elise: The bird, flew straight at me...at the windscreen.

Kevin: It's the sun.

Elise: Straight through the

Kevin: Reflection of the sun on the

Elise: Windscreen...

Kevin: You broke my tree!

Elise: I pulled away but it kept coming...

*She weeps. Elise cradles the bird to her chest.*

Kevin: Get rid of it.

Elise: No! ... It's still warm.

Kevin: Its neck's broken.

Elise: I can feel its little heart/fluttering.

Kevin: /It's dead. Probably crawling with lice.

Elise: I was watching it fly and thinking how beautiful it was. How free in the heat. Then it headed straight for me...

Kevin: You should have been watching/the fucking road!

Elise: /I couldn't take my eyes off it. It was like a magnet.

Kevin: You wrecked my tree.

*Beat*

Elise: What kind is it?

Kevin: Ghost gum...

Elise: I mean what kind of bird is it?

Kevin: Who cares?

Elise: I do.

Kevin: Wattle Bird. Baby by the looks of it.

Elise: Wattle bird baby.

Kevin: It happens a lot this time of year. It's the sun. But most people, most sensible people, people who know how to drive, hit them and stay on the fucking road! They don't smash into peoples own personal trees!

*Beat*

Elise: Own personal tree?

Kevin: I planted it myself.

Elise: I'm sorry.

Kevin: So you keep sayin'.

Elise: It was an accident.

Kevin: Idiots have accidents. The rest of us watch where we're going.

Elise: *(Beat)* Its heart...

Kevin: What?

Elise: The bird's heart has stopped beating.

Kevin: *(Beat)* You should toss it. Creepy, holding onto it like that.

Elise: I want to bury it.

Kevin: Suit yourself.... I'm gonna check the damage, in case there's a leak somewhere. Last thing I need is a bloody bush fire. ....

*Kevin exits. Elise cradles the bird and begins to hum a sad tune. She finds a spot and digs in the dirt. She sings as she buries the bird.*

Elise: Strange child, child of no land,  
Child without a home  
Born in the sky,  
Destined to fly  
Beyond the reach of things known.  
Fly little bird, strange child.  
Strange child, child of no land.

*When the bird is buried Elise goes to her painting table and finds herself in....*

**3. The Studio:** *comprising a blank canvas (Projection White) and a bed with STEPHEN sleeping in it.*

*Elise stands at her painting table. She paints (Projection animates to become the Road painting. See Appendix Two: a, Animations, The Road 00:09secs). MADELEINE PETRESCU enters and stands behind Elise continuing the song. This transition should happen quickly, so there is no break in the song.*

Madeleine: Strange child, child of no land

Child without a home

Born in the sky

Destined to fly

Beyond the edge of things seen

Fly little bird, strange child.

Strange child, child of no land

*Madeleine exits. Elise looks behind her at the now still projection of the early stages of the painting.*

Elise: A landscape...from a long time ago...I'm walking in the scrub. Mallee bush. Melaleuca. Red dirt and lizard trails. Flies. I don't tell anyone where I'm going, because I'm five years old and my mother has told me that the scrub is forbidden. But I decide to go further than I've ever been, so I keep walking. Gradually...I get the sense...that

I am being watched. Yes. Someone...or something is definitely watching me. I want to cry and run home, but I can't show the watching ones how afraid I am. So I sing.... as loud as I can. It's a song my mother sings to me.

Strange child, child of no land

Child without a home.

*We hear laughter.*

Suddenly everything is laughing at me. As if this is the most ridiculous song they have ever heard! So, I start laughing too. And there we all are, the trees, the rocks, birds and me all laughing our heads off in the middle of the scrub! I keep walking and laughing through the unknown. I've never been this far into the bush before...and the trees are different, Eucalypts...Iron bark...Box. Then, I feel frightened. It feels like I have bumped into an invisible wall ... and I know...I just know that I shouldn't go any further. I'm stuck. I don't know what to do...so ...I don't know why...but I sit down. And I wait. Everything is frozen. Even the ants stop crawling. I sit until my back aches. I sit until I start to shake and I can't stop it...

And then a lizard crawls up beside me...It sits there...looking at me...blinking. "Strange child".

Then it scuttles off across the red dirt, and the world cracks open and things begin to move. The wall is down...The wind nuzzles up against me and blows me forward. I have been given permission to walk. And so I do. I know the laughing ones are protecting me. I feel safe. I walk and walk until the sun is high in the blue sky. And then I turn and run home and as I run, I feel the laughing ones running beside me. They run and laugh as far as the fence and then they stop... I go into the forbidden bush many times after that, and always the laughing ones run with me, but they never come past the fence.

*Stephen gets up from the bed.*

Stephen: What are you doing?

Elise: I'm...er... painting.

Stephen: Elise, it's three in the morning.

Elise: I couldn't sleep. There was a mosquito, did it wake you?

Stephen: You woke me. I heard you talking...

Elise: I remembered something.

Stephen: What?

Elise: I used to walk in bush just like this, when I was a little girl.

Stephen: You haven't slept since you got back. Come to bed.

Elise: I will...soon...

*Stephen looks at the painting. The Road.*

Stephen: Nice colours.

Elise: Thanks.

Stephen: Can't see a landscape...

Elise: It's the laughing ones underneath.

Stephen: Underneath?

Elise: You know...underneath the landscape. The laughing ones...they have colours.

*Beat*

Stephen: This commission is getting to you.

Elise: I know.

Stephen: Don't stay up all night.

*Stephen wanders back to the bed. Elise adds more daubs of colour to the painting.*

Elise: Sometimes...on a night like this, when the mosquito whines and the clock beats at my head, I wonder, I just wonder if maybe the laughing ones have visited me in my long night.

*The painting animates...the coloured daubs transform into beams of different coloured lights which float and twirl around the space ....electric blue, orange, green and red. We hear laughter. Elise begins to laugh too and the painting becomes...*

**4. The Road** (*Projection still of Road - early Gorge*

*Painting. See Appendix Two: a, Animations, The Road, 00.52secs)*

*Coloured lights twirl around the landscape. Elise sits at the grave of the bird, looking around in wonder. There is a dominant orange glow which transforms into a creature. The creature has the body movements and shape of a frill neck lizard, with the face of an old woman. This is ATMA. She giggles at the play of different lights around her, as if she's watching a game. Elise giggles with her in amazement.*

Elise: It's beautiful...

Atma: Only if you notice.

Elise: What is it?

Atma: Life.

Elise: I thought it was the bird. I killed a bird.

Atma: Don't be ridiculous.

*Atma snaps out a quick hand and grabs a grasshopper from the air and munches on it contentedly.*

Elise: I've never killed anything before...Except pot plants and mosquitoes.

Atma: You're not that powerful.

Elise: It flew into me.

Atma: Exactly.

Elise: I buried it.

Atma: You should have eaten it...Helps you to remember.

Elise: Remember what?

Atma: Death becomes life.

Elise: I couldn't eat a bird.

*Atma (and everything else) laughs.*

Atma: Strange child.

Elise: Do you know me?

*Atma touches Elise's heart*

Atma: Do you know you?

*Atma exits.*

*Kevin enters carrying a back pack.*

Kevin: Your car's bugged. Busted the front end. You're gonna need a tow but Charlie knocks off at five and he'll be half way through the slab by now, so...What's wrong with you?

Elise: Something's happened...

Kevin: Jesus. What now?

Elise: It's my heart. It's fluttering.

Kevin: You're probably in shock.

Elise: And my eyes... I see all these colours...violet and electric blue...orange.

*Kevin looks around, perplexed.*

Kevin: Where?

Elise: Everywhere... floating...

Kevin: I reckon you've hit your head.

Elise: They're quite beautiful.

Kevin: Listen. Your car's stuffed and we need to get you sorted out. I brought your bag.

*He throws the bag on the ground.*

Kevin: You hear what I said?

Elise: And when I look at you I can't really see you. All around you there's light bouncing, but I can't see you...and I'm trying so hard to see you, because I'm wondering if you are real...

Kevin: Sounds like brain damage.

Elise: Something's not right.

Kevin: No shit Sherlock, you need a doctor by the sounds of it...You should come up to the house. We can call from there.

Elise: I er...I have a mobile...in my bag.

Kevin: Too far from town. No coverage. Can you walk?

Elise: Er...Yes...I think so

Kevin: Good, cause it's a fuckin' long climb up to the house.

*Beat.*

Elise: I think I should go to a town.

Kevin: No problems. Next town is Hawker...that way...about forty k's.

Elise: Oh.

Kevin: You should get there by midnight. Or else my house is up through those rocks there.

Elise: What rocks?

Kevin: Right there in front of you... The gorge, the cliffs. Are you blind?

*He points*

Elise: You mean through the trees?

Kevin: What?

Elise: All those tall trees.

*Kevin lets out a long slow whistle.*

Kevin: No trees here, it's a gorge. Don't you see the rocks?

Elise: I see trees.

Kevin: You're sicker than I thought. You better follow me.

*He goes to exit. Elise stands up but she can't move.*

Elise: I can't...

Kevin: What's wrong?

Elise: My heart's pounding.

Kevin: I'm not gonna hurt you.

*Elise clutches at her heart and sits on the ground.*

Elise: I need to sit down.

Kevin: Right....

Elise: I'm stuck.

Kevin: Well, I'm gonna call for help. Will you be OK?

Elise: Yes...yes...I just have to wait ...I'll follow you.

Kevin: I wouldn't do that if I were you. It's steep in that gorge. Wait here, I'll come back.

*Kevin exits. Elise breathes deeply. She finds herself in....*

### **5. *The Studio/Night***

*The coloured lights retreat into the painting. Elise sits in front of the painting. She turns and looks at it.*

Elise: I'm stuck. One day, I go with the laughing ones to a place where the walls of rock are like cliffs, and the trees are so tall I can't see the top of them. I am frightened. I can hear the trees whispering at me to stay away. I think I know what to do by now...So I sit down...and wait for permission from the trees. But this time. the wall is thicker and denser. I wait and wait until it is dark, and I know, that this time, I may not pass. This place is not for me.

Suddenly, I see lights twinkling in the darkness and then I see my mother ... and a man. They are carrying torches and have been searching for me for hours. I am in a lot of trouble. They take me back to the house. The man pulls off his belt and whips me with it. My mother screams for him to stop and I am sent to my room.

I cry and cry. I cry so much that I disappear. And then I hear one of the laughing ones. Her voice comes from the top of the wardrobe and she says...

Atma: *(Voice only)* Don't cry, strange child. Come play with us. Stay with us.

*Madeleine Petrescu enters and approaches Elise*

Elise: And then my mother comes into the room.

Madeleine: Are you alright my little bird?

Elise: Was that you Mama? Talking to me from the  
wardrobe?

Madeleine: No...

Elise: I heard a voice from up there, on top of the  
wardrobe.

Madeleine: Mama Mare.

Elise: It was orange.

Madeleine: You have made magnets!

Elise: What's that?

Madeleine: You have pulled the spirits!

Elise: It was kind to me.

Madeleine: What does it say?

Elise: It wants me to stay with them.

*Beat*

Madeleine: We must go from here. I cannot protect you here,  
my little bird.

Elise: Why do you call me little bird?

Madeleine: I tell you another day. We go from this place.

*Madeleine exits.*

Elise: I never see that place again. But I have a longing  
in my heart...a deep longing to hear once more, the  
laughing ones.

*She walks towards her painting table and continues to paint.*

*(The painting animates and develops)*

Elise: Sometimes, I can't trust reality. At least what I perceive to be reality. Sometimes, you can't recognize a thing until it's crashed into you. It's been there all the time, but you don't notice it until it flies into your heart and makes you open your eyes. And if you don't see it...you can't paint it.

*Elise looks at the painting... Atma enters eating sticks of celery.*

Elise: Beyond the clearing...there was a gorge... where the rocks tumble together...an ancient cliff face ...orange rock... and there were trees...tall trees....

Atma: I wouldn't paint the trees if I were you.

*Elise turns to see her.*

Elise: What?

Atma: Don't paint the trees.

Elise: I saw trees.

Atma: You don't have permission.

Elise: What do you mean?

Atma: Don't you remember?

Elise: Remember what?

*Pause. Atma munches on celery.*

Elise: How did you get in here?

*Atma indicates the painting.*

Atma: Be careful what you capture.

*Atma finishes a stick of celery.*

Atma: What is this stuff?

Elise: Celery.

Atma: It's good. Do you have any more?

Elise: Where did you get it?

*She indicates off stage.*

Elise: My fridge?

Atma: I was hungry.

Elise: You can't just rummage in my fridge and take what  
you like.

*Atma breaks into a fit of laughter.*

Atma: You can't just rummage in my country and take what  
you like.

*Atma disappears into the orange glow, which becomes one of  
the coloured blotches on the painting.*

## **6. Studio/ Morning**

*Elise looks at the painting. (Projection Still) Stephen  
enters dressed in a suit.*

Stephen: Were you up all night?

Elise: Oh...yes..I think so.

Stephen: You're obsessed with that damned thing.

Elise: It's not a thing.

Stephen: What is it then?

Elise: It's a landscape.

Stephen: Whatever it is, it's taken hold of you. You haven't been the same...

Elise: Or maybe it is a thing.... A thing that captures other things. A trap.

Stephen: What?

Elise: Do you think it's possible to trap things in a painting?

Stephen: What kind of things?

Elise: Spirits.

Stephen: I don't know.

Elise: The soul of the thing.

Stephen: I suppose so. The essence.

Elise: Is essence spirit do you think?

Stephen: I don't know...I guess it is. Heidegger thinks so.

Elise: I mean can you capture the thing without trapping its spirit?

Stephen: What is this, twenty esoteric questions before breakfast?

Elise: Sorry...I've just been thinking.... Isn't that a kind of theft?

Stephen: I don't know... That would mean to paint it would be to impoverish it.

Elise: Exactly.

*Beat*

Stephen: There'd be no essence left in the entire French countryside.

Elise: No.

Stephen: Or Australia for that matter.

Elise: That's what I mean.... Maybe artists are thieves,  
capturing things that don't belong to us.

Stephen: If that's true, we'd have to give up our jobs.  
Which at the moment, we can't afford to do.

Elise: No.

Stephen: Maybe it's the other way round. Maybe that  
painting's captured you.

*Beat*

Stephen: In any case, I have to get to work.

Elise: Can't you stay a bit longer? Something's happened.

Stephen: What?

Elise: Something in my heart.

Stephen: What?

Elise: I can't explain it, not in five minutes. Can't you  
be late?

Stephen: Not today. I have a speech to write.

Elise: It's fluttering...

Stephen: Crazy girl...I'll pick you up at six, ok? We'll  
talk in the car. Try to get dressed for the  
occasion.

Elise: What occasion?

Stephen: The opening. Robert's exhibition...Sacred  
Geometry.

Elise: I thought that was next week.

Stephen: No. It's tonight. And I set up the meeting with  
Jacinta Marshal remember?

Elise: Yes. I'm sorry... I lost track of time.

Stephen: I noticed. See you tonight.

Elise: Bye.

*He exits. Elise stands back and looks at the painting. She begins to paint the outline of a gorge, rocks...a cliff edge. (Projection animates. See Appendix Two, a Animations The Gorge 03:58). She stops and flips through her sketch pad.*

Elise: I'm sure I saw trees.

*She goes to her computer/ipad and scrolls through her photos.*

Elise: No trees... Why aren't they here?

*She turns to face the painting.*

Elise: I saw them...in the Gorge...

*Elise steps into...*

**7. The Gorge** *(Projection still on image)*

*There is a rustling sound and the light flickers as if she were in a grove of trees. Elise looks around in awe...*

Elise: I knew it. Trees...

*Elise walks forward...Male voices whisper.*

V1: Stupid, stupid girl.

V2: You are not welcome here...

V3: Wandering around in forbidden places.

*Elise stops in her tracks.*

V1: Stupid, arrogant girl.

V3: Trespasser.

V2: You will not enter here.

*Pause.*

Elise: I'm stuck.

*She sits down*

V2: She's wrong

V1: About Everything

V2: Everything

V3: You can't be what you were.

V1: What you were,

V2: Was a dream you had,

V1: One night when the moon was kind.

V3: But the dream is over.

*They laugh.*

Elise: Stop it!

V3: She got it wrong.

V1: She can't see.

V2: How wrong she is.

V3: How insignificant.

V1: How unwelcome.

V3: How unworthy.

V2: Insides are fluttering.

*Elise cowers in fright...falls down.*

Elise: Help me!

V1:           Battering.

V2:           Beating.

V3:           Faltering

V1:           Futile.

*They all laugh. Atma appears and sucks an enormous breath of wind into her lungs. She bellows out...*

Atma:        Enough!

*Everything is still. It is still for a very long time...*

*Everything waits and watches.*

Atma:        Chatter, chatter chatter, trees are so demanding.

*Pause. All is silent. Elise is crippled with pain...she clutches her heart.*

Elise:       What's happening to me?

Atma:        You forgot to laugh.

Elise:       Who are they?

Atma:        Memories.

Elise:       Whose memories?

Atma:        The land never forgets.

Elise:       Are they the trees?

Atma:        They were once.

Elise:       Why do they hate me?

Atma:        Don't take it personally, they're guardians. It's their job.

Elise:       Guardians of what?

Atma:        This Gorge.

Elise:       I have to get out of here.

Atma: You shouldn't go through the gorge.

Elise: I need to get to the house.

Atma: Time to fly.

Elsie: I can't fly!

Atma: Remember who you are, little bird.

Elise: Me?

Atma: The bird, remember? It flew back to you.

Elsie: Back to me?

Atma: "I see you...I know you."

*Elise touches her heart, remembering....*

Elise: I see you...I know you....

Atma: Close your eyes and step off the earth...the wind  
will catch you.

Elise: I'll die.

Atma: If you think of dying, you will die. If you think  
of flying, you will fly.

*Elise closes her eyes. Atma sucks another huge breath into  
her lungs and blows Elise into the air.*

### **8. Vast open sky** (No Projection)

*Elise floats higher and higher with her eyes closed.*

Atma: Don't forget to laugh.

*Elise opens her eyes...*

Elise: The ecstasy.... of weightlessness. A gorge of  
ancient rocks, streaks of red and black with folds  
of ochre. The ranges tumble away below. All the

names of places disappear. A spine shudders and a lizard raises its dark head towards me. It has the horrible face of a tortured old woman, though she is smiling. She winks and cranes her twisted neck, puckers her lips and her hot breath hits me, sending me higher and higher. I am alone in the darkness of space. And here...suspended beyond gravity ...I see her entire body... the old lizard of the mountains, with the long spine of her withered body curving down to the coast.

Suddenly there is an explosion and the Lizard writhes in pain...yellow puss oozes from a wound in her shoulder. Then there is another explosion...

rocks fly into the sky. This time the wound cuts across her heart and she cries out in pain, her hot breath scalding the land. The yellow puss runs like rivulets down the folds of her skin and into the sea. And then I see the old lizard, breathe her last breath, lay down her head and close her eyes.

Without her breath I can't fly. I'm certain I am going to die in this empty place, and this thought, the moment I think it ...sends me down... down, plummeting down to the fatal ground.

**9. Kevin's House -Porch- Evening.** (*Projection: Partial drawing of house. See Appendix Two: a, Animation, Kevin Morgan's House 07:10*)

*Elise tumbles to the ground. Kevin stands on the porch of his run down house, drinking beer.*

Kevin: I called Charlie. He'll pick up the car around six in the morning. Tow it to Hawker and you can sort everything out then....

*Elise gets up. She has difficulty breathing.*

Kevin: Cops are on their way. I didn't call the ambulance. Don't like 'em much, but if you start going queer on me, that'll be my next call.

Elise: Something's wrong...I think I'm...I'm hallucinating.

Kevin: You still seein' things?

Elise: Yes.

Kevin: What kind of things?

Elise: Colours ...I keep seeing a lizard... I thought I was flying....

*He lets out a slow whistle. She breathes heavily. She opens her back pack and gets a bottle of water. She drinks.*

Kevin: You want a beer?

Elise: No thanks.

Kevin: That stuff'll kill ya.

Elise: I'll risk it.

*Beat.*

Kevin: How'd you get here? Up the gorge?

Elise: I'm not sure.

Kevin: Most people are scared of that gorge.

Elise: Are they? ...Why?

Kevin: *(Beat)* No idea.

*Kevin comes closer.*

Kevin: You from the city?

Elise: Yes.

Kevin: On a camping trip were ya?

Elise: I was on my way to Wilpena Pound....to do some drawings.

Kevin: Oh yeah...Why would you wanna do that?

Elise: It's my job.

*Elise breathes, holding her chest.*

Kevin: What? You get paid for doing drawings?

Elise: Yes. Well, paintings.

Kevin: Pretty useless job. Who the hell would pay you to do that?

Elise: It's a company.

Kevin: You one of them greenies or something?

Elise: No... The opposite. It's a mining company.

Kevin: Not that Beverly mob!

Elise: They're called Horizon Futures.

Kevin: Oh yeah? *(Beat)* Are you one of their spies or something?

Elise: No. They just want me to do some landscapes...Why would they need spies?

Kevin: Always snooping round here with their little gadgets.

Elise: What?

Kevin: Tried to buy this place off me but I told them to get fucked. They need to leave that big stuff in the ground.

Elise: What big stuff?

Kevin: None of your business.

Elise: I'm sorry...I just. Look could you take me to town? I think I need to see a doctor.

Kevin: Darren'll be here soon. He'll take you to the hospital.

Elise: Who's Darren?

Kevin: The copper I told you about...from Hawker. You'll be lucky if he doesn't ping you... Must'a been going pretty fast, the way you wrecked my tree...

Elise: Please...something's not right.

Kevin: Are you serious?

Elise: I think there's something wrong with my heart.

Kevin: You having a heart attack?

Elise: I think the bird flew inside it.

Kevin: Right...Right...well...maybe I will call the ambulance...What's your name?

Elise: Elise.

Kevin: Elise what?

Elise: Petrescu.

Kevin: That foreign?

Elise: No. What's yours?

Kevin: Morgan. Kevin Morgan.

Elise: That foreign?

*Pause. Kevin heads towards the house. He stops and turns around.*

Kevin: Petrescu? Are you Romanian?

Elise: Yes. My parents were.

Kevin: I knew a Romanian once. A crazy woman, used to put garlic all over the place, and fucking crosses and all these dolls. She was a good cook though...Can you cook?

Elise: No.

Kevin: No. Don't look like you can.

*Kevin exits and the house disappears (Projection fades).*

*Elise clutches at her chest and gasps for breath.*

### **10. The Studio.**

*Elise sits on the ground gasping for breath. Stephen enters, carrying a briefcase.*

Stephen: It's six o'clock.

Elise: What?

Stephen: You didn't get dressed.

Elise: Er...No.

Stephen: Jesus, Elise. You promised you'd be ready. This is important.

Elise: I'm sorry.

Stephen: What the hell's going on with you?

Elise: I can't explain it...something's happening to me.

Stephen: Look...I can't wait for you. I'm supposed to be there already.

Elise: I'll come later. I'll get a cab.

Stephen: You're supposed to be meeting the Horizon people.

Elise: Tell them to wait.

Stephen: Jesus.

*Stephen exits. Elise gets up and begins to change into a red dress.*

### **11. A Gallery. Exhibition of Sacred Geometry.**

*Projection of Indian Mandalas; Tibetan sand sculptures; Japanese Zen calligraphy and the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci.*

*Stephen enters and stands on a podium.*

Stephen: Ladies and Gentlemen, honourable guests.

Everything we look at and perceive is ordered according to a universal principle of symmetry and unity, integral to life itself. We only need to look at the way single cells divide, to see that our existence comes into being through the

symmetrical and geometric principles of division or attraction.

Sacred Geometry is the study of this universal order, and no-one has contributed more to our understanding of Sacred Geometry than Robert Lawlor.

For the past three months, it has been my great privileged to work with Robert to bring together some of the most ancient works from around the world and our own country. This has been an inspiring journey for me; to realize that the universal shapes we find in Sacred Geometry are the very same shapes formed by magnetic energy and sound vibrations on matter.

*Elise enters, dressed in a beautiful red dress.*

To discover that on our own planet, there is a network of magnetic lines called the Rings of Gaia which crisscross our globe. Where they meet, we find heightened places of energy. Our mountain ranges, rivers, continents and even our own bodies are formed by or align with these magnetic forces. Sacred Geometry is a process of perception, not an application of logic. So tonight, I encourage you to see, without rationalizing, the relationship between energy and matter. It is my great pleasure to declare this exhibition open.

*Stephen exits. The projection changes to a moving image of geometric symmetries created by sound frequencies on sand.*

(See Image 1, Access to Images on USB Drive)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS67HA4YMCs>

*CALE COULTHER stands transfixed by the moving image. Elise approaches the image.*

Elise: Mesmerizing.

Cale: Fascinating.

Elise: It's amazing how...

Cale: How different frequencies/

Elise: /produce different shapes

Cale: and that we recognize them.

Elise: How different energies create/

Cale: /different places. Like home.

Elise: Maybe it's because we all come from sand...

Elise: From the earth.

Cale: From the stars.

Elise: And all you have to do is remember

Cale: Where you came from...

Elise: Then you remember...

Cale: Your shape...

Elise: Your frequency.

Cale: Who you are.

Elise: And that you're always being re-shaped.

Cale: Like sand.

Elise: On a boom box.

Cale: With the volume up.

Elise: And you know it's too loud.

Cale: So you get distorted.

Elise: But you can't turn it down.

Cale: Or remember who you are.

Elise: Or where you came from.

Cale: Or what you're supposed to be doing.

*Beat. They turn to each other and burst out laughing.*

Elise: All that from moving sand.

Cale: The forces of energy on matter.

Elise: Mesmerizing.

Cale: Fascinating.

Elise: Yes. *(Pause)* Well...Enjoy the rest of it.

Cale: Yeah. You too.

*Elise moves away to look at the other exhibits. The space is populated with images of Sacred Geometry. Cale and Elise keep bumping into each other, they smile, but move on.*

*Stephen enters carrying a portfolio, he approaches Elise.*

Stephen: You made it.

Elise: Yes. Nice speech.

Stephen: Nice dress.

*Beat.*

Stephen: Robert left these for you.

Elise: Oh, has he gone?

Stephen: Yes, I've just seen him off. I couldn't find you.

Elise: I've been here for a while.

Stephen: I couldn't find you. Anyway, he wanted you to have this.

*He hands her the portfolio.*

Elise: What is it?

Stephen: Something to do with the rings of Gaia.

Elise: Really? That's kind of him.

Stephen: He was disappointed not to say goodbye.

Elise: Me too.

*JACINTA MARSHAL and Cale Coulther approach them.*

Jacinta: Elise! You're here at last. We've been waiting for an hour.

Elise: Hi Jacinta, sorry I was late.

Stephen: She was working on your project.

Jacinta: Excellent! I want you to meet Cale Coulther.

Cale's our Aboriginal Liaison Officer. Cale, this is Elise Petrescu. You guys will be travelling together on the field trip.

Elise: Oh. Good to meet you.

Cale: You're the artist?

Elise: Yes.

Jacinta: Very highly recommended.

Cale: Good to put a face to the name.

Jacinta: So Elise, how's the work coming along?

Elise: Er...getting there.

Stephen: She hasn't stopped since she got back.

Jacinta: I'm keen to see how it's progressing. Did you get all the research we sent you? The aerial shots... satellite photos?

Elise: Yes, thanks, and I made sketches.

Jacinta: Good, good. So you enjoyed the trip?

Elise: Em...yes...

Cale: What trip?

Elise: Apart from the accident...

Jacinta: We set up a quick trip to Wilpena.

Elise: But I had an accident.

Jacinta: Just so she got the lay of the land, you know.

Cale: I thought that's what we came to talk about?

Jacinta: No, no, this was a different trip. Just the tourist areas. More like a holiday wasn't it Elise? No negotiation needed Cale, way outside your area. That comes next week.

Cale: So you've already been up there?

Elise: Yes.

Cale: Which sites did you visit?

Jacinta: She just went to the tourist areas. Wilpena Pound.

Elise: Er...No, I didn't get that far.

Stephen: She came back early.

Jacinta: Nowhere near Arkaroola.

Cale: That's not what we agreed.

Jacinta: We couldn't wait that long Cale. We open in June. Besides it's out of your territory.

Cale: Where did you go?

Elise: Err...near Hawker I think.

Cale: That's Nukunu land...she still needs permission.

Jacinta: From what? A website?

Cale: She needs to talk to Ruby Thomas.

Elise: I'm sorry, I didn't realize....

Cale: You should have known better, Jacinta.

Jacinta: It's not an exploration licence for Christ's sake... it's just a few paintings.

Stephen: I thought the approvals were all clear?

Elise: It was my fault, I had an accident and had to stop.

Cale: You shouldn't have gone alone.

Jacinta: She was happy to go, weren't you Elise?

Elise: I didn't realize I needed permission.

Jacinta: You don't.

Cale: She does!

Stephen: Actually Jacinta, she does. It's protocol.

Cale: Why didn't you consult with us?

Jacinta: We both know those meetings can take months. We're running out of time.

Cale: It's dangerous up there.

Stephen: Dangerous?

Cale: Certain places are, without a guide, without consultation. That's why I came here.

Jacinta: Oh, how can art be dangerous?

Cale: That depends on the art.

Jacinta: It's just a few landscapes. What's so dangerous about that?

Cale: What's dangerous is the land you paint and who paints it.

Jacinta: Oh that's bullshit.

Cale: She can't just go wandering into country on her own. She needs to meet with the elders.

Jacinta: Cale thinks we should have got an indigenous artist.

Stephen: I thought you tried?

Jacinta: We did, we did try, but they needed even more permission. It was impossible.

Cale: Not impossible, just respectful.

Elise: Sometimes....

Jacinta: Oh come on.... people can paint what they like.

Stephen: Their houses for example.

*Elise gradually moves away from the group.*

Elise: Actually quite often.

Jacinta: Oh, you know what I mean.

Stephen: Yes, I do, but I don't know if I agree.

Elise: I become invisible.

Jacinta: A landscape is a landscape.

Stephen: But not everyone sees it in the same way.

Elise: Right in the middle of a conversation...

Cale: Or has the right to see it. That's why we need  
consultation.

Stephen: I think Cale has a point.

Elise: Reality just shifts.

Stephen: You did say you wanted someone with a particular  
vision...

Jacinta: Yes. Yes. That's why we hired Elise.

Elise: And I disappear.

Stephen: I mean the lovely ladies from the CWA would see it  
differently...

Jacinta: Exactly and that's why we're investing all this  
money...

Elise: Into the clouds.

*Cale looks over at Elise:*

Stephen: I mean you can't paint it if you don't see it can  
you?

Cale: Into the clouds.

Jacinta: No. No of course not.

Stephen: And that's what you pay for...the vision...Not the  
ability to hold a brush.

*Elise exits. Cale begins to follow her off.*

Cale: Sometimes...

Jacinta: Well that's right, but...

Stephen: It's the vision underneath the vision.

Cale: Actually quite often.

Jacinta: Speaking of vision, when can I see the paintings?

Cale: I become invisible.

Stephen: She's still developing the sketches.

Jacinta: Of course, yes, but I'm only in town till tomorrow. I just want to see how things are shaping up.

Cale: Right in the middle of a conversation.

Stephen: You'd need to ask Elise about that.

Jacinta: I'll come to the studio.

Stephen: Where is Elise?

Cale: Sometimes.

Jacinta: Tomorrow morning is best for me.

Stephen: That may not be convenient for...

Cale: I open my mouth.

Stephen: I'd have to ask Elise.

Jacinta: Tomorrow is the only day I have free. Let's say eleven o'clock?

Cale: And I make a sound.

Jacinta: I have to be back up North by the next day.

Stephen: She's not ready to show anything yet.

Jacinta: Oh, it's not a showing, it's just a routine check.

Cale: But nobody hears.

Jacinta: I need to report on the progress, Stephen. I have a media launch in a month. I'm getting squeezed from above.

Cale: As if I've disappeared.

Stephen: Jacinta it's too early...

Jacinta: You know what it's like Stephen.

Cale: Into a landscape that no longer exists.

Jacinta: All these consultations and meetings... Seeking permission about walking on to a bit of land for God's sake. Well it's slowing things down.

Stephen: What's the rush?

*Cale exits.*

Jacinta: We need at least half the paintings by the media launch.

Stephen: That's less than a month away.

Jacinta: You understand my position Stephen, I need to show something concrete for the investment... I need to show progress.

Stephen: I understand that but...

Jacinta: A general layout, an abstract. Blocks of colour on a canvas. Yellow. We just need to see the yellow. The glow.

Stephen: Excuse me?

Jacinta: You know...that orange, yellow light, it's like a candle on the rocks. It's like energy, dancing on the rocks. We want our foyer filled with...light.

Stephen: Luminescence.

Jacinta: Yes. Yes exactly that. The luminescence of the landscape captured in the paintings.

Stephen: Are you talking about spirit?

Jacinta: I'm talking about ... well it's a certain kind of light we're after...

Stephen: Because if you're talking about spirit...I think you need permission for that.

Jacinta: Right. Good, so that's settled then. Tomorrow morning at eleven. I'll bring Cale to work out the road trip. Where is Cale, by the way? Oh that man. Always going walkabout. *(She laughs)*

*Stephen and Jacinta exit.*

*Pause. Stillness.*

## **12. Studio. Night.**

*Elise, enters in her red dress and switches on a small lamp. She plonks the portfolio on her table and begins to flip through it. She does this for quite some time before...*

*Stephen enters.*

Stephen: You disappeared.

Elise: You suits had it all sewn up.

Stephen: Jacinta's a walking flow chart.

Elise: Thanks for dealing with her.

Stephen: I couldn't ward her off. She's coming tomorrow.

Elise: I have nothing to show her.

Stephen: She doesn't care about the work. She just wants to see the "glow".

Elise: The glow?

Stephen: Don't even ask me. Jesus! I feel like I've been hit by a truck.

Elise: She has that effect.

Stephen: You seemed to manage the spunky young Cale, though.

Elise: He's nice.

Stephen: Star stuck I would say.

Elise: I wasn't star struck.

Stephen: I mean him. He was smitten.

Elise: He's married!

Stephen: Good!

Elise: He has kids.

Stephen: *(Beat)* Not so good.

Elise: Don't tell me you're jealous.

Stephen: I've just signed a contract for you to go traipsing around the wilderness with this guy for two weeks. I'm not jealous, I'm nervous.

Elise: I so love it that you can tell the difference.

*Pause*

Stephen: I could sleep for a week.

*Stephen heads towards the bed and begins to undress. Elise flips through the portfolio.*

Elise: I liked the sand video.

Stephen: I don't think many people got it.

Elise: Cale did. We had fun before we realized we were both working for Horizon.

Stephen: I noticed.

Elise: I thought you said you couldn't find me?

*Pause. He changes into his pyjamas then comes back and looks at her intently.*

Elise: What is it?

Stephen: This morning...you said there was something wrong with your heart.

Elise: A bird flew into it.

Stephen: Shouldn't you see a doctor for that?

*Pause.*

Elise: I have this strange feeling I'm going to fly away and never come back.

*Pause.*

Stephen: Are you leaving me?

Elise: Not intentionally.

Stephen: What do you mean by that?

Elise: It's not a voluntary thing. I'm scared I'm going to disappear, like my father. Like I'm on Ceausescu's list.

Stephen: The disappearing list?

Elise: I need to talk to my mother.

*Beat.*

Stephen: Darling, your mother's dead.

Elise: Yes. But ...I still talk to her sometimes.

*Beat.*

Stephen: Give her my regards.

Elise: I will.

Stephen: Are you sure you're not leaving me?

Elise: I'm not sure of anything. That's the problem. It feels like everything's shifted in some way and I'm floating around without an anchor.

Stephen: It's that damned painting.

Elise: Maybe.

Stephen: Anyway I'm going to bed. Are you coming?

*He waits, but Elise continues to flip through the portfolio.*

Elise: This is really interesting, Stephen. These rings of Gaia cross in the Flinders Ranges, at Wilpena Pound. It's the only place in Australia where they cross. Do you think that's why they sent me there?

Stephen: I don't know. Are you coming to bed?

Elise: In a little while.

Stephen: I get lonely without you.

Elise: I can't sleep when I'm painting.

Stephen: I know. It's relentless.

Elise: I do appreciate you.... The way you put up with me.

Stephen: It was easier during your "chair and pipe" phase.

Elise: That was different. I was a student.

Stephen: This is not a chair.

Elise: Nor is it a pipe.

*They laugh awkwardly. He kisses her.*

Stephen: No more talk of disappearing. It scares me.

Elise: Does it?

Stephen: Yes.

Elise: Come with me...up north. We could both use a break.

Stephen: I'll think about it... while I'm asleep.

Elise: Please?

Stephen: Don't stay up too late. Goodnight my love.

Elise: Goodnight. *(Pause)* My love.

*Stephen climbs into the bed. Elise flips through the portfolio.*

*Madeleine steps into the light.*

Madeleine: He is good for you this Stephen. Better fâlfâind  
lucru like you stay with man who is solid.

Elise: Stephen isn't solid.

Madeleine: Next to you, hurricane is solid....

Elise: What about Papa? Was he solid?

Madeleine: No. He moves like river and thinks like ocean.

Elise: Then he just disappeared.

Madeleine: Many people disappear in Romania.

Elise: You were very brave to come here on your own.

Madeleine: I am pregnant, I have to escape, or they kill us  
both.

Elise: Why did they take him?

Madeleine: He is scientist, I tell you this. He doesn't  
Agree with Ceausescu so they make his disappear.

Elise: And then you disappeared too.

Madeleine: No. I go to Germany and my brother he gets me  
ticket on plane to Australia. I never tell them I  
am pregnant or they don't let me go, so I eat and  
eat and eat and they think I am so fat! They get  
big surprise when you are born and they have to  
land plane in Adelaide.

*They burst out laughing. Stephen calls from the bed.*

Stephen: Elise, please!

*Long Pause*

Madeleine: This why I call you my little bird.

Elise: Mama...I feel like...I'm scared I'm going to  
disappear too.

Madeleine: Where you going?

Elise: I don't know. It's my heart. It's fluttering, as  
if it wants to fly out of my body.

Madeleine: Mare Mama.

Elise: I see things differently, like when I was little.

Madeleine: What you see?

Elise: A lizard. She teaches me things.

Madeleine: What things?

Elise: She says I can fly.

Madeleine: Mare Mama. You get sick?

Elise: No. I had an accident. I was driving and a bird  
flew into me.

Madeleine: When? Where this happen to you?

Elise: In the Flinders Ranges.

Madeleine: Why you ever go to this place?

Elise: It's where Horizon sent me... I'm painting a series of landscapes for their new building.

Madeleine: You stay away from this place. You make magnets!

Elise: What do you mean when you say that?

Madeleine: We live there once. We live at Flinders Ranges  
When you are little. I work there for short time.  
But then...you are not like other children, my  
little bird. You see those whispering things in  
the bush and they see you. You make magnets to  
each other. Your grandmother she is also like you.  
But in Romania there is long tradition, we learn  
how to protect ourselves. Here there is no  
protection. They follow you. They come into the  
house one night...

Elise: I remember that. Where..? Where did we live?

Madeleine: Near Hawker. Promise me you don't go back there.

Elise: Near Hawker? *(BEAT)*

Madeleine: Further south of there.

Elise: I thought we lived with Uncle Peter.

Madeleine: Only for a little while, then I get a job in  
Flinders Ranges

*Stephen approaches, dishevelled in his pyjamas.*

Stephen: For crying out loud Elise! If you're not coming to  
bed, can't you at least be quiet?

Elise: Sorry.

Madeleine: Please Elise, you never go back there.

*Madeleine exits.*

Stephen: Who the hell are you talking to?

Elise: Er...My mother.

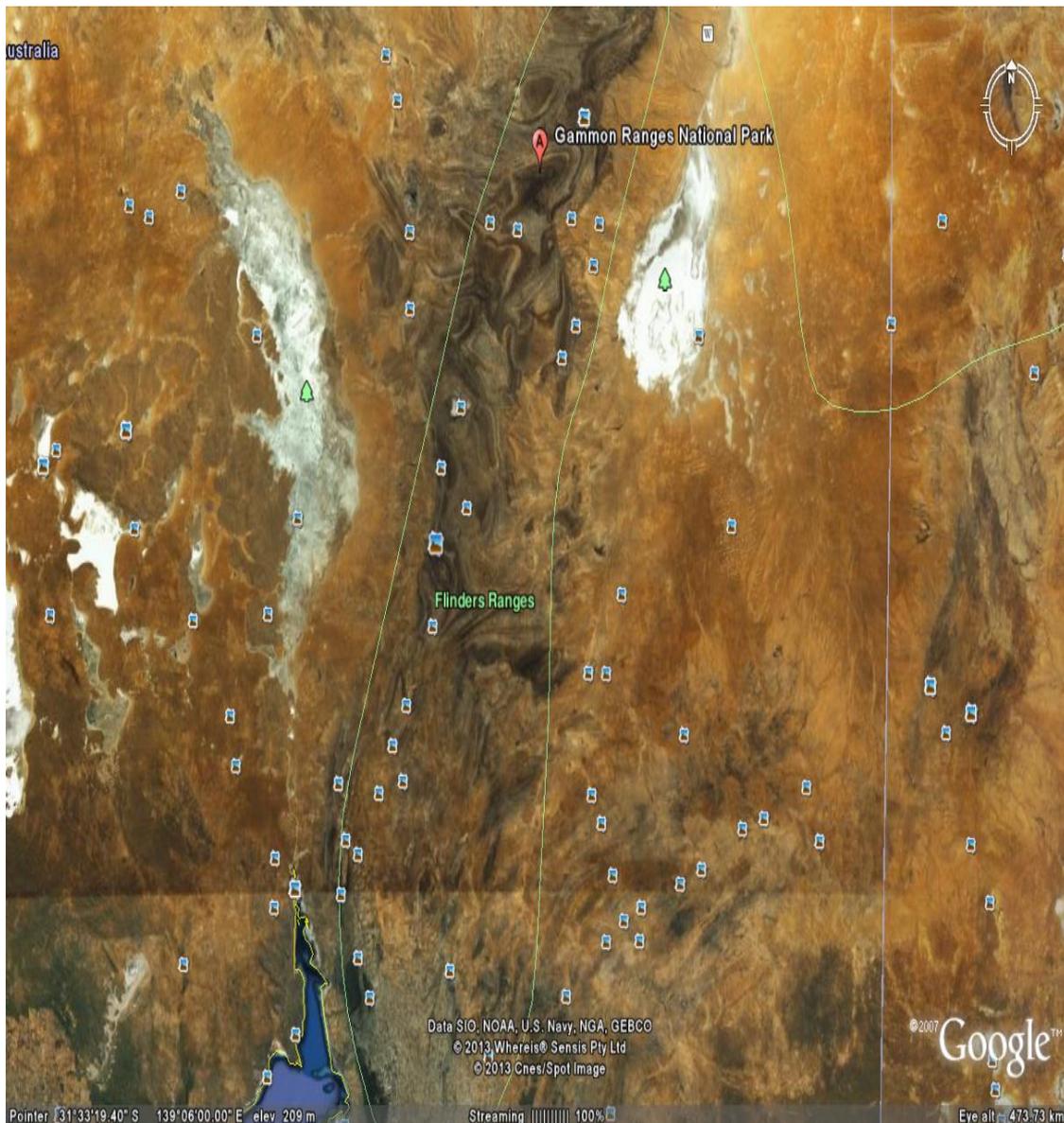
Stephen: Well can you keep it down? It's half past one!

Elise: She has no sense of time.

Stephen: Come to bed!

Elise: No please! I want to show you something.

*She brings up a satellite image (Projection) of Gammon and Flinders ranges.*



Elise: This is the satellite photo they sent me of the Gammon and Flinders Ranges.

*Stephen looks at it reluctantly.*

Stephen: So?

Elise: So, I've been looking at the map Robert gave me, the Rings of Gaia in Australia. And they correspond to the photo, look.

*She places the Rings of Gaia overlay on top of the satellite photo. The latitudinal line runs through, the Arkaroola National Park, Beverly, Wilpena Pound and down to Hawker. The longitudinal line crosses at Wilpena Pound.*

Stephen: So?

Elise: Stephen? Can't you see this line runs through Wilpena Pound and right down south of Hawker. Right through the gorge I'm painting?

Stephen: I see that, yes. Can we go to bed now?

Elise: No. Just one more thing.

Stephen: Couldn't we do this in the morning?

Elise: No, I want to know if I'm imagining it or not.

Stephen: Elise you're imagining all of this. It's a delusion.

Elsie: It's not! It makes sense, please Stephen.

Stephen: OK. What?

*Elise removes the Rings of Gaia overlay, so only the satellite photo remains.*

Elise: What do you see?

Stephen: A lot of red dirt.

Elise: It's a lizard. I need to paint it.

Stephen: What tonight?

Elise: It won't take long.

Stephen: Jesus Elise!

Elise: The shape is all there, I just have to follow it.

Stephen: I'm going back to bed.

*Stephen goes back to bed. He yells to Elise.*

Stephen: Tell your mother to keep the noise down!

*Elise develops the painting from the satellite image into the painting of the lizard she had seen while in flight. (Projected animation approx. three minutes. See Appendix Two: a, Animations, The Lizard 05:57) We hear the sound of the laughter throughout. When it is finished, the painting looks a lot like Atma.*

*Elise stands in front of the painting of the Lizard.*

Elise: Here is your landscape.

*Lights fade. Only the painting of the Lizard woman glows luminous in the dark.*

**13. Studio.** *Morning....The painting of the Lizard dominates. Elise is asleep at her painting table. Stephen comes from the bed area dressed in a suit. He looks at Elise, then the painting. He exits. Elise awakes. Stephen returns with two cups of coffee. He gives one to Elise. They look at the painting.*

Stephen: It's a lizard.

Elise: It's the Gammon and Flinders Ranges.

Stephen: They're not going to like it.

Elise: I know.

Stephen: You'll show them the other one right?

Elise: It's not finished...

Stephen: Don't show them this. They won't understand.

Elise: Why not?

Stephen: They want landscapes.

Elise: That's what it is, from an aerial view.

Stephen: Elise, I bust a gut to get you this commission. They wanted to get some Pro Hart imitation for God's Sake. Don't show them this, please.

Elise: Oh? So I didn't get this job on my own merit is that right? I only got this job because you're my boyfriend.

Stephen: No, that's not what I'm saying. They loved your work, of course they did. But, you know how competitive this was. I had to convince them you wouldn't go too...you know.

Elise: No, I don't.

Stephen: Well... all conceptual and weird. They don't want anything too abstract.

Elise: It's not abstract, it's a fucking landscape.

Stephen: It's a lizard!

Elise: It's the Gammon and Flinders Ranges.

Stephen: Please, Elise. Please don't show Jacinta this. She'll pull the plug on the whole deal.

*Pause.*

Elise: Stupid bitch.

Stephen: Put it in another exhibition, just not this one. Look I have to go. I'll be back at eleven.

*He goes to kiss her.*

Stephen: You will have a shower before they get here?

Elise: What?

Stephen: You're still wearing last night's dress.

Elise: Since when did you become my master?

Stephen: Since you stopped living in reality.

Elise: What reality would that be?

Stephen: The one where we have to pay for this place. The one where we eat, sleep, go out to dinner occasionally, you know...that one.

Elise: Oh, that one.

Stephen: I can't wait till this is all over. Maybe I'll get my girl back.

Elise: Which girl would that be?

Stephen: The girl without a bird in her heart.

Elise: That isn't me anymore.

Stephen: Isn't it?

Elise: No.

Stephen: Pity, I loved that girl.

*A long pause before he kisses her and exits. Elise convulses in pain. She changes the projection from the Lizard Painting to the painting of the Gorge. She paints on her painting table, gasping for breath. (Gorge painting animates and develops so that rocks are fully visible. See Appendix Two:a, Animations, The Gorge 04:58).*

*Madeleine enters and looks at the painting.*

Madeleine: Yes. This is the place.

Elise: The Gorge?

Madeleine: We live in the house at the top of here.

Elise: Kevin Morgan's house?

Madeleine: Yes. That is his name. Kevin Morgan is my  
boss...When you are little girl.

Elise: Is he the one who beat me? The night I stayed out  
so late?

Madeleine: He is worried sick for you, when you don't come  
back this night. He knows something about this  
gorge.

Elise: What?

Madeleine: He hears some stories. But I already know. They  
wait for you.

Elise: Who?

Madeleine: The laughing ones.

*Pause. Elise breathes deeply, with difficulty.*

Elise: Did you see them too?

Madeleine: No. I do not see them. I put garlic, I put  
crosses, I put the mark of the goddess on every  
gate. And I think you are safe...But this night  
you go missing, Kevin Morgan he tells me the gorge  
is very bad place for us...for the womans.

Elise: Why?

Madeleine: This is a man's place.

Elise: A man's place?

Madeleine: This is what he tells me. He inherits this place from his grandfather when he is young man. He is work hard on the land, he is happy. He get a wife and have little baby girl. But when this child only a few weeks old, she is disappear...gone from her crib. A little time later he get home and his wife is gone too. She is pack up everything and left him.

Elise: What happened to her?

Madeleine: She is go to Victoria where she come from.

Elise: Did they ever find the baby?

Madeleine: Never.

Elise: What did he do?

Madeleine: He puts ad in the paper for a housekeeper. I have child and can't speak good English but he doesn't mind. People have tell him this is a bad place for womans, but he doesn't believe them. He think it just a story. But this night you don't come back he is tell me about his daughter...He is tell me what they say. I think I am going to die with fear. Then we find you and he gives you good beating so you never go into that gorge again.

Elise: I didn't go into the gorge, mama. They wouldn't let me.

*Elise clutches her heart in pain.*

Madeleine: I don't care. You tell me the spirits want you to join them. This is too much for me. We leave the next day. We leave Kevin Morgan alone with his man's place.

Elise: You never told me this.

Madeleine: Is nightmare I want to forget. Even worse than Romania.

Elise: It wasn't for me. I loved that place.

Madeleine: You don't go back there, they want you for themselves.

Elise: How can you be afraid of spirits, mama? You're dead!

Madeleine: I not afraid of spirits, my little bird. I worry I never see you again. This bush, it wants you to give up everything you are, everything you know, to be part of it. You disappear. You become it. Promise me you don't ever go back there.

Elise: It's too late, mama. It's too late.

*Elise sinks to the floor and crawls into the bed.*

Madeleine: *(Sings)* Strange child, child of no land

Child without a home

Born in the sky, destined to fly

Beyond the edge of things seen.

Fly little bird, strange child.

Strange child, child of no land.

*Madeleine exits.*

**Scene 14. Studio. (Still projection of Gorge)**

*Stephen brings Jacinta and Cale into the studio.*

Stephen: Elise! This way, mind your step. She gets a bit messy. Elise! She might be asleep, I'll just go and er...This is the first painting she did. Er...it's not finished.

*Jacinta and Cale stand before the Gorge painting. Stephen goes to find Elise.*

Jacinta: Oh my God! She found Morgan Gorge!

Cale: How did she get in there?

Jacinta: Who cares? It's perfect.

Cale: She shouldn't have painted that.

Jacinta: What are you talking about, she's nailed it.

Cale: Morgan Gorge is a sacred site.

Jacinta: It's private property Cale, there's nothing sacred about it. *(She inspects the painting)* Almost exactly to our specifications... The glow on the rocks...feels like you can walk right into it. Oh they're going to love this. They can tell a great deal about the land from a painting like this.

*During her speech Elise enters from the bed area, followed by Stephen.*

Elise: It's not finished.

Jacinta: Oh Elise, well done. It's wonderful.

Elise: It keeps changing all the time. That's why it's taken so long.

Jacinta: Well, genius takes time they say, don't they Stephen?

Elise: I haven't painted the trees yet.

Jacinta: It doesn't need trees. Don't change a thing.

Cale: What trees?

Elise: There should be trees. But...

*Elise clutches her chest.*

Stephen: Are you alright?

Elise: I couldn't paint them.

Cale: The trees were cut down a hundred years ago.

Elise: What?

Cale: The railway people cut down the trees for sleepers.

Jacinta: Oh rubbish, this looks just like the photographs.

Don't distract her Cale, the painting is just fine.

Elise: No it isn't. Not yet.

Cale: They broke Nukunu law.

Elise: How?

Cale: The Gorge used to be a boy's initiation site.

Jacint: Personally, I like the rocks. The painting's perfect, Elise. It doesn't need trees. Consider it finished. So, where are the others?

Stephen: I think that's all isn't it, Elise?

Elise: Apart from sketches, yes.

Stephen: It's still early days.

Jacinta: Oh, yes, yes I fully understand that, but it's been two weeks. Goodness, if I only got through that much work in two weeks I'd be on the street.

*(Laughs)*

*Elise reluctantly hands Jacinta her book of sketches.*

Stephen: Elise are you OK?

Elise: Er...They're only sketches at this stage, but I'll develop them.

*Jacinta flips through the sketches.*

Jacinta: Don't you have any more paintings? I mean you don't really get the full impact unless...

Stephen: The work's still in development, can't you see she's not well?

Jacinta: Yes Stephen, I fully comprehend the caveats of production but we are paying the girl a hundred thousand dollars. Surely there's more than one painting?

Elise: Er...I have this..

*Elise brings up the projection of the Lizard painting.*

*Jacinta stands in shock.*

Elise: It's...an aerial view...of the Gammon and...

Jacinta: It's a lizard.

Cale: It's Akurra.

Jacinta: Where is the landscape?

Elise: It is a landscape. It's the ... the Flinders and the Gammon Ranges-

Cale: How did you see this?

Elise: From the sky...the satellite photos you gave me,  
combined with....

Jacinta: It's a joke, right?

Elise: No.

Jacinta: You're playing a little joke.

Elise: No. It's the way I saw the land.

Jacinta: We sent you on a road trip...We've  
invested...quite a lot of time and money and you  
paint a lizard?

Elise: It will be the central piece... that connects all  
the other landscapes.

Jacinta: It's a lizard! Don't get me wrong Elise, I think  
the other one's great, but you've got to stay  
focused. We asked for landscapes, with  
features...glowing rocks. Not Lizards.

Cale: Glowing rocks?

Stephen: Jacinta, I told you there was nothing finished.

Jacinta: "Nothing too conceptual", remember Stephen. It's  
written in the agreement.

Stephen: Yes, I understand but...

Jacinta: You assured us she could do this.

Stephen: She can. Of course she can.

Jacinta: Well all I can say is, thank God I came to check  
on things otherwise we'd end up with the whole  
Australian zoo. Cale, you take her to the

designated sites. Make sure they're not heritage listed and make sure she paints landscapes...Landscapes.

*Beat*

Elise: I'm sorry.

Jacinta: (*To Elise*) You have one month, one month to paint the yellow.

Cale: The what?

Jacinta: The luminescence.

Cale: Is that what this is about?

Jacinta: It's the brief Cale. It was always the brief. Ten paintings showing us the yellow. Make sure she follows it.

Stephen: Look, its early days, why don't we have a coffee and...

Jacinta: Early days? I have the media launch next month and what am I going to show them? A lizard?

Stephen: I think you're over reacting.

Jacinta: My job's on the line here Stephen. You promised me.

Elise: Promised what?

Jacinta: Landscapes. It's very simple.

Elise: OK. OK. I'll paint landscapes.

Jacinta: Thank you. That's all we ask. I have to go. Cale will organize the trip with you. Are you up for it?

Elise: Yes.

Jacinta: You don't look like it.

Elise: I just need to sleep.

Jacinta: You do understand the brief now?

Elise: Yes.

Jacinta: Good. I'll see you in a couple of weeks. Stephen,  
we need to talk.

Stephen: Yes. I'll see you out. (To Elise) Are you OK?

Elise: Yes. I'm fine it's just...

Stephen: I'll see you tonight. Get some sleep.

*Jacinta and Stephen exit. Elise and Cale stand in shock for  
a few moments.*

Elise: How can you stand to work with that woman?

Cale: I can't.

Elise: She doesn't get it.

Cale: No.

*Cale looks at the painting.*

Cale: You painted Akurra.

Elise: I painted what I saw.

Cale: You shouldn't have done that.

Elise: Why not?

Cale: You need to be initiated to see Akurra...you need  
to train for it, otherwise...

Elise: What?

Cale: I don't know. But I heard stories. Your body won't  
handle it... He'll eat you up.

Elise: She...the lizard's a she. I saw her.

Cale: No-one sees Akurra unless they've been trained.

Elise: It's right there on the satellite photo.

Cale: People have been looking at that map for years.  
No-one's can see Akurra.

Elise: I didn't see Akurra, I saw that!

*She indicates the lizard painting.*

Cale: Something must have happened to you out there.  
Something big.

Elise: I told you, I had an accident...

Cale: What kind of accident?

Elise: A bird flew into me.

Cale: Into you?

Elise: Yes. In here. *(She touches her heart, she coughs and falters)*

Cale: You need to talk to Aunty Rube.

Elise: What do mean?

Cale: You ever had an electric shock?

Elise: Yes.

Cale: Little ones, like from a battery or an electric fence? Just enough to scare you off?

Elise: Yes.

Cale: You ever plugged yourself into 240 volts straight down the wire for five minutes?

Elise: Of course not, Cale, what are you talking about?

Cale: You look at Akurra for more than two seconds, it's like plugging yourself into the grid. You're toast. To paint this painting must have taken you, how long?

Elise: All night.

Cale: People have to train for years to hold that much charge. You gotta be able to hold that charge long enough to see, otherwise...

*He looks at Elise for a long time.*

Cale: I don't think we should wait till next week. What are you doing tomorrow?

Elise: Painting. Sleeping. I don't know anymore.

Cale: Can you come tomorrow? Up to Port Augusta? I'll pick you up in the morning.

Elise: Otherwise what?

Cale: You need to talk to Aunty Rube. She'll know what to do.

Elise: Otherwise what?

Cale: I don't know. I don't know how this happened.

*They look at the painting.*

Elise: Alright. I'll come tomorrow.

Cale: Good. I'll pick you up around ten OK?

Elise: OK.

Cale: OK. Pack something warm for the nights. It gets cold up there.

Elise: Where are we going?

Cale: We'll spend the night in Port Augusta. After that,  
Arkaroola. You'll feel better after that. It's  
Arkurra's eye. My place.

*He exits. Elise looks at the Lizard painting.*

Elise: Your place. Where is my place?

*She flicks back to the Gorge Painting. She collapses.*

*Light's fade.*

*The Gorge painting animates to become a glow of orange,  
yellow and flickering green light. The lights burst from the  
painting and swarm around the stage. Atma emerges from the  
glow then scuttles off. She returns with a bunch of celery  
and sits munching as the light twirls around her. We hear  
laughter. Elise wakes up and sits in awe.*

Elise: It's beautiful.

Atma: It's life. Come with us.

Elise: I'm afraid.

Atma: If you fear life, it will harm you. If you love  
it, it will never harm you. Come with us.

*Elise takes Atma's outstretched hand and they both step  
into...*

### **16. The Gorge (Projection of painting)**

*Elise clutches at her chest and gasps for breath. She  
writhes and twists in pain. Atma watches Elise struggle.*

Elise: My arms hurt.

Atma: Growing pains.

Elise: When will it stop?

Atma: When you stop growing.

Elise: When will that be?

*Atma bursts out laughing.*

Atma: Never! You are suffering over your own suffering.

Stop it!

Elise: I'm scared!

Atma: Of what?

Elise: Death.

Atma: Don't be ridiculous, death is an illusion.

*Elise convulses in pain. Atma watches, munching on celery.*

*Kevin enters, running.*

Kevin: Hey you! I see you! You hit my fucking tree!

Drove straight into it.

Elise: It's the bird. It flew into me.

Kevin: What?

Elise: It flew into my heart.

*Elise writhes and spins.*

Kevin: You broke my fucking tree!

*Elise begins to laugh. Atma laughs with her.*

Kevin: What's so funny?

Elise: It's not your tree! You can't own a tree. You  
can't own any of this.

*As she laughs, Elise transforms into a bird...a beautiful  
red wattle bird that raises up into the sky. (Aerial  
choreography required here)*

Elise:     Funny to be back with the laughing ones.  
          Reaching...becoming...another...becoming part of  
          everything. Remembering how beautiful it is....to  
          stretch, to touch, to fly.

*Atma fills her lungs with air and blows onto Elise.*

*Elise flies higher into the air; dipping, turning,  
celebrating (Aerial choreography required here).*

*Atma munches on celery while Kevin watches from below. The  
red bird flies high in the sky...laughing...*

Kevin:     Jesus!

*With another burst of laughter Atma disappears. Laughter  
reverberates.*

*The Gorge painting gradually becomes populated by gigantic  
gum trees and Kevin is surrounded by a landscape of a rich,  
dense forest. He looks up at the bird in wonder.*

### **19. Vast open sky.**

*Elise is the red bird. She flies against the blue, twirling  
and laughing. Celebrating freedom*

Elise:     I, trust the eddy current.  
          Thrust into the seductive wind.  
          Spiral up and soar,  
          Twist free of earth's force.  
          Dart, float, bounce on the air,  
          twirling, fluttering, feather tail steering,  
          I surf the edge of fear.

Further, faster, scooping lower,  
laughing louder, wings burning,  
I fly free.

Whirling and flipping,  
down, down to the steady ground  
to hunt, to feed, to fuck, to breed,  
to see...you.

Longing to see...you.

to know you.

To see you, to know you.

*Elise hovers.*

*Atma enters.*

*Atma raises her head, puckers her lips and blows a hot north  
wind over the audience. Laughter reverberates.*

**The End.**

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CREATIVE PRACTICE AND PROCESS

### *WYRD SONG*

In this Chapter I discuss and analyze the creative process involved in the writing of my second play *Wyrđ Song*. This was quite a different journey from the writing of *Bird*, although interestingly, I think the plays are quite similar in several ways. The process involved in the writing of *Bird* was characterized by experimentation with new techniques and a suspension of critical evaluation until the workshop drafts. In contrast, the writing of *Wyrđ Song* was ultimately a study in *via negativa*. Writing this play involved building up every possibility through research, language and worlds and then paring them all back to the essential point and story. Once again, the confusion around research-led-practice and practice-led-research dominated the process until I could find a methodology that resounded with me as a creative practitioner. The first draft of the resulting script *Wyrđ Song* is included at the end of this chapter.

#### 7.1 THE BEGINNING

*Wyrđ Song* started out as a simple scene outline for a film script written in 2001 called *Dreamhouse*. The story premise of this outline did not really change in over fifteen years: A woman moves to a house and is drawn into the past. She eventually realizes that she has lived in this house before and that past events are influencing her present life. I have attempted to write this story in various forms, over the course of several years: as a screenplay, as a play and as a novel. It has been set in France, Scotland and the Flinders Ranges. The research for this work covers subjects such as reincarnation, Scottish history, Pict history, the history of the Flinders Ranges and the Nukunu peoples, the mythology of Norse Goddesses called Norns, witch circles, stone circles and bushfire trauma.

Before I begin to explore the creative processes involved in the writing of the current draft, I would like to explain my impulse to write this story in all its disguises. I was born in Fife, Scotland, and my cultural heritage is not only Scottish, but Pictish. Fife is considered by some, to be the last cultural bastion of the ancient Picts (McHardy, 2010). This was a matter of great pride for my own family. Another important aspect of my upbringing was the unquestioned belief that certain people had been here before and that they brought knowledge from other lifetimes to their current lives. My parents and wider family reinforced this belief in reincarnation. It was never a disputed concept, although as I have explained in the Introduction, ours was not a Hindu or Buddhist interpretation of reincarnation.

It was not until we migrated to Australia as a family, that this notion of reincarnation stood out as markedly different to the world view of those around us. In this new environment, such a view was not socially or culturally reinforced. Nonetheless, I have had many experiences in my life which reiterate the idea that ‘I have been here before’, including some that have been the impetus for the play *Dreamhouse/Wyrd* and *Wyrd Song*.

I had written a few scenes of the play *Dreamhouse* as part of a Master’s Degree in Playwriting at Edinburgh University, but could not complete the play. When I proposed the idea as part of my PhD creative portfolio at Flinders University, the play was to be set in the Flinders Ranges, based around the Scottish migrant town of Melrose, South Australia. However, the colonial history of this town including the removal and deliberate genocide of the Nukunu peoples, threatened to take the emphasis away from the experience of reincarnation towards a political statement about the treatment of Indigenous people in the region. After a year of research and reflection in 2012, I recognized that this was not the story I wanted to tell, although there were parallels. The colonization and

Christian conversion of Indigenous Australians seemed to be a repeat of the way the Picts had been overwhelmed and ultimately defeated in Scotland. The difference was the Scottish story was part of my own heritage, *my own* story. *Wyrđ Song* is a deeply personal story for me, which is probably why I was so assiduous in wanting to write it over many years. Although I have not explored the migrant experience in my exegetical research, I must acknowledge that the experience of displacement and the dislodgement of a spiritual world view that is ultimately non-Christian, has been influential in my life, and in both of the plays I have written.

I returned to my original idea to set *Dreamhouse* in an old house in Scotland. In this story, the new Australian owners Judith and Robert MacMillan, buy the house over the internet after their own property had been destroyed in a bushfire. I wrote a further act towards the script I had written in Edinburgh which included a young girl Nellie, who comes to the Scottish house to light the fires. She recognizes Judith as her sister and finds it strange that Judith now speaks in a funny accent (Australian.) Through Nellie, Judith slowly begins to remember previous incidents in the house and slowly realizes that she had lived there before in a previous life.

The feedback from my supervisors was that *Dreamhouse* was well written but needed conceptual re-thinking. It was too narrative driven and presented like a historical romance. Suggestions were made that I concentrate on the concept of place and possibly write the story from the house's perspective, or to turn the house into a character. I was also encouraged to think about the relationship between place and *time* and how this could influence an experience of the sacred. I decided to pursue the idea that the house itself (built around an ancient Pict circle of stones) would be instrumental in triggering the memories of the main character Judith; that the house itself could somehow become alive. One further question that preoccupied me at this time, was whether the past was to be a

static singular event, or if it would be continuous? If it were to be continuous, then there would need to be a series of events which changed over time. If the concept of reincarnation was not to be a static, singular realization for the main character Judith, my challenge included finding a way in which ‘place’ in the present tense became a portal or trigger to a continuous and co-existent past.

By August 2013, I decided to rename the play *Wyrd*. The first decision I made in approaching this draft was that there would be a continuous past incorporating the history of the Picts in Scotland and the demise of their pagan belief systems through the introduction of Christianity from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD. This history would include their eventual disappearance as an ethnic minority after the invasion of Caledonia by the Danes, the Norsemen and eventually the Scots (McHardy, 2010, Driscoll, 2002, Frazer, 2009). I decided that a select family of Picts had tried to maintain their culture in secret for several centuries, disguising one of their stone circles as a house in order to protect it from colonization by the Church. I envisioned that the main characters from the past would inhabit each of the stones and play out the key incidents of their history, by stepping from the stones and into the performance space.

As Robert renovates the house in the present, he uncovers the engravings on the ancient stones. Each time he does this, he provides a catalyst for an episode from the past to unfold. As Judith witnesses and begins to participate in this unfolding history, she slowly realizes that she has been reincarnated many times in this same house. The stones would become active characters, revealing the history of the house until the last three of the ancient Picts (one of whom is Skuld, Judith in a previous life) are burned as witches by King James VI of Scotland (Maxwell, 2007). I was deeply fascinated by the ancient belief system of the Picts, who practiced a matriarchal lineage of succession and worshipped the Goddess Beira, Queen of winter. Beira, or *Cailleach Bhéarach* is said to have shaped the

mountains of Scotland with her hammer. There was a strong fatalism in this system of belief, harking to the Greek *Moirai* (collective goddesses who weave destiny), strongly associated with the Norns and the concept of *Wyrd*.

The word ‘wyrd’ derives from a combination of old Germanic, Norse and Saxon terms for fate or destiny and in Old English means ‘to come to pass’ or ‘that which happens’ (Clark Hall, 1996). In Scottish, *wyrd* is a verb meaning ‘to divine’ or to ‘preordain’. Its modern day equivalent is *weird*, which denotes odd or strange. More precisely it means ‘uncanny’, in other words something that cannot be rationally known. The term *weird* is most famously associated with Shakespeare’s *Weird Sisters*, the three witches in *Macbeth* and this usage is not accidental. In the old Norse mythology, *wyrd*, or *Urd* is the name of one of three Norns; Goddesses who weave fate outside of the law of logic.

In Norn mythology, the three goddesses are *Urd*, who oversees that which is done (past), *Verdandi*, who oversees that which is becoming (present), and *Skuld* who oversees that which will be done (future). *Skuld* makes sure the present fulfils its obligations (debt) to the past in order to prevent retribution in the future (Frakes, 1984 and Cambria, 2015). In Greek mythology these three goddesses are also known collectively as *The Moirai*. Another important aspect of this ancient myth is that in the *weaving* of fate, time is not considered to be linear but that past, present and future are interconnected and may influence each other. A good deed in the present may pay off the debt (or curse) of the past and therefore change a person’s *wyrd* or fate. Or, a person may unwittingly be fulfilling an obligation made in the past, even from other lifetimes (Pollington, 1996). It was my desire to include some of this mythology into the story.

I decided that I would incorporate the Norns as characters in the play. These Norns would create the circle of stones in the first scene and also set up the matrilineal obligation

of the Picts to safeguard them. They would elect seven Pict families to honor and protect Beira over lifetimes. This echoes Irigaray's (1993) thinking around the reintroduction of Goddess worship and matriarchal lineages of knowledge. I chose the Picts as a cultural heritage, not only because it is my own heritage, but also because the Picts adhered to and fought for a matrilineal genealogy. They did so in the face of enormous patriarchal pressures including the introduction of Christianity. I perceived their worship of the Goddess Beira, in an increasingly male dominated world view to be a reassertion of a feminine sacred. As I acknowledge in Chapter Two, the feminist scholarship I engage with in the writing of this play is largely reflective of writers in the nineteen eighties and not commensurate with current feminist theory. However, I was strongly attracted by Irigaray's call to re-introduce the honouring of Goddesses into a feminine sacred. I was influenced by writings around the Crone/ Mother/Maiden triumvirate, based predominantly on the work of Jane Ellen Harrison (1903) and poet Robert Graves (1948). I was also interested in D. J. Conway's (1994) neo-pagan argument, that reconnection with the triple faceted Goddess (Maiden, Mother Crone), could contribute to the reclamation of suppressed matriarchal histories. This echoes Mary Daly's (1978) assertion that the Hag or Crone must make an effort to remember the past, or failing that, invent the truth about the past.

The key to dispossession of the fabricated "past" projected by the fathers, sons, and holy ghosts, then, is female-identified creativity, through which we repossess our energy. On a practical level this involves a constant struggle to reaffirm Hags' own priorities, since the past possessors/fabricators, the unrightful owners of our history/memory, use this stolen and damaged property as a weapon to confuse us about our priorities, to disorient our perceptions, and to thwart female process. (Daly, 1978:220)

Although subsequent feminist writers such as Margaret Atwood (2002) suggest that the triple Goddess model denies female creativity outside of her reproductive role, I am more interested in role of the Hag or Crone in reinventing or rewriting male dominated histories.

Thus, Judith's entry into the past where she encounters her crone mother *Urd*, is a way for her to reclaim the power she once possessed as a matriarchal Pict/Goddess.

Perhaps it is already evident that the main problem with my approach was that I had become completely seduced by the research to the detriment of creative practice. Worse, I incorporated all of this research into an already complicated story. The new draft, written in August 2013, included the Norns, the Pict history, the revelation of the house as a circle of stones, as well as the contemporary, relationship tensions between Judith and Robert. Consequently, the play had become both epic and vastly overwritten. Furthermore, in each of these time frames I had used a completely different language; the Norns spoke in verse that was to be sung, the ancient Picts spoke old Scots and Gaelic, while the contemporary characters Robert and Judith spoke in vernacular Australian. For example,

*Scene One: Three ephemeral beings emerge from the wind. They are Urd: Norn of the crone/past; Skuld: Norn of the mother/future. And Verdanki: Norn of the maiden/present. These words are to be sung.*

Urd: An age old place of crossing paths, I feel here...A vortex.

Earth song, wind song, water song, fire song,  
Singing here. The vortex.

Old, old place like me, with ancient stirrings silenced by the wind.  
Powerful forces near forgotten, but not yet.

Not quite the magic gone, yet.

There is still some calling here, from long ago.

It is she, Moira...Yes, daughter, here is the place.

Skuld: From each cardinal corner I see

A place of meeting; the place where we  
Will weave the cloth of destiny.

Four stones shall stand upon this earth  
To East and West and South and North.

In between, we three and place of fire;  
a sacred shrine to hold our power.

Verdanki: With all our magic manifest

We call to present, here today

our future's sight, our ancient ken

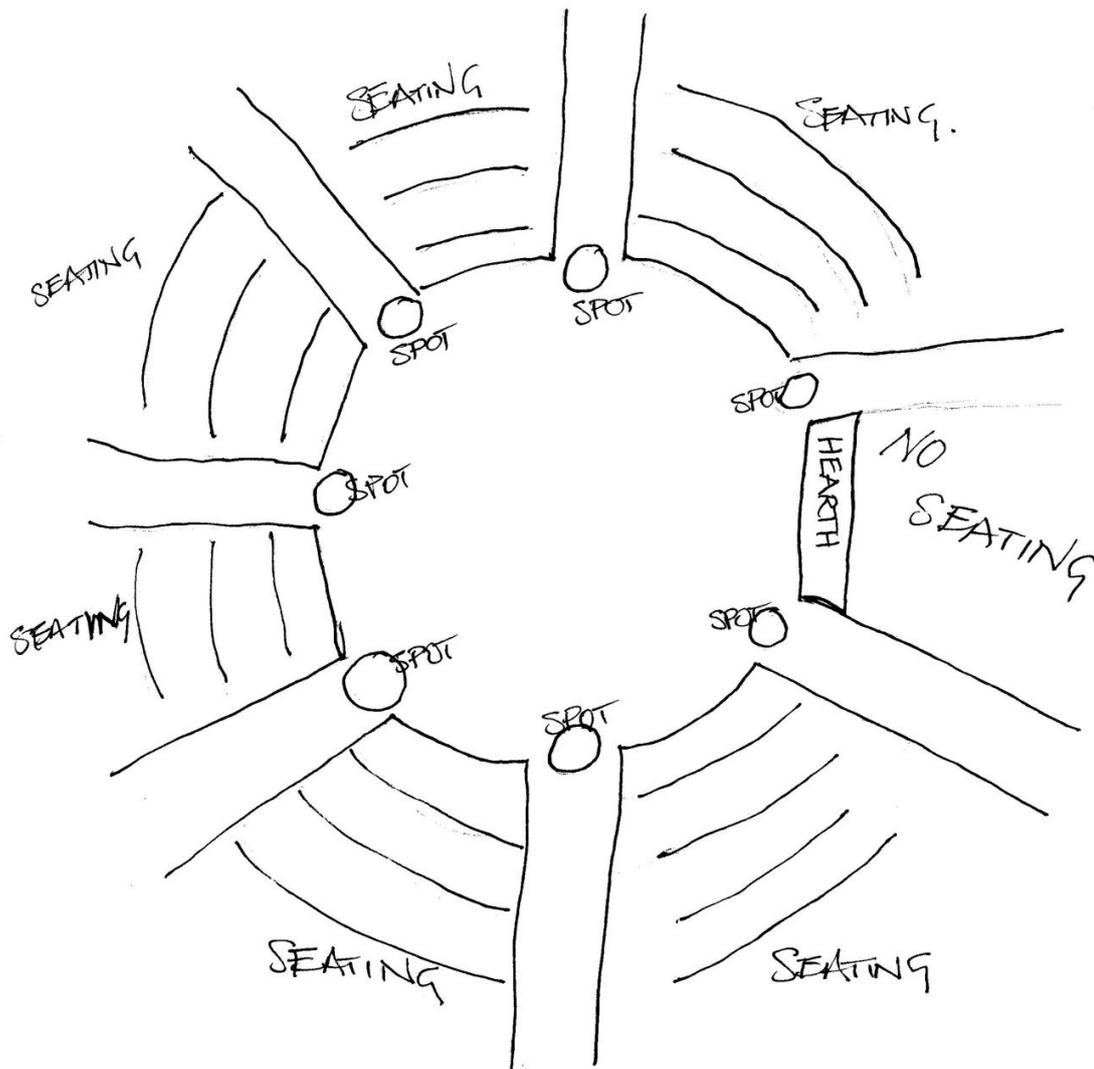
to build the home of Ceridwen.  
 (Duncan, Journal, 2013: Early Draft *Wyrđ*)

I had hoped to give signature to each time frame via language, but in reality the complexity of poetic form and ancient dialects, simply made the narrative impenetrable. In combination with all the historical information, it was clear that my audience would need to work very hard indeed. I let this stand however, because at this stage, I anticipated that there would be a workshop with actors. I felt confident that working with actors would reveal the overwriting and I was prepared to make drastic cuts.

## **7.2 VICTORIA LAMB'S SET DESIGN.**

Rather than immediately take this draft into workshop, it was recommended that I consult with a designer to assist me in conceptualizing the piece three dimensionally. Dr. Anne Thompson arranged that I should meet with designer Victoria Lamb on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2013. Victoria quickly came up with the brilliant idea that the set would be a circle of seven pillars of light, not solid stone, and that characters from the past could enter into the main stage area via these pillars. The audience would be seated in the round, leaving a central performance area that could be accessed by seven aisles. **Image 8** on the following page, is a copy of the drawing Victoria made on the day (Duncan, Journal, 2013). It clearly shows a round stage, surrounded by seating and seven aisles. The seven pillars are indicated on this diagram as spotlights or SPOT. On one solid wall there is a large Hearth or Fireplace

IMAGE 8: THE SET DESIGN FOR WYRD BY VICTORIA LAMB



SET FOR WYRD.

BY

VICTORIA LAMB.

AUGUST 2013.

Victoria Lamb's design immediately transformed the stage into a flexible but intimate performance space. The use of lights to delineate the stones would have the two-fold effect of bringing the house to life, while giving actors the chance to enter and exit via the aisles. The idea was that each of these stones would begin to glow blue as the stories unfolded, culminating in a circle of blue light at the end of the play. One further element that I wanted to incorporate into the design was that the ceiling of the house should look like the interwoven branches of oak trees. I wasn't sure how this could be made visible to an audience without a clunky structure being flown in for the final scene. By placing the audience in the round, this structure could exist all the way through the play, and then in the final scene become visible through the use of dappled green lights. I thought the combination of blue stones and a glowing green canopy in the final scene would create a magical image.

### **7.3 THE NEXT PHASE**

In lieu of a workshop, I asked some friends, all professional actors, to donate their time to do a reading of the play at my house on 18 October 2013. These actors were, Cathy Adamek (Skuld, Judith, Elspeth), Nic Martin (Robert McMillan and Robert Moncrieff), Kerry Reid (Urd, Shona Whitelaw), Patrick Frost (Domangart, Patrick Craven, The Provost of Dunfermline), Tamara Lee (Verdanki), Rob MacPherson (Stiubhard, King James, Glen – Stage Directions). Also present as supervisor was Dr. Anne Thompson. By this stage the play was 18,905 words long. It spanned eight time frames and the writing style traversed naturalism, high verse and ancient Scots. I had incorporated historical facts and characters around Mellitus, Pope Gregory's first Bishop in England (601CE), the Danish invasion of Scotland (937CE), the victory of the Church over pagan rituals such as Beltane, and the reign of James XI of Scotland (1583). All of these incidents occurred

while Australians, Robert and Judith were renovating the house! I had subtitled the play “Macbeth meets the Block”.

The reading went for over three hours and actors were not paid. By the end of the reading the actors were exhausted, but their comments were invaluable. As I recorded in my Creative Journal some actors “loved it” as a play. Others were more cautiously astute. The overall consensus was that the play was more like a thirteen-part mini-series in the vein of *Game of Thrones* or *Lord of the Rings*. It was recommended that I should reconcile the differences in language between time frames to make the transition easier for an audience. The play also had far too much exposition, particularly around the Pict history and the Norns, which took the focus away from the Judith /Robert story in the present. There were recommendations that I should focus on the potential for ritual in the piece, with harmonics of voices and stylized movement. The main issue however, was that there was simply too much information, too much Scottish history and not enough space or atmosphere to affect a ‘sacred experience’ for an audience (Duncan, Journal 2013).

By October 2013, I had already analyzed these same issues in Margaret Davis’ play *Isis Dreaming*, which in many ways is similar to *Wyrd* in that it attempts to introduce an ancient mythology and world view to contemporary Australian audiences (Chapter Four). When this mythology is too socially or culturally exotic, it becomes what Schechner calls “the cultural zoo approach” (1976:214). Rather than bringing the audience into the ritual or myth, the strangeness sets up a sort of ‘tourism’ that is ultimately alienating. Although this had not been my intention, the time and effort spent on the ancient Picts and their foreign world view had alienated my Australian (and probably even Scottish) audiences.

The disjunction between language styles in each of the time frames, contributed to this alienation, because audiences would be constantly switching not only between time frames, but between modes of listening. The disjunction itself pulls the audience outside of

the experience and into analysis. It re-establishes, rather than dissolves the “I- you” or “Ich–du” dichotomy. (Buber, 1923) Too much story telling also alienates an audience as evident in the early drafts of *Bird*, but also in those narrated segments in *Isis Dreaming*. I tried to avoid narration in *Wyrd*, choosing instead to enact each historic episode as a present event, unfolding in the narrative, but there was simply too much plot.

In early 2014, during the re-writing and massive editing of *Wyrd*, I was privileged to attend Professor Julian Meyrick’s course in Dramaturgy at Flinders University. I hungrily absorbed the material in this course and wrote as much my journal at the time. “All of Julian Meyrick’s classes seem to speak directly to my own work...He calls the point of epiphany *convergence*.” Several important questions emerged such as “What experience is my audience having, right now?” and “What experience does my audience need next in order to reach an experience of epiphany?” (Duncan, Journal, 2014). This was a reiteration of Brook’s (1993) contention that the weaving of a net towards a Sacred Theatre is comprised of moments. One of the class exercises required us to write a synopsis and analysis of a play and then provide comments. I chose to analyze *Wyrd* as if it were someone else’s play. My conclusions were:

This play needs to go back to basics. What is this writer trying to say? Once this is clarified, it could probably lose all the fancy “dress ups” and historical fact. This central question resides with Judith, the protagonist, what does this character want? At the moment she’s a passive observer in a historical drama...then she just disappears from the play completely. It is only as the character Skuld does she show any muscle, but then she speaks in archaic riddles. The author needs to answer several questions. What is this play about? Who is this play about? Why speak now? Why write this play? Cut the play right back to the impulse and start again. (Duncan, Journal ,2014)

Almost exactly the same conclusions were reached by writer, director and actor, Rosalba Clemente when she read the latest draft in June 2014. Rosalba Clemente is a former Artistic Director of the State Theatre Company of South Australia and currently Head of Acting at the Flinders Drama Centre. She is also a well-respected playwright and dramaturge. Rosalba was invited to direct and dramaturge a proposed workshop of the next

draft of *Wyrđ*. However, she concluded that there were too many problems with the script and that it was not ready for workshopping. My supervisors asked me to consider whether submitting two plays as part of my PhD was possibly too ambitious; perhaps I could let *Wyrđ* go and concentrate on *Bird?* The options were that I write *Wyrđ* as a screenplay for television or write it as a novel outside of the PhD. Alternatively, if I wanted to pursue this project a part of the PhD, then I should rewrite it altogether. This was quite shocking news.

I met with Rosalba Clemente on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014. In this generous three-hour meeting, Rosalba did not dismiss the play out of hand, but deconstructed it scene by scene highlighting every flaw. The transcription of this meeting is part of my Creative Research Journal. Rosalba's most important point was that the protagonist's journey began too late. By the time Judith arrives in Scotland she had already battled her biggest demons. Rosalba asked me why Judith had given up her life in Australia to move to Scotland. She also pointed out that in transposing the character of Judith into her previous incarnation Skuld, I had taken Judith's character journey out of the play. I completely agreed with this assessment. She also suggested that the Nellie character was problematic in that Judith and Robert too easily accepted her living in their house. Furthermore, Nellie's presence in the play confused the issue about the dead daughter. There were simply too many children in the play and Nellie's symbolism as the goddess Brigit (who keeps the fires burning) was too heavy handed.

Rosalba's advice was that I bring the story back to Judith's journey. Why had she felt compelled to leave Australia in the first place? She also advised that rather than situate the play in Scotland, I bring Scotland to Australia. In this way, the haunting memories of Scotland would occur in Australia and that is what draws Judith to search for answers away from her marriage and country of birth (Duncan, Journal 2014). At the time, I thought this was a good idea and started writing a simple page outline of Judith's journey.

It read like this: Judith loses everything in a bushfire including her nine-year-old daughter. She feels increasingly unsafe in Australia and disturbed by memories of a previous life in Scotland, searches the internet to find a house there. During this time her relationship with her husband Robert becomes strained and she must choose between her desire to live in Scotland or her marriage. She eventually buys the house in Scotland, leaving Robert.

Clearly, the entire premise and story of *Wyrd* was different. This was no longer a play about place, or even reincarnation, it was now a psychological story with a rational trajectory justified by post-traumatic stress. Despite all assistance available from Flinders University, I simply could not see for myself how this new approach to *Wyrd* could achieve the goal of evoking a sacred experience in an audience. I have to admit, that by this stage, I had lost faith in my ability to write plays at all. By the end of 2014, I gave up on *Wyrd* as a play. Instead, I returned to writing the story as a novel. This exercise was helpful because it made me realize that the main problem with all of my attempts to write *Dreamhouse* and *Wyrd* was that there was simply *too much* of it; too much story, symbolism and language; too many time frames, signs and far too many children.

I was prepared to relinquish *Wyrd* as a PhD project, but something that Grotowski had written in 1968 stuck in my mind.

In terms of formal technique, we do not work by proliferation of signs, or by accumulation of signs (as in the formal repetitions of oriental theatre). Rather, we subtract, seeking **distillation** of signs by eliminating those elements of “natural” behaviour which obscure pure impulse. Another technique which illuminates the hidden structure of signs is **contradiction** (between gesture and voice, voice and word, word and thought, will and action, etc), here too, we take the **via negative**. (Grotowski, 1968: 18)

Grotowski’s aim for *Poor Theatre* was to pare back all dressing until all that remained was the communion between actor and spectator. This is precisely what I needed to do with *Wyrd*. This strategy was reinforced in Barba’s (1988) essay; “The Deep Order Called Turbulence” in which he outlines three dramaturgies: 1) an organic or dynamic dramaturgy where the composition of rhythms and dynamisms affect the spectators on a sensual level;

2) a narrative dramaturgy that interweaves characters and events to inform the spectators of meaning; 3) a dramaturgy of changing states which captures or *distils* hidden significances to evoke something totally different (60). Barba describes the dramaturgy of changing states as a leap from one state of consciousness to another, made possible through turbulence and confusion; “The profusion and confusion of material and trends is the only way to arrive at the bare and essential action” (Barba, 1988:62).

In other words, there must be disorder, a storm, a mess and a great deal of wasted material in order for the work *to begin*. The work is not creating or generating material; that is simply the preparation. The real work begins when the artist discards everything that is not *the essence* of the piece; when they “extract the difficult from the difficult” (64). Barba describes two kinds of errors; there are errors that block progress like walls, and there are errors which create portals the artist didn’t even know existed, like doors. True craftsmanship lies in knowing which errors are walls and which are doors; in knowing *what* to discard.

When I looked at *Wyrđ* from this perspective I did not see a play, nor a novel or a television mini-series. I saw all three, layered on top of each other and actually fighting with each other. I had created what Haseman (2006-2009) calls a “mess”. In many ways, Haseman’s acknowledgement and articulation of this mess reassured me that it was a valid part of the process. Reading Barba assured me that there was a useful strategy for extricating the *essence* of the piece from the mess. So I began to separate the complex story lines and styles of *Wyrđ* into three different documents.

Through the process of writing this story as a novel, I satisfied my urge to tell the Scottish witch hunt story from the witch’s perspective. In that narrative, King James VI of Scotland’s fascination with witches grows from the time he escapes from prison in 1583 and begins to suspect that his best friend Robert Oliphant is part of the coven of Cailleach

Caim, an old Pict site in Fife disguised as a house. As a result, I felt certain that I could discard the entire Scottish witch hunt story from *Wyrd*. I could remove the circle of stones and the character Nellie. A similar question remained around the Norn and Pict material. Could I discard this and still tell the story of reincarnation? The answer was “Yes”. I began to cut and paste all of the Norn and Pict material into a new document with the intention of removing it completely. However, when I looked at this document separate from the play *Wyrd*, I could see that this was actually another form of writing all together. All of the Norn and Pict material was written in high verse or old language. Rather than discard it, I could experiment with telling the Pict story as a separate piece; an epic poem, or an opera.

The inevitable question would not go away, however. Could I discard Robert and Judith’s story? No. Their story is the play. Their journey from losing their daughter, property and livelihood towards healing, is the crux of the play. Notice I say *their* journey. I felt dissatisfied with Judith leaving Robert in order to go to Scotland. I wanted them to heal together. Such a happy ending may not be the ingredients of great drama, but I felt confident that I could leave social realism to other playwrights. My intention was never to write social realism. In attempting to write Sacred Theatre, I was giving myself permission to write fantasy, the improbable, magic. Where did reincarnation fit into all of this? I wasn’t sure, but somehow the idea of another life and dimension needed to assert itself as an alternative to the everyday problems that Judith and Robert were facing.

#### **7.4 WYRD SONG: A NEW TITLE AND REFLECTION**

One of the undeveloped images in previous drafts of *Wyrd*, was that during the bushfire in Australia, while Judith tries to save her daughter, she sees three women in the flames (the Norns). In previous drafts this image comes very late in the play, as a kind of back story. I asked myself; “What if that was the opening image of the new draft?” “What if the play

opened during the bushfire?” I started playing with the idea that instead of three women, Judith sees only one, the Crone, an old woman standing in the flames who says to her in a Scottish accent, “Come home, lass.” This was the beginning of the latest draft included in this chapter called *Wyrđ Song*.

The opening image is of a woman trapped by bushfire and trying to save her daughter. She sees an old woman in the flames and begs for help. But the old crone simply tells her to “come home”. I then began to experiment with the idea that this Crone, Moira Whitelaw, is not a spirit, but a living person in Scotland, longing for the return of her daughter (from a previous life) to take care of the circle of stones. Just as Judith sees her in the flames of the bushfire, what if Moira sees Judith in the flames of her hearth-fire, at the same time, but in different continents? So the fire becomes the catalyst for their seeing each other. I kept writing in this vein for several scenes, incorporating the research I had done about post-bushfire trauma, where a characteristic of people in such post-traumatic stress, is that they either collapse in grief, or they go into adrenalin drive and can’t stop ‘rescuing’ others.

In the new draft, Judith and Robert deal with the death of their daughter in very different ways. Judith refuses to go back to the source of their grief, their devastated land. On the other hand, Robert jumps into action mode; bulldozing, rebuilding and starting all over again. Meanwhile in Scotland, Moira is evicted from the house, which has been condemned as a ruin, and sent to a nursing home. She refuses to stay in the home, however, and keeps returning to the condemned house, hoping to see her daughter (from another life) in the flames of her fire. This seemed to work as a story and structure, but there was something missing. Then, one day as I was driving and listening to the music of Nick Cave, one of his lyrics struck me: “I felt you coming girl, as you drew near, I knew you’d find me, ‘cause I longed you here” (Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, 1996). I drove

home and dug out the research I had done about Scottish water kelpies: mythical creatures, half horse, half human that were said to lure little children into the lakes and rivers of Scotland by singing to them.

What if Moira Whitelaw was one of these mythical creatures and *longed* Judith to find the house in Scotland by singing to her? I set about writing songs of longing for Moira, but I knew that many old Scottish ballads were songs of longing for the return of a departed loved one. I own a book of such ballads and decided to use these traditional songs instead of writing my own sub-standard versions. The use of such songs would also be very familiar to any Scots in the audience. Of personal importance to me, was that some of these songs were my mother's favourites. So, I built traditional Scottish ballads into the structure of the piece (MacLeod, A. C. & Boulton, Harold, 1894) and renamed the play *Wyrđ Song*, song of destiny.

These songs provided not only the framework of the piece, but also the elusive connection between the two women across two continents. Judith can hear the singing in Australia, but her husband Robert, cannot, exacerbating the tension in their relationship. In yet another nod to Barrett's (2010) models around situating practice without appropriation, I need to acknowledge that the dream scene (Sc. 13, *Wyrđ Song*) follows a convention from David Harrower's excellent play *Knives in Hens* (1995). In his inimitable, minimalist style, Harrower simply has the character Gilbert arrive at the bed of the Young Woman while she sleeps (Harrower, 1995:29). What follows between them is clearly a dream, because of the logical impossibility of Gilbert physically being there, especially when the Young Woman's husband William is lying right beside her. We know he is not a ghost, because we have seen him as a living character, and so the only inference we can make is that he is part of the Young Woman's dream.

In *Wyrđ Song*, I employ this convention of simply having Moira arrive in Judith's house in Australia. Quite literally Moira shows Judith where to find the sale advertisement of the Scottish house on the internet website. As soon as Judith sees the house, she is captured, and from this point in the play I didn't see much point in drawing out the inevitable. Judith and Robert go to Scotland and almost as soon as Judith enters the house, she begins to have fragmented, partial memories of a previous life there.

In the last scene of the play, Judith goes to the house and recognizes that Moira is her mother from a previous life. Moira briefly tells Judith of her ancient Pict heritage and her obligation to the Goddess *Cailleach Bhéara(ch)*, the Crone version of the Scottish Goddess Beira. Judith is left with the realization that has confronted her throughout the play: her spiritual home is not in Australia, but Scotland. Her longing to leave Australia is a spiritual longing; one that honours the past and does not try to erase it, to bulldoze over it and start anew. In the last line of the play Judith is invited to sit with the stones of the Goddess and let them speak to her, all she has to do is stay.

In reflection, I owe a great deal of gratitude to Rosalba Clemente. She was the first to isolate a sense of spiritual longing as the essence of this piece. She also articulated the main question I needed to address in the play: "Why did Judith give up her life in Australia and move to Scotland?" We talked in our meeting about being migrants to Australia and our shared sense that there was something missing in our lives. On further reflection, I realized that my fifteen-year journey to write this story was born from longing. I wrote it first as *Dreamhouse*, then as *Wyrđ*, subsequently as the novel *Cailleach Caim* and finally as this creative artefact for a PhD, *Wyrđ Song*. Each one of these is a manifestation of longing and nostalgia for a way of being and seeing in the world. They are the nostalgia of a migrant, whose spiritual beliefs were essentially non-Christian and the longing for a way of expressing these beliefs. Through recognizing this longing, I was able to clarify the

creative impulse of the entire piece. This realization acted as a kind of ‘essentializing’ or ‘via negativa’ which allowed me to discard all of the superfluous story elements and concentrate on that simple question, “What does your character want?”

In many ways Judith’s journey ends, much like Elise’s journey in *Bird*. It is the journey of a woman longing for another way of being and seeing in the world; a way that honours the invisible, the irrational and recognizes that the sacred is all around, in everything, always.

### **7.5 WYRD SONG: A PLAY BY SHEILA DUNCAN WITH TRADITIONAL SCOTTISH SONGS - 9686 WORDS.**

Please find following the first draft of *Wyrđ Song* completed in March 2016. This play is written in industry format, using Courier Final Draft 12 with double line spacing, which approximates to 1.5 minutes of stage time, per written page. As such, the current draft of 55 pages would play at approximately eighty minutes.

Songs come from:

MacLeod, A. C and Boulton, Harold (1894) *Songs of the North*, Volume One, 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition (no date), J.B Cramer & Co., LTD, New Bond Street, London

# **WYRD SONG**

*by Sheila Duncan*

*Draft One*

*March 2016*

*For my mother.*

© Sheila Duncan 2016  
15 Callistemon St.  
Wirrabara S.A. 5481  
[shehaswings@gmail.com](mailto:shehaswings@gmail.com)

**Cast of Characters:**

Judith MacMillan: A woman in her mid-late thirties.  
Robert MacMillan: A man of similar age. Judith's husband.  
Moira Whitelaw: A Scottish woman, aged around 70.  
Patrick Craven: A Scottish man, aged around 60.

**Staging**

Scenes in Australia co-exist on the stage with some of the scenes set in Scotland.

The most consistent scene location is a round hall in Scotland. At first we only see the fireplace or hearth, but eventually we see that this location is a large circle of stones.

**Music**

Songs and sheet music come from:

MacLeod, A. C and Boulton, Harold (1894) *Songs of the North*,  
Volume One, 32<sup>nd</sup> Edition (no date), J.B Cramer & Co., LTD,  
New Bond Street, London

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**1. *Hearth Scotland/Hospital Australia: Night.***

*On the stage at the same time: a large fireplace in a room in Scotland and a bed in a hospital in Australia.*

*MOIRA WHITELAW rocks in a wooden rocking chair next to the hearth (Scotland). She hums a tune to herself, barely visible in the speckled moonlight.*

*JUDITH MacMILLAN is asleep in the hospital bed (Australia). She sits up suddenly to reveal burn stockings on her arms and head. She is delirious. ROBERT MacMILLAN stands in the room, looking out (of a possible window) away from the bed. He does not react to Judith's speech. For him, she is in a coma.*

Judith: Got to get out. Keep breathing. Keep her safe.  
Can't breathe. Can't... Sarah! Little blue dress.  
She's not...Eyes stuck open.... She's not...her  
hair. No! Face black and burned. She's not....

Robert: The little blue dress we got for her birthday.

Judith: ...breathing!

Robert: That's how I knew it was her.

Judith: Somebody help me!

*Moira gets up and slowly approaches Judith*

Robert: Face black and burned. I didn't recognize her.  
They told me, when they found you, the fire was  
like a blast furnace...

Judith: Wake up my darling, wake up!

Robert: It's a miracle you survived.

*Judith sees Moira*

Judith: There's someone in the flames. A woman. Please help my little girl...

Robert: The fire gutted everything, the house, the sheds, the sheep.

Judith: *(To Moira)* She's not breathing! Please help me!

Robert: The whole house was flattened, roof-iron everywhere, even the cutlery had melted. But you were alive...as if...

*Moira approaches Judith very slowly.*

Judith: Oh hurry...please hurry...

Robert: ... something was protecting you.

Judith: Help her!

Robert: Like a shield.

*Moira comes close to Judith. She speaks in a Scottish Accent.*

Moira: Come home, lass.

Judith: Please help my little girl.

Moira: I'm waiting for you.

*Moira turns away.*

Judith: Please don't leave us. No! Wait!

*Moira returns to the chair. Judith collapses on the bed.*

*Robert sits beside her and touches her face.*

Robert: Please wake up, Judith....I can't... House is gone. I had to shoot the horses. The look in their eyes. The look in their eyes. They knew what I was

doing, one by one. Please wake up. They put her  
body in the morgue. It's freezing in the morgue.  
Jude. Please wake up. House is gone. Everything is  
gone.

*Lights down on bed. Robert exits.*

*Moira rocks and sings.*

Moira: Rest my ain bairnie, lie peaceful and still,  
Sleeping or waking I'll guard thee from ill  
Fair be thy body, whiter than snow,  
No evil mark from the heel to the brow;  
No ghost shall fright thee, nought shalt thou  
fear,  
I'll sing them a charm that none can come near

*Judith sits up in the bed, listening.*

Moira: Rest may ain bairnie, lie peaceful and still,  
Sleeping or waking, I'll guard thee from ill.

*MUSIC*

**2. Hospital/Australia:** *Day. Robert sits beside Judith, who  
is now conscious.*

Judith: I forgot to open the stables. We were running to  
the car...trees on fire all up the driveway. I was  
yelling at Sarah to run faster, but then she  
started screaming about Napoleon, that we had to  
let the horses out. I couldn't catch her.  
Couldn't...keep up with her and then there was an

explosion...I think it was a gas bottle. Her hair was on fire and her dress and I threw myself on top of her, but I couldn't...

Robert: Jude...

Judith: Her eyes were welded open and she was on fire. Our little girl was on fire.

Robert: I know...I know...Shhh.

Judith: I was screaming and screaming for someone to help me and no one came. You didn't come, Robert. Then I saw a woman.

Robert: What woman?

Judith: A woman standing in the flames.

Robert: Who was she?

Judith: I don't know. I've never seen her before. But she wouldn't help me and I thought I'm in hell...I've died and I'm in hell. You left us to burn.

Robert: I couldn't get to you.

Judith: You left us.

Robert: I was fighting the fire...

Judith: Not our fire.

Robert: The wind changed so suddenly...I was trapped on the other side of the front. I couldn't get through.

Judith: You shouldn't have left us.

Robert: I know that now. I'm so sorry. The wind changed so quickly, without warning. I'm sorry.

Judith: Sorry doesn't cut it, does it? There's this gaping  
...wound of regret. I lie here in this bed  
thinking about it over and over. If only I'd  
opened the stables. If only we had left earlier.  
If only you hadn't left us. Oh my God any one  
little thing could have made the difference and  
she would be alive. Sorry doesn't even come close.

*Judith lies down and turns her back on Robert.*

Robert: I know. I know.

*Robert kisses Judith and exits.*

**3. Hearth/Scotland:** *Moira rocks and hums a tune at the  
hearth. Patrick Craven enters the hearth area. He has a  
thick Fife accent.*

Patrick: How are ye farin' Moira?

Moira: Patrick.

Patrick: We've done the evaluation.

Moira: Oh aye?

Patrick: The place is condemned, Moira. I'm afraid ye have  
to leave.

Moira: Over my dead body.

Patrick: The roof's fallin' in, the floorboards are rotten.

Moira: Disn'ae bother me. Let me wait, just a few more  
months.

Patrick: Ye ken we cannae dae that.

Moira: Who's we?

Patrick: Social Services have found you a nice room in the  
village. You'll be looked after.

Moira: I dinnae need lookin' after.

Patrick: Ye dinnae have a choice. They'll be here in the  
morning. I'll come and help ye pack.

Moira: I'm no goin' anywhere.

Patrick: Dinnae make me call the police, Moira, please.

Moira: Call who you like. I'm no leaving.

Patrick: I'll come in the morning. I'll help ye. Goodnight  
Moira.

*Patrick exits. Moira rocks in her chair. She sings:*

Moira: O how can ye gang, lassie?  
How can ye gang?  
O how can ye gang sae to grieve me?  
Wi your beauty and your art  
Ye hae broken my heart,  
For I never, never thocht 'ye wad leave me.

***Hospital/Australia:*** *Judith sits up, listening.*

Moira: O, how could ye think, hen  
How could ye think,  
O how could ye think that I lo'ed ye?  
For its O and I lo'e ane,  
But I daurna tell his name  
And I never, never meant to deceive ye.

*Judith gets out of bed and changes into street clothes*

Moira: Then how could you look, lassie  
How could you look?  
And what when your e'en met mine, lass?  
For wi' sorrow in my heart,  
And the tears in my e'en,  
I maun down to the grave loving thee, lass.

*Moira gets up from the chair and exits. Judith sits on the bed and waits. Robert enters.*

Robert: Hi. Are you ready?

Judith: No. Are you?

Robert: No.

*(Pause)*

Robert: You must be glad to be getting out of here.

Judith: Yes.

*Judith gets up and looks around at the hospital room.*

Judith: I'll miss the singing.

Robert: What singing?

Judith: Someone sings at night...One of the other patients. It was soothing.

*They exit. Music.*

#### **4. A Podium. Funeral Service.**

*Robert stands at a podium adorned with flowers. Judith sits nearby.*

Robert: Napoleon was a Falabella, a tiny little horse who thought he could win the Melbourne Cup. She adored

that horse. She got up every morning at six to muck out his stable and take him for a ride. Then she'd brush him down and catch the bus to school. One day, in the pouring rain, Napoleon got out and followed the bus all the way to town, all the way into the schoolyard. Sarah didn't think twice about it. She didn't call us for help, she didn't tell her teachers, she just climbed up and rode Napoleon home, 27 kilometers in the rain without a saddle. And I know that wherever she is, Napoleon is with her and they're *(he breaks down)*...I'm sorry...I'm sorry ... They're together. Goodbye my beautiful girl.

*Robert leaves the podium. He and Judith embrace. They exit.*

**5. The Hearth. Scotland. Morning** Patrick Craven enters to find the rocking chair empty. He calls out.

Patrick: Moira? Moira! Where are you? Oh come on, dinnea be daft! Ye've nowhere else te gan. Moira!

*He exits calling...*

Patrick: Moira!

**6. The Cottage:** A small room with a table, chairs and a laptop. Boxes of clothing, kitchen utensils etc. litter the space. Judith and Robert enter.

Robert: Well, here we are. There's only one bedroom, but it's got everything we need for now.

Judith: It's nice.

Robert: People have donated all this stuff, clothes, dishes, pots. They've been great....and Carol brought your laptop from the library. She thought you might need it.

Judith: Oh...good.

Robert: Are you tired? The bed's all made up if you want to rest.

Judith: No. I'll just potter for a bit. What about you? You must be exhausted.

Robert: Hanging in there.

*Pause*

Judith: What an awful, awful day.

Robert: Yes.

Judith: You did well to stand up and speak like that.

Robert: I wanted to. I wanted to...remember her.

Judith: What are we going to do?

Robert: We're going to keep going.

Judith: I mean without her?

Robert: I don't know, Jude. If I didn't have you I think I would just lie down and die.

Judith: Let's do that together.

Robert: What?

Judith: They've given me all these painkillers. Let's go lie on the bed, close our eyes and die.

Robert: No. Let's not even think about doing that, OK?

Judith: You know you want to.

Robert: No, I don't...neither do you. Don't talk like that.

*Pause*

Judith: So, what will we do?

Robert: Jimmy said we can stay here as long as we like...till we rebuild. He's been fantastic, Jude. He feels terrible.

Judith: You saved his house while ours burnt to the ground.

Robert: He's doing everything he can. Everyone is. We're not the only ones. There's more than 400,000 hectares of farm land gone. Sixteen properties. The whole forest was destroyed.

Judith: The forest?

Robert: They're still putting out the tree roots. They say they can burn for another six months, two metres underground.

Judith: Those beautiful old trees.

Robert: We're not the only ones, Jude. Everyone's in shock. Six people died including...

Judith: Sarah.

*Pause*

Judith: What are we going to do?

Robert: I've put in the insurance claim. We'll rebuild. In the meantime, we're here and we're alive. We'll get through this. We will.

*Robert picks up one of the boxes.*

Robert: Come and see the kitchen. It's got an old wood oven, you'll love it.

*Robert exits with the box. Judith looks into space and starts scratching at her arms and legs. She exits. The Cottage remains as...*

**7. The Cave/Scotland:** *(On a different part of the stage)*

*Moira enters wearing an overcoat and carrying a bag. She rummages in her pocket and finds a candle. She lights it and looks around. She reaches in to a deep hole in the cave wall and takes out a small wooden box. She sets the candle down and unpacks her bag. MUSIC PLAYS: "My Faithful Fond One".*

*Moira lays out bottles of water, cans of beans and soup, a loaf of bread, a portable gas burner, cans of butane fuel, a pot, a can opener, a spoon, a small pillow and a blanket.*

*When the bag is empty, she places the box inside it. She prepares a bed for herself and then begins to cook a meal.*

*Music continues as Moira sings:*

Moira: My fair and rare one, my faithful fond one,  
My faithful fair, wilt not come to me  
On bed of pain here who remain here,

With weary longing for a sight of thee

**The Cottage:** *Night. Judith enters in a dressing gown. She listens to the singing in the grey light.*

Moira:     If wing were mine now to skim the brine now,  
              And like a sea-gull to float me free,  
              To Fife's fair shore now they'd bear me o'er now  
              Where dwells the maiden that's dear to me.

*Robert enters.*

Robert:    What are you doing?

Judith:    Do you hear that?

Robert:    What?

Judith:    Someone singing.

Robert:    No.

Judith:    A woman's voice. Like in the hospital.

Robert:    I can't hear anything.

Judith:    Listen.

**The Cave:** *Moira sings*

Moira:     My fair and rare one, my faithful fond one  
              My faithful fair, wilt not come to me  
              On bed of pain here who remain here,  
              With weary longing for a sight of thee.

Robert:    It's the wind in the trees.

Judith:    It's a song. Can't you hear it?

Robert:    No. You're imagining it.

Judith:    Or remembering it.

Robert:    From the hospital?

Judith: Maybe. But it's a song I've heard before. I don't know where from.

Robert: I can't hear it.

Judith: It's a song of longing. She's longing to see someone she loves.

Moira: O were I yonder with her to wander  
Beneath the green hills beside the sea  
With birds in chorus that warble o'er us  
And ruth of kisses so sweet to me.

Judith: She's singing for her lost daughter.

Robert: You're imagining it Jude.

Judith: No I'm not.

Robert: It's the painkillers...Come back to bed.

Robert: I want to listen.

*Judith sits, listening. Robert exits.*

Moira: My fair and rare one, my faithful fond one  
My faithful fair wilt not come to me  
On bed of pain here who remain here,  
With weary longing for a sight of thee.

*Throughout the rest of the song Robert comes and goes, removing boxes and tidying the room. Judith sits scratching her arms and legs.*

Moira: What though the sky here be wet or dry here  
With peaceful breeze here, or windy war,  
In winter glooming or summer blooming  
'Tis all one season, love when thou art far.

My fair and rare one, my faithful fond one  
My faithful fair wilt not come to me  
On bed of pain here who remain here,  
With weary longing for a sight of thee.

*(Translated from Gaelic by Professor Blackie)*

*Moira's candle dies out. Music continues. Robert exits and returns carrying an urn of ashes. He gives it to Judith, who sets it on a side table.*

*Robert and Judith exit.*

**8. The Cave.** *Darkness. Patrick Craven's voice rings out (OFF).*

Patrick: Moira! I ken you're in there! Dinnae be daft hen!

Come out!

*Moira scurries and hides. Patrick enters with a torch. He finds Moira cowering.*

Patrick: Oh come on hen. Come wi' me. We're gonnae look after ye.

Moira: Leave me alone!

Patrick: It's freezin' in here. Ye'll catch yer death. The police have been looking fer ye fer days. Come on hen, just come wi me.

Moira: Get away. I'm no comin'

*Patrick starts packing her things into the bag.*

Patrick: I didnae tell the police ye were here. But if ye dinae come wi me, I'll tell them about this place and they'll ken where to look.

Moira: Ye cannae tell naeb'dy Patrick. Ye'll be struck doon by Cailleach hersel'.

Patrick: Only if ye dinnae come quiet like.

Moira: How did you find it?

Patrick: I wis wrackin' ma brain and I thought where would that old witch be hidin'? And then I remembered the stories about the witch hunts and how the old Picts used to hide in a cave under the house. I was days crawlin' through aw the tunnels and then I smelled it...baked beans an I ken't ye were in here.

Moira: Ye cannae speak o this Patrick. It's a secret.

Patrick: You could have died down here an naeb'dy wid ken.

Moira: I widnae be the first.

Patrick: Come wi me and behave yerself and my lips are sealed. But if you dinnae, I'll tell the police.

*He picks up her bag.*

Patrick: Come on Moira. Ye cannae stay here. There's a nice comfy bed waitin' fer ye at the home.

Moira: Ye'll no tell, Patrick.

Patrick: No. Come on.

*Moira reluctantly leaves with Patrick. Music.*

**9. The Cottage.** Day. Judith sits at the table working on the laptop. (Still in her dressing gown) After a while Robert enters, he is dirty and exhausted.

Robert: What are you doing?

Judith: Searching.

Robert: For what?

Judith: I was trying to find that song, then I found all this other stuff about Scottish water-kelpies.

Robert: You've spent the whole day reading about dogs?

Judith: No, they're spirits, half human, half horse who live in all the lakes and rivers of Scotland. They lure little children to their deaths by singing to them.

Robert: Great. Remind me never to go there.

Judith: Your grandparents were Scottish.

Robert: Yeah...maybe that's why they came to Australia...All that bloody singing. (Beat) Did you do anything else today?

Judith: I cooked the casserole. How about you?

Robert: We cleared the stables, a couple of sheds. We're doing the house tomorrow. Why don't you come?

Judith: No.

Robert: Don't you want to see it one last time before...?

Judith: Before you eradicate the evidence?

Robert: Before we bulldoze it.

Judith: I don't want to see that place ever again.

Robert: You have to face it sometime, Jude.

Judith: Why?

Robert: It's our home.

Judith: Was. Was our home.

Robert: And it will be again, as soon as the insurance money comes through. I've had my eye on this Stallion from Western Australia...champion stud. We could start from there. All we need is one big rain and one little foal.

Judith: We need a lot more than that.

Robert: Jimmy's going to help us rebuild.

Judith: Robert, we need to talk about this.

Robert: Talk about what?

Judith: You're moving too fast!

Robert: At least I'm moving. You've been hiding in here for a week.

Judith: I like hiding.

Robert: You could get dressed.

Judith: Clothes make me itchy. Everything makes me itchy. I'm itching from head to toe, but I tell you where I'm itching most Rob and that's my feet. I don't want to go back there.

Robert: Where else can you go?

Judith: I don't know. But I'm terrified that if I put my clothes on and walk out that door, I'll just keep walking and walking and never come back.

*Pause*

Robert: I didn't know you felt that way.

Judith: You never asked me. You just assumed. Robert it's like you're still fighting that fire, everything's a tactical response. You need to stop and grieve.

Robert: I can't stop. There's too much to do. I can't just sit around and feel sorry for myself.

Judith: Well you can't keep bulldozing through...knock it all down and build it back up again like...like leggo. We can't just move back there, into our shiny new house and pretend nothing ever happened.

Robert: It wouldn't be like that.

Judith: How would it be?

Robert: We could build the house on a different site, up on the cliff. There are great views from up there. We could get one of those places with lots of glass. Hire an architect.

Judith: And we'd have to drive past the old place every day. It's still the same driveway. I couldn't do it, Robert.

Robert: We'll move the driveway.

Judith: I want us to sell.

Robert: What?

Judith: Sell the land.

Robert: What? The MacMillan Estate?

Judith: We can buy more land. Start again somewhere else.

Robert: Where?

Judith: Anywhere away from bushfires.

Robert: Jude. This is Australia.

Judith: I don't know. Move to a city.

Robert: And do what?

Judith: I don't know. I don't know.

Robert: Jude, I breed horses; that's what I do. I couldn't live in a city.

Judith: And I can't go back there. I can't Robert.

Robert: This has come out of nowhere.

Judith: Yeah well, the wind changed quickly and I was caught on the wrong side of the front.

Robert: You're never going to let me forget that are you?

Judith: As if you could forget. As if you could even try.

*Pause*

Robert: I'll never forget...every single moment of every single day...I'm sorry.

*Judith exits. After a while Robert exits.*

**10. The Hearth.** *A howling wind and rain. The sound of an exterior door banging. Moira enters in her overcoat. She sets about lighting the fire. She sits in her rocking chair. She sings.*

Moira: How often haunting the highest hilltop  
I scan the ocean thy sail to see  
Wilt come tonight? Wilt come tomorrow?

Wilt ever come, love, to comfort me?

*Patrick Craven enters in an overcoat. He does not disturb Moira.*

Moira: Fhir a bhata, na horo eile

Fhir a bhata, na horo eile

Fhir a bhata, na horo eile

Oh fare ye well, love, where'er ye be.

*Patrick joins her singing. He crouches beside Moira at the fire.*

Both: Fhir a bhata, na horo eile

Fhir a bhata, na horo eile

Fhir a bhata, na horo eile

Oh fare ye well, love, where'er ye be.

*(Song translated from the Gaelic by Thomas Pattison)*

*Patrick takes a flask from his pocket and offers it to Moira. She drinks.*

Patrick: They rung me to say you'd gone. I ken't ye'd be here.

Moira: I'll aye be here, even when I'm deed.

Patrick: Ye cannae stay long, hen.

Moira: Just let me sit a wee while in front o ma ain fire.

Patrick: Aye. A wee while. But I need te take ye back tonight.

*She gives him the flask. He drinks and looks around.*

Patrick: Ye have te gie this up Moira.

Moira: No yet.

Patrick: I need to tell you somethin'. I've listed it on the internet.

Moira: Ye what?

Patrick: I've put the place on the market. It's yer only option.

Moira: You had no right te dae that. This is my hame.

Patrick: It's condemned, ye cannae live here, hen. Ye've got one year to sort it or they'll come and knock it down.

Moira: You had no right without askin' me.

Patrick: I'm the executor of yer mam's will. I had te make a decision, because you widnae.

Moira: That's no a decision. That's a criminal offence.

Patrick: It's in the will. Aw the proceeds'll go into yer account. Ye'll no have to worry about anythin'.

Moira: Yer a traitor Patrick Craven. Why my mother ever trusted you I dinnae ken.

Patrick: I'm yer only kin.

Moira: Our folk have lived in this house for centuries. And now you're gonnae sell it to a complete stranger?

Patrick: Have ye forgotten about the curse?

*Pause*

Moira: Only one of the thirteen clans can live in the house of Cailleach.

Patrick: That's right. She chooses who lives in this house.

Moira: It's always the last daughter of the Picts.

Patrick: You keep telling me you've seen her.

Moira: I did. I saw her right there in the fire. She was standin' there in the flames beggin' me te help her.

I've been singing her home ever since.

Patrick: Well, just in case she doesn'ae hear ye singin', I've listed it on the internet.

Moira: What if someone else sees it?

Patrick: Cailleach chooses remember. Even if it's not the woman you saw, who ever buys this house will need to to have their crest on those walls. And if they don't...

Moira: They'll be cursed.

Patrick: Aye. Mind you, the place is faw'n te bits. They'll be cursed onyway.

Moira: She'll come Patrick. I ken she'll come.

Patrick: Well, you keep singin' hen. And I'll keep my eye on the website. Between us we'll bring her home. In the meanwhile, I have to take ye back.

*He takes a swig from the flask and passes it to Moira.*

*They look into the fire. Lights down.*

**11. The Cottage:** *Dusk. Robert enters, carrying a large envelope. He puts it on the table.*

Robert: Judith?

*He exits calling...*

Robert: Jude?

*He returns and looks around. He goes to the urn and touches it.*

Robert: She wouldn't have left without you.

*He picks up the urn and kisses it. He sits, cradles the urn in his arms. After a while Judith enters wearing clothes. She stands watching Robert.*

Robert: You didn't keep walking then?

Judith: No. My feet hurt, they're not my shoes.

Robert: Where did you go?

Judith: I walked into work...one of the benefits of living near town.

Robert: I was worried...

*Robert gets up and places the urn back in its spot.*

Judith: I've requested three months leave.

Robert: Three months?

Judith: I need time. We both do, to make a decision.

Robert: Well time's running out, they approved the insurance claim. The letter's there on the table.

*Judith opens the letter and reads.*

Judith: Eight hundred thousand?

Robert: They didn't pay out for the horses.

Judith: That's less than half. Why didn't they pay for the horses?

Robert: It's on page two.

*Judith flips to the next page. She reads.*

Judith: "Negligence to protect animals in accordance with policy guidelines."

*Pause. Judith begins to scratch.*

Robert: It's enough to rebuild Jude, that's all they'll pay for.

Judith: How do we replace the stock?

Robert: We'll have to start small.

Judith: What with...chickens?

Robert: Possibly mice.

Judith: Can we appeal?

Robert: Do you want to?

Judith: I don't know...it just doesn't seem fair.

Robert: We've still got the land.

Judith: How much is that worth?

Robert: Not much at the moment, it's brown fields and sticks. All the fences are down. It'll take a lot of work to get it back to what it was...Years for the trees to grow back.

Judith: What if we sold it as it is?

Robert: We might as well walk away and leave it to the roos. I'm not doing that, Jude. Don't even ask me. I love that land. You did too, once.

Judith: Once, not now.

Robert: So now isn't a good time to make a decision.

Judith: I know...That's what I've been thinking...I want us to go away for a while...for a holiday.

Robert: I can't go away. The fences won't fix themselves.

Judith: Surely, they can wait for a couple of weeks.

Robert: The teams are at it already. Government assistance only lasts a few months.

Judith: So, you won't sell and you won't go away and you won't stop working and you won't listen when I tell you that I can't go back there.

Robert: I am listening, but I can't just down tools and go on a holiday.

Judith: OK, I'll go on my own.

Robert: What...by yourself?

Judith: If I have to.

*(She scratches)*

Robert: Where would you go?

Judith: I don't know...Bali...New York? I always promised Sarah I would take her to Paris.

Robert: Those places are crawling with terrorists!

Judith: Good, maybe one of them will shoot me. Then you can get a new wife to go with the new house, maybe one of those salt-of-the-earth women who can bake cakes and battle on regardless.

Robert: I don't want a new wife.

Judith: You don't want a new life. You want the old one  
back, but that's impossible.

Robert: No it's not.

Judith: I've got to get out of these second hand clothes.  
They're making me itchy.

*Judith exits.*

Robert: I don't want a new wife.

*Robert exits.*

**12. Old Folks Home: Scotland.** Day. Patrick guides Moira  
through the webpage on a laptop.

Patrick: So then you click on there...no, no...up there.

Moira: What's it doing up there? Why don't they put  
things where you can find them?

Patrick: They do. You just need to know where to look.

Moira: Now what?

Patrick: Scroll down. Push that wee arrow.

Moira: What arrow?

Patrick: Down the bottom.

Moira: Sweet Goddess, she'll never find the place if she  
has to do this.

Patrick: Good. Now click on that wee button. That's it!  
That's the house.

Moira: It looks like a ruin.

Patrick: It is a ruin. That's what I've been trying te tell  
ye.

Moira: What's that big hole?

Patrick: That's where the roof used to be.

Moira: Could ye no have found a better bit?

Patrick: It's aw like that.

Moira: Sweet Goddess.

Patrick: That's the main hall wi the fireplace.

Moira: That's my rockin' chair! Yer no sellin' that!

Patrick: It's worth more money than the house.

Moira: I want it back! And what are these?

Patrick: The stones in the hall.

Moira: Ye cannae show them Patrick, they've been hidden  
for centuries.

Patrick: Only the right people will know what they are.

Moira: It's the family crests.

Patrick: Aye. But someone's bound to recognize them, maybe  
not all, but at least their own.

Moira: What if they don't?

Patrick: Then I dinnae think they'll be interested. I'm no  
tryin' te sell this up in any way Moira. Just read  
the description.

Moira: How?

Patrick: Push that wee button.

Moira: Which button?

Patrick: The one that says "Home". Here, I'll do it.

*(He takes the mouse)*

Moira:     *(Reads)* "This ancient property is said to be the last bastion of the ancient Picts in Fife. It hasn't been renovated since they left." *(Beat)* That's not true! My mam put in central heating in nineteen sixty three.

Patrick:   Aye but it stopped working in two thousand and eight.

Moira:     The fire's fine by me.

Patrick:   Keep readin'.

Moira:     *(Reads)* "The property boasts a magnificent hall of historic significance and a fireplace of great splendour. A stair of ancient steps leads to a turret overlooking the North Sea Coast. Potential buyers will need a sturdy toolbox and a will to live." *(Long Beat)* Inspection essential. This is a diseased estate." *(Beat)* What's a diseased estate?

Patrick:   I was gonnae say a deceased estate but yer no deceased. I thought diseased was more accurate.

Moira:     Right.

Patrick:   What do ye think o' the price?

Moira:     Two hundred thousand pounds? That's a lot of money.

Patrick:   Aye. I think ye better keep singin'.

*Lights down on home. They exit. Music.*

**13. The Cottage:** Night. Darkness. Music: "Leezie Lindsay".

*(Old Scottish Ballad) Moira sings from OFF.*

Moira(Off): Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?

Will ye gang to the Hielands wi me?

Will ye gang to Heilands Leezie Lindsay?

My bride and my darling to be?

*Judith enters dressed in her dressing gown. She looks around, listening. Moira enters wearing her overcoat. She sings.*

Moira: To gang to the Hielands wi' you sir?

I dinna ken how that might be,

For I ken naw the land that ye live in,

Nor ken I the lad I'm gaun' wi.

*Moira approaches Judith.*

Judith: It's you.

Moira: Aye. It's me.

Judith: Why didn't you help me?

Moira: That's what I'm here for...to help ye.

*Moira takes Judith toward the laptop and opens it for her to see. As soon as the laptop is opened lights come up on the Hearth and several pillars glow blue in a circle around the fireplace. Judith looks into the laptop then turns around to see the dream-space of the Hearth. Moira sings*

Moira: Leezie Lindsay 'tis little that ye ken,

It sae be ye dinna ken me,

For my name is Lord Robert MacDonald

A chieftain o' higher degree.

Judith: I don't understand.

Moira: Come home lassie. Bring her ashes to the stones.

*Moira takes Judith's hand and leads her into the Hearth space. Judith is enchanted. They dance together.*

Moira (*sings*): Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?

Will ye gang to the Hielands wi me?

Will ye gang to Heilands Leezie Lindsay?

My bride and my darling to be?

*They dance and laugh together, singing...*

Moira: She has kilted her coats o' green satin,

She has kilted them up to the knee,

And she's aff wi' Lord Robert McDonald,

His bride and his darling to be.

Both: Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?

Will ye gang to the Hielands wi me?

Will ye gang to Heilands Leezie Lindsay?

My bride and my darling to be?

*Music. They laugh and Moira dances away. Lights down on Hearth/Dream. Judith sits scrolling through the webpage on the laptop.*

**14. The Cottage: Dawn.** Robert emerges, weary.

Robert: You're up early.

Judith: I had an amazing dream.

Robert: Oh yeah? What about?

Judith: I saw the woman in the flames. She showed me this.  
*She shows him the webpage on the laptop.*

Robert: She showed you a website?

Judith: In the dream...She showed me where to find it. And  
here it is.

Robert: What is it?

Judith: A house...in Scotland....and I remembered what she  
said in the fire. She told me to come home.

Robert: Home to where?

Judith: I think she means this house. She told me to bring  
Sarah's ashes to the stones.

Robert: What?

Judith: Just look at it.

*He scrolls through the webpage.*

Robert: It's a ruin.

Judith: I recognize this house Robert.

Robert: The roof's falling in.

Judith: I can't take my eyes off it. Look at those stones,  
the designs. I've seen them before. I know them  
from somewhere. And look at that one. That's your  
grandfather's crest. It used to hang above our  
fireplace.

Robert: Shit, it is too....the same design.

Judith: The inscription's in Gaelic, but I looked it up.

Robert: There are probably hundreds of those in Scotland.

Judith: But why so many in the same place? They're family crests, all of them. I know these so well. It feels like I'm looking at old family photographs.

Robert: Maybe you've seen them in a book somewhere?

Judith: I know this house so well.

Robert: How? You've never been to Scotland.

Judith: I know...it's strange. But I want to go there. I want us to go and see it.

Robert: Are you nuts?

Judith: I don't think we can ignore this.

Robert: You have a dream and see a bunch of ruins and now you want go to Scotland?

Judith: Just for a holiday. Please look at it.

*Robert looks at the webpage.*

Robert: What the hell is a diseased estate?

Judith: It means it's sick but not dead yet. It needs to heal.

Robert: Darling, it needs a bulldozer.

*Pause*

Judith: You think I'm crazy.

Robert: Not crazy, just...There's post-traumatic stress and then there's delusional psychosis. I think you might have tipped.

Judith: Delusional psychosis?

Robert: You're not thinking straight.

Judith: How come what you want is right, but what I want is delusional?

Robert: The house is a ruin on the other side of the world.

Judith: Yes, as far away from here as you can possibly get. I just want to go and see it.

Robert: And what if you like it?

Judith: I already like it.

Robert: What if you want to buy it?

Judith: What if I do?

Robert: Then its crunch time isn't it?

Judith: Robert, it was crunch time for me four weeks ago, but you didn't believe me.

Robert: I thought you'd...get better and change your mind.

Judith: I am getting better...I'm growing a new skin.

Robert: You won't get better till you go back, see the place again and face reality.

Judith: I have faced reality, it's you who thinks we can go back and start again.

Robert: We can.

Judith: What are we gonna do? Take Sarah's ashes and mix them up with clay and bring her back to life, like a Golem?

Robert: It's better than sprinkling them on a bunch of old stones in Scotland.

Judith: All I'm asking is that we go on a holiday.

Robert: No you're not. You're asking much more than that.

Judith: Yes. Yes I am. I'm asking you to lay down your tools and listen to me.

Robert: You're asking me to sell our land.

Judith: Yes. I am.

Robert: So it's your way or the highway?

Judith: Rob, I'm already on the highway. I'm asking you to come with me.

Robert: Sounds like you've made up your mind.

Judith: Seeing that house has given me hope, some sort of faith in the future. Haven't you ever felt that sense of knowing? That sense of déjà vu? It's like a sudden jolt from out of nowhere and you just know in every cell in your body that it's....right, that you can't ignore it.

*Pause*

Robert: Yeah actually... I've felt that...once.

Judith: As if you've lived somewhere before?

Robert: It wasn't a place. It was a person.

Judith: And what did you do about it?

Robert: I married her.

*Pause*

Judith: Though you should take a wife from hell, yet she will lead you home.

Robert: What's that?

Judith: Your family crest.

*Beat*

Robert: I need to think about this Jude.

Judith: That's all I'm asking.

Robert: And I need coffee.

*He exits. Music. Judith goes to the urn of ashes. She sings.*

Judith: Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?

*Music. She picks up the urn and dances around the room with it. She sings.*

Judith: Will ye gang to the Hielands wi me?

Will ye gang to Hielands Leezie Lindsay?

My bride and my darling to be?

*Robert enters and watches her.*

Robert: You're dancing.

Judith: I'm happy.

Robert: What if I say no?

Judith: I'll go on my own.

Robert: Would you?

Judith: I really want to see it, Rob. There's something about it.

Robert: I'll make you a deal.

Judith: What?

Robert: You come and see our place again and see how you feel. If you still want to go to Scotland after that, I'll come with you, but just for a holiday.

*Judith looks down at the ashes in her hands.*

Judith: OK. I'll come.

Robert: You'll need to get dressed.

Judith: What now?

Robert: I'm leaving in half an hour. Let me know when  
you're ready.

*Robert exits. Judith looks at the urn and begins to dance  
with it. She sings...*

Judith: She has kilted her coats o' green satin,  
She has kilted them up to the knee,  
And she's aff wi' Lord Robert MacMillan,  
His bride and his darling to be.

*Judith places the urn in its spot and exits. Music. Strike  
Cottage.*

**15. The cleared house site.** *Day. Judith and Rob enter,  
holding hands. Judith struggles to keep walking.*

Judith: It's all gone.

*Robert bends down and picks up a glob of melted steel. He  
gives it to her.*

Robert: Take a look at this.

Judith: What is it?

Robert: It used to be a pot by the look of it.

Judith: So this was the kitchen.

Robert: Yeah.

*Judith looks around and walks to a specific spot.*

Judith: This used to be her bedroom. The last thing I did

here... was... wake her up... She was lying in bed  
right there....

*Judith stands where the bed once was and crouches down.*

Judith: Wake up my darling, darling, darling girl. Wake up  
we have to go.

*Judith collapses, crying.*

Judith: Please wake up...

*Robert helps her to her feet.*

Robert: Come on. Come on, let's get out of here.

*They exit. Music.*

**16. The Hearth Scotland: Night.** *Moira sits in the rocking  
chair in front of the fire. She sings 'Ae Fond Kiss' by  
Robert Burns.*

Moira: Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!  
Ae farewell, and then forever!  
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,  
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

*Patrick enters.*

Moira: Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,  
While the star of hope she leaves him?  
Me, nae cheerful twinkle lights me,  
Dark despair around benights me.

Patrick: I ken't ye'd be here.

Moira: I'll aye be here, even when I'm deed.

Patrick: Are ye no cold hen?

Moira: Never cold in front o ma fire.

Patrick: Did ye walk here?

Moira: Aye. Keeps me fit.

Patrick: In the dark?

Moira: I ken ma way blindfolded.

Patrick: De ye no like it in the home?

Moira: They dinnae let me sing.

Patrick: Why no?

Moira: They say it wakes everybody up.

*Patrick warms himself at the fire.*

Patrick: I have some news for ye. There's a woman coming to  
look at the place fe Australia.

Moira: Australia?

Patrick: Aye. She saw it on the internet.

Moira: My mam's Aunty Jean went to Australia before the  
war.

Patrick: Aye, ma dad telt me.

Moira: Naeb'dies heard fe her since.

Patrick: This woman's comin' next week. Would ye like to be  
here?

Moira: I'll aye be here, even when I'm deed.

Patrick: I mean officially.

Moira: Is it her?

Patrick: I dae ken. You'll fund oot when ye see her.

Moira: Aye, that I will.

Patrick: Her name's Judith MacMillan.

Moira: Well she must have some Scot in her somewhere.

Patrick: Aye.

Moira: So many have left, so few return.

Patrick: It's the weather.

Moira: I'm no sellin' if it's no her.

Patrick: Let's wait and see. Come on hen, I'll take ye  
back.

*They exit. The fire continues to burn. Music. Day breaks.  
Lights reveal seven stone pillars in a circle around the  
Hearth. The Hearth becomes...*

**17. The Hall: Scotland.** Day. Judith enters. She touches the  
rocking chair and looks around the room in awe.

Judith: It's a church.

*She looks up at the ceiling and at the pillars. Robert  
enters.*

Robert: Brrrr it's freezing.

Judith: It's warm by the fire.

Robert: Great!

Judith: Where's Mr. Craven?

Robert: He's getting something from the car.

*He warms himself at the fire.*

Judith: Look at that ceiling.

*Robert looks up.*

Judith: It looks like tree branches all woven together.

Robert: At least it's got a roof...unlike the rest of the place.

Judith: It's beautiful.

*Patrick Craven enters carrying three hard hats.*

Patrick: Sorry about that, I forgot the safety gear. Ye'll need it for the upstairs, but you're ok in here.

Robert: That's reassuring.

Judith: What a beautiful room.

Patrick: Aye the great hall.

Judith: I love these crests.

Patrick: Do ye now?

Judith: I recognize them from somewhere.

Patrick: Is that right?

Judith: One of them belongs to my husband's family....the MacMillans.

*Patrick looks over to Robert who shrugs.*

Robert: My grandfather was Scottish.

Patrick: And his crest is in this room?

Judith: Yes. We used to have one just like it hanging above the fireplace, but we didn't know what it meant.

Patrick: What crest would that be?

Judith: This one here.

Patrick: That's the stone of Perth, the stone of the sacred bough. Not the crest of MacMillan, but Moncrieff.

Judith: Oh...I wonder why he had someone else's crest?

Patrick: Maybe his mother was a Moncrieff.

Robert: Actually it was his wife...my grandmother.  
Moncrieff was her maiden name.

Patrick: Your grandmother?

Robert: It could have been her crest. She died before I  
was born, so I wouldn't know for sure, but her  
name was Moncrieff.

Judith: We just assumed it was your grandfathers.

Patrick: Well, as you can see it's carved on the  
cornerstone of the hearth itself, next to the  
Stone of Fife, so it must have been important.

*Judith looks at the stone of Fife*

Judith: What's done in secrecy will come to the hearth.

Patrick: What did you say?

Judith: That's the meaning of the crest there.

Patrick: How did you ken that?

Judith: I looked it up. I looked them all up, from the  
photos on the website.

Patrick: Are you a historian?

Judith: No. I'm a librarian.

Robert: She's been obsessed with this place ever since she  
saw it.

Judith: I just wanted to know what they meant.

Patrick: Do you have Scottish ancestry Mrs MacMillan?

Judith: No. I'm seventh generation Australian.

*They look around.*

Patrick: Have ye ever spent a winter in Scotland?

Judith: No. We've never been here before.

Patrick: Well ye've never known a winter till ye've spent one in Scotland. An' it's no just the cold. Wind comes off the sea some days ye think ye'll end up in Glesgie. And the harr, ye've never been lost till ye've been lost in a Fife harr.

Robert: So you're not working for the tourist board then?

Patrick: Dinnae get me wrong I love Scotland. But I've seen it time and again... the Americans, the Canadians, the Australians... aw wi names like MacPherson and Campbell and...MacMillan. Aw wi mist in their een and the sound of pipes in their lugs... buyin up properties that should rightly be knocked doon.... And then the chill blains set in, and the council tax, an' the heritage laws, an' the petrol tax, an' the TV licence, an' the desperate search fur a wee bit o' heat.

Judith: We've had enough heat, haven't we Robert?

Robert: Yeah. What do mean should be knocked down?

Patrick: Oh you'll see. Shall we take the tour? Ye'll need one of these.

*Patrick gives them each a hard hat.*

Patrick: Let's start wi' the library. You'll appreciate that, Mrs. MacMillan. We just go up those steps there...

*Judith turns to see the steps.*

Judith: ...up to the tower...

*Beat.*

Patrick: Aye.

*Judith walks slowly towards the steps.*

Judith: And from the top of the tower, you can see for miles, all along the coast.

Patrick: Ye've certainly done yer homework.

Judith: That's where I saw them. And through there, that's the kitchen. It has a cellar and a series of tunnels leading down to a cave where we went to hide. And there's a box... with names in it.

Robert: Jude?

Patrick: How d'ye ken that?

Judith: Because I hid it there, in the wall. And then we had to wait in the darkness...

Robert: Judith...

Patrick: When?

Judith: When the soldiers came... We hid in the darkness and then a man saved us.

Robert: Jude stop it.

*Beat*

Judith: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry...I seem to have...

Patrick: Are you OK?

Judith: Yes. Yes, I'm fine. I'm just a bit confused. I'm imagining things.

Robert: Too much reading.

Judith: Yes. I must have read about this house somewhere.

Patrick: It couldn't have been this house Mrs MacMillan,  
there are no caves here.

Judith: Sorry. I'm letting my imagination run away with  
me.

Patrick: Aye. Shall we go up? You'll have to be careful,  
the roof's fallen in.

*They put on the hats.*

Judith: Are the books alright?

Patrick: Oh aye. Moira had them moved to the lower level.

Judith: Moira?

Patrick: Moira Whitelaw the current owner. Mind your step  
now; the stairs are a wee bit crumbling.

*They exit. Music. Evening falls.*

*Moira enters in her overcoat. She revitalizes the fire and  
sits in the rocking chair. She hums a tune then sings 'Turn  
ye to me' by John Wilson (Christopher North)*

Moira: The stars are shining cheerily, cheerily,  
Ho ro Mhairi dhu, turn ye to me:  
The sea-mew is moaning drearily, drearily,  
Ho ro Mhairi dhu, turn ye to me.

*She remains on stage as...*

**18. Hotel Room. Scotland.** *Judith rubs cream on her arms and neck. Robert sits looking through paperwork.*

Judith: It was as if he didn't want to sell it to us.

Robert: No. It was more like a job interview.

Judith: I wonder why he didn't mention the land on the web page?... Or the stables?

Robert: He's got to be the worst real-estate agent I've ever met.

Judith: He's not an agent, he's the executor of the estate.

Robert: How do you know that?

Judith: He told me.

Robert: Anyway, he'd get a lot more interest if he picked up a few marketing skills. The stables are the best part of the whole deal.

*Pause. He reads.*

Judith: What are you reading?

Robert: Building report.

Judith: What does it say?

Robert: Apparently that round hall dates back to 800AD.

Judith: Wow.

Robert: The east wing was built in around 1300 and the west wing in the 1800's. Needs a new roof...all the woodwork is water damaged....needs new plumbing, electricity...

*Robert starts doing calculations. Long pause.*

Judith: What do you think?

Robert: It's do-able.

Judith: Really?

Robert: Let's see what it'll cost in pounds.

Judith: I would love that place, Robert.

Robert: I know you would.

Judith: It was amazing. I kept getting all these flashes,  
like memories.

Robert: That was a bit weird.

Judith: Did you feel like that?

Robert: I was too busy trying not to fall through the  
floorboards.

Judith: What about your grandmother's crest? Didn't you  
feel anything when you saw it?

Robert: Er...frost bite.

Judith: Thanks for considering it at least.

Robert: Don't thank me yet.

*Robert returns to his calculations. Judith ponders...*

Judith: I mean there's all that land... so lush and  
green... and the views along the coast. I've  
missed that... It was like going home after a long  
journey. You know that feeling, when you've lost  
something precious and then you find it again?  
It's relief. I don't know why he said there were  
no caves under the house because I know there's

one for certain. I spent days in there with my  
sister...

*Judith gradually remembers something.*

Judith: I was up in the library. I saw the soldiers riding  
towards us and ran down to warn my mother and  
sister. My mother went to fetch the box of names  
from the antechamber and we all headed towards the  
cellar. We lifted the door up and climbed down the  
steps but then, my mother thrust the box into my  
hand and told me to hide it. She shut the cellar  
door on top of us and bolted it from above. We ran  
through the tunnels to a cave and I hid the box in  
a hole in the wall. The walls were wet. My sister  
and I were trapped in there for days, in the  
darkness, it smelled like mushrooms. I thought we  
were going to die there, but then I saw a torch.  
There was a man coming towards us. He said he had  
come to help us... and then I saw his face...

*She looks at Robert for a long time.*

Robert: What? What is it?

Judith: It was you.

*Pause*

Robert: Sounds like a dream.

Judith: It's a memory...the woman who was my mother, she's  
the woman in the flames. She's the one who brought  
us here.

Robert: Well I wouldn't trust her if I were you. Not if she locked you in the cellar.

Judith: No, she did it to save us. She sacrificed herself.

Robert: To save you from what?

Judith: The soldiers.

*Pause*

Robert: Jude, you're not making sense.

Judith: I remember it so clearly. I've lived in that house before. I know it.

Robert: You can't have.

Judith: I know. It's impossible, but I don't mean in this life. I mean in another life, another century.

Robert: What? You're scaring me now.

Judith: I'm scaring myself. I don't even believe in any of that stuff, but it's happening to me.

Robert: It's your imagination Jude. It's a fantasy.

Judith: You're probably right. That's what it is, wishful thinking. I've probably seen a film or something. But it's so vivid. I even remember how it smelled.

Robert: If it's real you should be able to find the cave. Maybe it's on the plans.

Judith: That's true.

*Robert hands her the building report and she looks through it. He returns to his calculations.*

**The Hearth:** *Moira rocks in the chair. She sings.*

Moira: Cold is the storm-wind that ruffles his breast,  
But warm are the downy plumes lining his nest;  
Cold blows the storm there,  
Soft falls the snow there,  
Ho ro Mhairi dhu, turn ye to me.

**Hotel room.** *Judith looks up from the report.*

Judith: Do you hear that?

Robert: What?

Judith: Nothing.

Robert: Found anything?

Judith: No.

*Pause*

Judith: I can't concentrate. I might go for a drive.

Robert: It's after nine.

Judith: I won't be long. Where are the car keys?

Robert: Jude, it's not safe, you've never driven here before.

Judith: I'll be ok, it's the same side of the road.

Robert: Do you want me to come with you?

Judith: No. I need to think. Where are the keys?

Robert: On the side table.

Judith: OK. I won't be long.

Robert: Jude. What if you get lost?

Judith: You'll know where to find me. You always have.

*She exits. Robert sits dumbfounded. Lights down on Hotel Room.*

**19. The Hearth/Hall:** Night. Moira sits at the fire. She continues to sing 'Turn ye to me'.

Moira: The waves are dancing merrily, merrily,  
Ho ro Mhairi dhu, turn ye to me;  
The sea birds are wailing wearily, wearily,  
Ho ro Mhairi dhu, turn ye to me.

*Judith enters cautiously.*

Moira: Hushed be thy moaning, lone bird of the sea,  
Thy home on the rocks is a shelter to thee,  
Thy home is the angry wave,  
Mine but the lonely grave,  
Ho ro Mhairi du, turn ye to me.

*The two women see each other.*

Judith: It's you.

Moira: Aye lass, it's me.

Judith: Who are you?

Moira: I'm Moira Whitelaw, I own this house.

Judith: I've seen you before.

Moira: As I saw you... in the fire.

*Moira indicates the fire.*

Judith: I heard you singing.

Moira: I hoped you would.

Judith: Why?

Moira: I've been longing for you.

Judith: You don't even know me.

Moira: Not in this life, no. I didn't know where to find you. And then I saw you in the flames...

*Pause*

Judith: You were my mother.

Moira: Aye, lass.

Judith: We lived in this house.

Moira: Many, many times. We are the guardians of Cailleach. I've waited for you to come, all my life. I'm so glad to see you lassie.

*Judith kneels beside Moira and takes her hands.*

Judith: And I am glad to see you.

Moira: Welcome home.

Judith: I didn't recognize you when I saw you in the fire. It wasn't until I came here and I remembered...

Moira: The last time...

Judith: Yes.

*Moira takes the box from her pocket and gives it to Judith.*

Judith: The box I hid in the cave.

Moira: It contains the names of the thirteen Pict clans who brought these stones for Cailleach.

Judith: Who's Cailleach?

Moira: Cailleach Bheurach is the Crone goddess of winter.  
It is she who made the mountains from which these  
stones were cut and lain in a circle.

Judith: Is this a stone circle?

Moira: Aye and always has been. Don't you remember?

Judith: No.

Moira: We built a house on top of it when the Christians  
came.

Judith: To disguise it?

Moira: First as a croft house, then in stone. We  
practiced our ceremonies here in secret.

*Pause*

Judith: They thought we were witches.

Moira: When you hid that box in the cave, you saved  
thirteen families from ruin. You risked your life  
for them.

Judith: But I didn't die. Someone rescued us.

Moira: Aye, Moncrieff.

Judith: My husband.

Moira: Aye. Your two stones are joined together by the  
lintel of the hearth.

Judith: I mean, he's my husband in this life.

Moira: Then, he found you before I did. Fancy that...as  
far away as Australia.

Judith: What happened to you, when the soldiers came?

Moira: Oh, they stripped me of my mortal garment. Such is the way of soldiers.

Judith: And my sister?

Moira: She grew up to become a very powerful sorceress in this house of Cailleach.

Judith: What about in this life? Is she alive?

Moira: No. She was your daughter, I saw her in the fire.

Judith: Sarah?

Moira: That's why you must bring her home. Her ashes must sit here between the stones of Perth and Fife.

Judith: How do you know?

Moira: I've been fortunate to live in this house all my life. The longer you live here, the more you will know. Cailleach will teach you through the stones.

*Judith gives the box back to Moira.*

Judith: I need to talk with my husband. He may not agree to buy this house.

Moira: Whether he agrees or not, this is your house. It's your wyrd.

Judith: My what?

Moira: Your destiny.

Judith: Destiny?

Moira: Aye. I'll talk to Patrick in the morning. He'll have the title signed over to you, so it's all legal.

Judith: Oh, no, I couldn't accept that. It's too much.

Moira: It's your inheritance and your obligation. You made a promise nearly two thousand years ago.

Judith: I'm sorry, this is very kind of you, but...

Moira: Can you walk away? Can you turn your back on the stones and leave them to ruin?

Judith: No. I don't want to do that.

Moira: Then you have no choice. Over lifetimes Cailleach calls us back to protect her circle.

*Pause*

Judith: It feels like a dream.

Moira: It's all a dream, daughter. Every life is a new dream, in and out, in and out, century after century, searching for your wyrd, searching for something you know is there, but you can't quite grasp. Every pathway is a dream. The question is, which dream do you trust?

Judith: I don't know.

Moira: Then sit in the stones of Cailleach for a while. Soon you will know.

Judith: Yes. Yes, I would like to do that.

Moira: I have sung for you. I have used all of my powers and those of the goddess to bring you here. To bring you home. All you have to do is stay.

*They sit, holding each other, looking into the fire. Music.*

The End.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

Those moments that enlighten us, whether it is through nature, whether it is through the work of the mind, through reading, through study...whatever extends us beyond ourselves into a broader understanding [of] the world beyond our own limits, those are sacred moments. (Interview, Andrew Bovell 2013)

Throughout this research I have addressed several key questions pertaining to the possibility of sacred theatre with a view towards writing and theorizing two of my own creative works. The overriding question in this enquiry was, “Is it possible to deliberately write sacred theatre: theatre that evokes a sacred experience in an audience?” In addressing this question my aim was to find a way to infuse my own spiritual longing into my work and to expand my own practice in order to create the kind of sacred and transformational theatre I admire in the work of other key practitioners. In order to do this, I looked at the theoretical underpinnings of sacred theatre as a possibility and also at several Australian plays. In my conclusions I aim to outline my findings in a way that may contribute to a conversation about the *possibility* of sacred theatre and to consolidate the theoretical and creative territory for future practitioners or theorists who may wish to pursue this possibility.

I began by outlining my own understanding of the sacred as an underlying set of relationships closer to atomic intelligence. Using some of the findings of quantum physics, my own definition of the sacred is that it exists as an ‘anterior’ and non-hierarchical web of interconnectedness between all things and beings. An experience of the sacred may give us a glimpse of this connection in moments that may be called epiphany, *sphota* or *noetic*. In my own formulation, a ‘sacred experience’ occasions the dissolution of boundaries between self and the world; it involves a phenomenological and ontological shift in perception close to Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of ‘reversibility’ and ‘flesh’. It is not a phenomenon of learned knowledge, but of perception. That such an experience is achievable in the theatre, has been the premise of this PhD thesis. I based this contention

on my own experiences in the theatre and on the writings of others who shared this ambition. However, is it possible to guarantee a specific audience experience when audiences bring their own horizons of expectations and interpretive fields to any performance or reading? Although influencing an audience response seems at first to be an impossible task, there are strategies to invite audiences to participate in the construction of meaning of a theatrical piece. These do not guarantee that the “meaning” or “message” will be uniformly received, nor do they guarantee a consistent experience, however the process of engaging the audience in the symbolic configuration of meaning, has a similar effect as ludic reconstruction in ritual. This involves not only a reconfiguration of the sign-signifier relationship, but also the provision of blanks or spaces in the transmission of information

As I investigated the possibilities suggested in the book *Sacred Theatre*, I found the definition from one of its contributors, Carl Lavery (2007), to be most useful: “The sacred [in theatre] is a liminal phenomenon, a logically impossible place where two opposing forces meet in synthesis that is characterized by disjunction” (34). This echoes Peter Brook’s observations that through the disruption of the rational, one gains a glimpse of the “world bubbling underneath”, and that this may be achieved by the “friction of unyielding opposites” (1968:57). Peter Malekin’s claim that theatre has the potential to enact space as a world of “forever becoming” (2007:51) and time as “eternal beginning” (55) also echoes Brook. This raised the important question for me, “How may this be achieved in praxis?”

Several useful concepts emerged from the writings found in *Sacred Theatre* (2007), including those most commonly associated with postmodernism such as ‘fissure’, ‘tearing apart’ and the erosion of socially constructed grand narratives. However, as Brook has observed, disruption is not enough and audiences quickly become neutralized by disjunction and “shock” (Brook, 1968: 62). As my own observations and examples reveal,

sacred theatre differs from postmodern theatre in that it offers an alternative unity outside of the socially constructed narrative: the “synthesis” mentioned by Lavery (2007) or the “world bubbling underneath” described by Brook. However, in the fictive world of theatre, that world underneath must be carefully constructed so that the audience may glimpse it through deliberately placed cracks in the unfolding narrative, no matter how disjunctive that narrative may be.

The underlying unity of an alternative world view needs to be carefully considered as part of the imagining of the piece. It must also have been embedded in its construction, either through writing or the performative processes. In other words, the alternative, underlying unity should be a deliberate inclusion in the overall discourse of the play. Again, Brook as practitioner, admits that this is extremely difficult to achieve. He warns that deliberate attempts to create sacred theatre are not always successful; practitioners cannot always catch what he calls the “Golden Fish”. However, they can weave a net best knotted through a construction of “moments” which open a portal into another world. (1993:95). Brook outlines the three elements necessary to construct these moments: ‘a paradox in thinking’, ‘collaboration in praxis’ and ‘the negotiation between the ordinary and the invisible’. I will discuss ‘collaboration in praxis’ in more detail, as this has emerged as a consistent process for making sacred theatre. First, I want to summarize my observations of the ways that the practitioner/writer may find this ‘paradox in thinking’ and the ‘negotiation between the ordinary and the invisible’.

A ‘paradox’ comprises two statements or concepts that seem to contradict each other, but both are true. One statement cannot negate the other. Brook’s ‘paradox in thinking’ towards the creation of a theatre piece involves embracing two contradictory ideas or ‘worlds’ and presenting them both with equal value. The presenting of one view or world and then tearing it apart, frequently associated with postmodernism, but also true

of realism and political theatre, is not enough. For paradox to occur, both views must coexist plausibly together even though the *logic* of their coexistence is problematic. Paradox does not challenge the verity of any view or statement, but challenges the binary logic of their contradiction. It cracks open the ‘us/them’, ‘Ich/du’, ‘self/other’ dichotomy to reveal it as a phenomenon of perception. When, as Brook suggests, paradox centres on the ‘negotiation between the ordinary and the invisible’, then the ‘invisible’ must be presented with equal plausibility to the ordinary. When this is achieved, neither the invisible nor the ordinary are undermined; what is undermined is the logic which claims they cannot coexist.

Sacred theatre then, may be achieved through the undermining of binary logic which claims that two seemingly contradictory planes of existence must negate each other. This does not mean that the ordinary and the invisible must be given equal representation within a piece. As Brook suggests, sometimes we may only catch a glimpse of the invisible in a moment, but the invisible or sacred world must have been thought through and given its own logic, equal to that of the ordinary. It must exist as a fictive construction in the imagination of the creator/s of the work as a plausible and logical alternative to the ordinary.

Most of the plays I have examined in this study achieve exactly this. Peter Kenna’s *A Hard God*, where the role of sacred is debated as part of the content of the play, is the exception. Every other example presents the ‘invisible’ as a plausible but logically impossible alternative to accepted reality. This could be the presence of a plausible but logically impossible character, such as ‘The Girl’ in Patrick White’s *The Ham Funeral* or the ‘I AM’ character in Kevin Gilbert’s *The Cherry Pickers*. It may be the presentation of a plausible but rationally unsustainable state of being, such as the dream states in Margaret Davis’ *Isis Dreaming*, the ‘ecstatic unity of temporality’ in Jenny Kemp’s *Still Angela*, or

the liminal states in Nicki Bloom's *Land & Sea*. It is the acknowledgement of a plausible if invisible web of 'reversible' relationships which comprise a way of seeing and being in the world, such as that found in Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman's *The 7 Stage of Grieving*. Or finally, it is a plausible cluster of logically impossible and a-causal incidents brought together to reveal the invisible hand of synchronicity in Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling*. With varying degrees of success, each of these plays presents the 'unpresentable' as a plausible logic equal to 'ordinary' rationality to create a paradox, thereby dissolving or deconstructing the very logic that makes them incompatible.

This deconstruction of logic is precisely what occurs in ritual and particularly in the liminal state achieved by participants in rites of passage. As Turner (1975, 1985) posits, the most important occurrence in the liminal state is the ludic deconstruction of the social order accompanied by a ludic reconstruction of the symbolic order. Those who participate in this process emerge with the shared experience of *communitas*. Theatre practitioner and scholar Richard Schechner theorizes that the theatre space itself occasions a liminal state for an audience. His company *The Performance Group* famously attempted to evoke an experience of *communitas* and ludic reconstruction through audience proximity to the action in space, thus physically inviting audiences into the symbolic world. Susan Broadhurst argues that artists such as Pina Bausch and Robert Wilson are engaged not so much in postmodern theatre, but in liminal theatre. She argues that these artists manage to collapse the hierarchy which places the linguistic order above all others and in so doing interrupt a singular, culturally ascribed reading of their work. This allows their audiences to experience a different kind of unity outside of the social order.

Several important techniques emerge from Schechner and Broadhurst's research, which can deconstruct the social and the symbolic order. Semiotic defamiliarization is the key. The sign-signifier relationship must shift from the real and ordinary to the unthinkable

and invisible within a single performance. Audiences learn to build new sign-signifier pathways and to value certain signs previously not valued. Writers and creators teach audiences by ascribing new significances to well-known and ‘assumed’ signs, as well as building new connections between signs. A case in point is the way the female body is first de-codified and then re-signified in Pina Bausch’s work, often through jarring and repetitive metaphors and physical violence. Another example is the way certain objects, such as the hat, in *When the Rain Stops Falling* gain new signification throughout the piece allowing audiences to participate in the construction of meaning by making new links between signs and metaphors woven into the work.

This is a process theorized by Pavis as vectorization. Here the sign is steadily disengaged from its everyday meaning and begins to assume its own meaning through its relationship with other signs. The effect is very similar to the ludic deconstruction that occurs in the liminal state of ritual. In *Rain*, the ritual passing of objects between the ‘ancestors’ in the last scene becomes a re-enactment of the complex network of human relationships that these objects have begun to signify. Their ritual passing reinforces the invisible order that has been carefully established throughout the play. More than this, it makes the audience participants in the ritual because they have been instrumental in ascribing meaning to those objects.

These paradoxical presentations of the invisible and the ordinary also provide possibilities for ways that the concepts of space ‘as a world of forever becoming’ and time ‘as an eternal beginning’ may be achieved in praxis. If the theatrical space is not overburdened by naturalistic furniture defining ‘place’, then the space can transform very quickly, simply by an actor turning around and entering a new world, such as achieved in *Still Angela* and *Land & Sea*. This is also achieved by uttering the simple words “Ah, there

you are” in *Rain*, instantly transporting us not only to a new place, but to many places within the same space (heterotopias).

The mutability of space is essential for both of my own creative works. In my play *Bird* the character illogically passes between a city dwelling and the Flinders Ranges simply by changing focus from seeing the paintings as objects within a place, to the paintings becoming the place accompanied by a simple shift in lighting. Similarly, in my second play *Wyrđ Song*, the synchronous coexistence of two places in different countries in the same theatrical space, allows for the illogical communication that occurs across these places through song. From my perspective as a writer, heterotopias are my new best friend. I acknowledge however, that heterotopias are not achieved without serious consideration of the logic of their coexistence. The possibility must be presented with the same value as the logical impossibility.

In their use of space as a ‘world of forever becoming’, the Bovell/Drummond/Valamanesh collaboration is masterful. Similarly, the non-linear presentation of time and use of vertical or synchronous time may give the impression of an ‘eternal beginning’. This is nowhere more evident than in Kemp’s *Still Angela* where the invisible and ordinary overlap in time, interrupting and influencing each other in ways outside of the rational. Kemp not only employs vertical time, presenting several time frames at once, as in Angela’s vortex moment in the desert, but also the reversibility of time where Angela may enter the past and assist her younger self. I attempted such a presentation of time in the many drafts of *Wyrđ*, but struggled to achieve it with any mastery. I conclude that such a presentation of time is possible but requires a great deal of work on the floor and in particular, collaboration in praxis.

Every one of my examples of Sacred Theatre written after 1975 was created as a collaborative process between writers, directors, writers as directors, designers,

choreographers, musicians and actors. As Peter Brook and Chris Drummond have strongly reiterated, collaboration is essential if the value placed on the linguistic order is to be challenged in favour of a poly-semiotic experience. More than that, the process of collaboration generates a kind of alchemy between ideas, images, sounds and performance that writers may then incorporate into the overall construction of a piece. This is particularly important when attempting to present the 'invisible' because often the invisible may not be revealed through language alone. Importantly, as Brook has said, often it is revealed in silence.

Reflecting on my own creative processes, in many ways the research itself provided a form of collaboration by introducing theoretical and practical concepts that I had not previously considered. However, it was in those moments of genuine collaboration with designers and dramaturges that the work progressed exponentially. The very nature of writing the PhD artefact is solitary and leaves the writer very much to their own devices. Writing plays within the academic environment is intrinsically problematic in that it sets up the potential for the creative work to be a literary artifact, rather than a performance process. I am extremely grateful that the Flinders University Drama Department recognized this potential problem and provided opportunities for me to work with designers, dramaturges and actors wherever possible. Working collaboratively with designers Victoria Lamb and Nic Mollison allowed me to envisage fluid, liminal and workable spaces where several time frames and locations could coexist. My collaboration with dramaturge Verity Laughton allowed me to interrogate the inconsistencies in the logic of *Bird*, so that the illogical world I was attempting to present had substance and plausibility. This is a crucial finding. No matter how much the writer disrupts the rational, there must be a unity of the aesthetic event; an alternative logic which is consistent and plausible for an audience.

Rosalba Clemente was instrumental in helping me to isolate the absolute essence of what I was trying to say in *Wyrd*. By helping me to realize that the impulse for this work was a spiritual longing born from the migrant experience, she allowed me to clarify the story. I was then able to discard all of the extraneous elements, to pare the play script down to an experience, rather than a history lecture. Having said this, I do not see the resulting scripts *Bird* and *Wyrd Song* as completed artifacts. Rather, I see them as blueprints for further collaboration. For me, the process will not be complete until I see the work on the stage. Therefore, I must remain open to the idea that any further development of these works will involve radical negotiation and rewriting. I must also be open to the idea that I may have to pick up the gauntlet and direct these pieces myself, since the statements they make could already be too fixed and concrete for a collaborative process to occur.

With regard to my very first question, “Is it possible to deliberately write Sacred Theatre?”, I believe the answer is yes. However, in order to do so, a writer must move away from some of the basic practices of playwriting. “What does your character want?” is an essential dramaturgical question, but should not necessarily drive the plot of the play. Story is also an essential ingredient but only if there is a counter story, an invisible one that hums underneath as a paradoxical world view, an alternative way of seeing, state of being, or form of healing. Ideally, there is a plurivocality of world views and stories which are sometimes contradictory or logically incompatible. Much playwriting pedagogy encourages writers to develop conflict as the cornerstone of drama. In sacred theatre it is not conflict but paradox that reigns; the unsettling coexistence of two logically plausible worlds that interrupt binary logic. As Brook has pointed out, creating sacred theatre involves a ‘negotiation’ between the invisible and the ordinary which involves the audience in the construction of new meaning. It is a balancing act, which requires enormous skill and arguably many minds in collaborative praxis.

The process of writing *Wyrð* points up the importance of this negotiation. In writing that play, I aimed to present the alternative cosmology and world view of the Scottish Picts as a way of privileging the female sacred through Goddess worship and matrilineal genealogies. I even attempted to deconstruct Lacan's 'symbolic order' using Kristeva's suggestion of ancient and poetic language. However, by trying to convince my audience of the authenticity of this alterity, I created a world that was completely alien to an audience. I engaged in what Schechner calls "the cultural zoo approach" (1976:214). I did not achieve a negotiation between the invisible and the ordinary, because my pen fell too heavily on the worldview of the Picts, thereby turning the sacred and invisible into a new hegemony. A light touch in the negotiation between the invisible and visible is imperative.

This doesn't mean that the alternative cosmology or world view hasn't been thoroughly researched and considered; indeed, it must be plausible if it is to create paradox. However, it must be glimpsed in a moment: the passing of a hat, the message of a bird, standing in the desert or hearing a song from far away. Sacred theatre requires the careful deconstruction of the ordinary to reveal that glitch; that crack in the façade, where the alternative and invisible may present itself in a single moment. The combined effect of these cumulative moments suggests the possibility of an intelligent order 'wholly other' to the ordinary bubbling underneath. I believe that through the careful construction of these moments it is possible to deliberately write sacred theatre.

In this regard, the collaborative dramaturgy of Brink Productions in South Australia has provided the most beneficial framework. With a focus towards transcendent theatre, the audience experience of "communion" and a firm commitment to the relationship between collaboration and rigorous writing, Brink provides the opportunities and incentives to strive towards a theatre that may evoke a phenomenological shift in

audience perception towards healing, unity and wholeness. Although I was not able to replicate Brink's ideal framework in my creative process, I believe it is one that provides a step forward. Writing sacred theatre is possible for the solo playwright if the intention is clear and the writer is willing to experiment with processes which stray away from teleological, linear story-telling. If, however, the conditions are ideal, such as the collaborative dramaturgy provided by Brink for *When the Rain Stops Falling*, then, writing sacred theatre can be exemplary. I hope that some of the techniques and processes uncovered by this research present more possibilities for future practitioners, including myself.

For me sacred theatre provides an acknowledgement of the underlying connection between all things. Through paradox it evokes a phenomenological and ontological shift in perception of the separation between self and the world. It provides reinforcement of a way of seeing and being in the world that is healing and connective without being religious. It appeals to *gnosis*; the sensation that we already know of a world beyond ourselves. We often reject this knowledge because it is subsumed by the rationality of the everyday. Sacred theatre offers the possibility to connect us to the anterior of things, by openly acknowledging and asking us to consider not only what we see, but what we don't see.

## APPENDIX ONE: BIRD READING SURVEY RESPONSES 5<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2014

### SURVEY RESPONSES

In the scale provided, please circle your responses from 1 -8, where 1 = Not applicable and 8 = Very Highly Applicable

1Not	2 Very Low	3 Low	4 Medium -Low	5 Medium	6 Medium-High	7High	8Very High
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Total survey numbers are recorded in bold.

1. I adhere to a formal religious practice.

1. <b>14</b>	2. <b>2</b>	3. <b>2</b>	4. <b>2</b>	5. <b>1</b>	6. <b>1</b>	7. <b>0</b>	8. <b>0</b>
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2. I consider myself to have spiritual beliefs outside of formal religion.

1. <b>1</b>	2. <b>5</b>	3. <b>1</b>	4. <b>1</b>	5. <b>4</b>	6. <b>0</b>	7. <b>4</b>	8. <b>6</b>
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3. I am an atheist.

1. <b>6</b>	2. <b>1</b>	3. <b>1</b>	4. <b>4</b>	5. <b>1</b>	6. <b>0</b>	7. <b>4</b>	8. <b>5</b>
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4. I have experienced moments in my life which I hold in great reverence or as a point of realization.

1. <b>0</b>	2. <b>0</b>	3. <b>0</b>	4. <b>0</b>	5. <b>2</b>	6. <b>4</b>	7. <b>8</b>	8. <b>8</b>
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5. I consider the above experience to be a "sacred" experience.

1. <b>6</b>	2. <b>2</b>	3. <b>1</b>	4. <b>1</b>	5. <b>4</b>	6. <b>2</b>	7. <b>2</b>	8. <b>4</b>
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6. I have had a similar experience in the theatre

1. <b>3</b>	2. <b>0</b>	3. <b>3</b>	4. <b>1</b>	5. <b>5</b>	6. <b>2</b>	7. <b>6</b>	8. <b>2</b>
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7. This play/reading reminded me of a previous experience of reverence or realization

1. <b>5</b>	2. <b>1</b>	3. <b>1</b>	4. <b>1</b>	5. <b>6</b>	6. <b>5</b>	7. <b>2</b>	8. <b>1</b>
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8. This play/reading reminded me of an experience of the sacred.

1. 3	2. 1	3. 4	4. 4	5. 2	6. 6	7. 2	8. 0
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9. This play/reading impacted on the way I think about the sacred in my life.

1. 3	2. 1	3. 1	4. 5	5. 4	6. 5	7. 1	8. 2
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10. This play/has the potential to evoke a sacred experience for an audience through:

Poetic Language

1. 0	2. 0	3. 0	4. 1	5. 3	6. 7	7. 6	8. 5
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Performance

1. 0	2. 0	3. 1	4. 0	5. 3	6. 6	7. 7	8. 5
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Visual Language

1. 0	2. 0	3. 0	4. 0	5. 5	6. 3	7. 8	8. 6
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**Comments: The following comments are anonymous.**

“A very powerful play and thought provoking. I felt honoured to hear it.”

“This play has the opportunity to be a visceral experience for the audience – drawing on weaving words, music and visual energy into a feeling experience beyond the conventional theatre structure.”

“I really appreciate the contemplation of the sacred experience in Australia as a non-Indigenous person, in relationship to the land and Indigenous culture.”

“A very inventive way of looking at sacred sites and understanding them. Lyrical and highly theatrical.”

“I really enjoyed the themes and imagery throughout this play. I like that none of the themes are too heavily weighted. The play seems to send a feeling or and overall “vibe” or possibly a “sacred experience” rather than a message which I feel a lot of theatre I see, does. I recognize the characters and the feelings the characters experience.”

“Addressing an interesting question, finding the sacred through a medium that is collaborative. Can’t wait to see how performance informs this writing.”

“Keep writing! You’re onto something!”

“The word “sacred” blocks many of my responses and distorts the conclusions one might reach based on my answers. I believe others genuinely believe things to be sacred and I respect that and was moved by that in the play.”

“The mention of “Heathgate” as a specific mining company was problematic for me. A less specific reference would be more effective in keeping us in the story.”

"I would say the play has the potential to evoke a sacred experience for an audience. The poetic language used certainly contributes and the use of paintings was very effective, engaging and mysterious. I had difficulty connecting with the oil executive, but I loved the lizard and the sound of celery crunching."

"Your play explores such a huge concept that I find it difficult to express my opinion of the work. I find myself wondering what I think of the sacred in theatre and in my own life. What I can say is that I appreciated how, for a tightly controlled piece of writing, you have left room for the collaborative element. In the microscopic view I found language use that was beautiful, poetic and wry."

END OF SURVEY

## **APPENDIX TWO: USB DRIVE PROVIDED: SUPPORT MATERIAL FOR BIRD**

### a) Animations by Nic Mollison DVD

1. The Road – 00:09
2. The Gorge – 03:58
3. The Lizard – 05:57
4. Kevin Morgan's House – 07:10

### b) Song Extract Audio Visual

### c) *Bird* Full Movie of Play Reading

### d) Song Extract Audio

### e) *Bird* Full Reading Audio

Access to Images 1 and 2

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