Depicting the Gorgon: the making of theatre about historic-political trauma

by

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research PhD consists of an exegesis on the dramatic depiction of extreme (traumatic) historic-political events from the point of view of the craft of the playwright, and a related creative outcome, a play. In particular, it considers contemporary theatre artists' depictions of people subject to deliberate and significant violence for political ends.

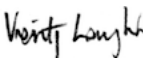
Firstly, the project looks at understandings of the traumatic, the complexities of memory, and the issues of ethics and authenticity in the use of testimony in contemporary theatre. Secondly, it considers the differing claims for "text" versus "*mise en scène"* in 20th and 21st century dramatic depictions of traumatic political events. Thirdly, reflecting the Polish-Australian subject matter of the play, it compares theatre made in contemporary Australia with work created in Poland post-World War II, heavily influenced as the latter was by the memory of an extreme national experience of trauma. Through interviews with Australian creative practitioners, mainly playwrights, the exegesis discusses features of Australian theatre culture that have influenced Australian work in this area. A second set of interviews with different generations of Australian-Polish Jewish and Gentile survivors of the Holocaust provides historical amplification of research conclusions as well as approved content for the play itself.

In the exegesis, several methodologies are employed: the use of iterative cyclic webs to depict the creative/analytic tensions of practice-led research; an artistic audit of the work of other practitioners; a description of the author's poetics with regard to the creative outcome, the play; and, uniting all of the above, a case study of the project overall. The case study specifically explores writing about the long-term individual and communal impact of traumatic events in a new full-length, large-scale play, *Bloodlines, a Polish Memory*, based on the experiences and memories of members of the Polish diaspora who sought a new life in Australia after World War II.

The following is a list of keywords found in this exegesis: theatre, political, trauma, memory, authenticity, Poland, practice-led research, creativity

DECLARATION

The work in this exegesis 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 reference to any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed…  …… (Verity Laughton)

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This project constitutes practice-led research into theatre of traumatic events in the contemporary West. By 'theatre' I mean a crafted (and in the twenty-first century often necessarily self-reflective) narrative told in the present time through the bodies and voices of actors, a ritual experience shared by a community which has come together for the purpose; and where, through engaging in an observed interaction between character and event, a society can confront its anxieties, desires, and questions about who and what and why we are here. The related field of 'performance' where nuances of both intention and presentation interrogate performativity itself is outside this present scope.

Firstly, the project investigates contemporary theatre artists – in particular in Australia and Poland – who have made theatre about overwhelming barbarities. Key markers are the treatment of memory, an ethical awareness of authenticity, and the achievement of tonal accuracy. Secondly, the project offers a case study of the writing of a large-scale non-documentary play about a Polish/Australian trauma that incorporates ambiguities of memory and is informed by contemporary postmodern and postdramatic practice but does not relinquish the centrality of text.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide an introductory context, including a literature review. Chapter 3 considers the phenomenon of trauma itself and its alliance to the theatrical avant-garde. It also introduces a recurring linkage of trauma with authenticity through discussion of a hinge work of avant-garde French playwright, Jean Genet. Chapter 4 addresses examples of sub-genres of documentary theatre that bring focus to ethical complications of witnessing. Chapter 5 considers the often-denigrated possibilities of text to evoke the traumatic through key works of selected twentieth-century playwrights. Chapter 6 addresses counterclaims of the primacy of the *mise en scène* through observation of works of Polish artists, Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor. Chapter 7 observes Australian artists of trauma across a range of genres with special attention to issues of cultural shame. Chapter 8 offers a model of research findings about both practice and research that may apply to a creative work that evokes landscape, culture and ineradicable loss through destabilized fluidities of memory.

Given that the primary research interviews undertaken for both exegesis and play are a considerable document–8 interviews of Creative Practitioners and 8 interviews of survivors

and their descendants comprising 262 pages of interview in all–a section entitled *Notes on Sources* (pp. 172-180) presents some conclusions taken from both sets of interviews (which are available on request in their entirety). The *Notes on Sources* also detail the ways in which this primary research impacted on the Creative Project. The Iterative Webs are included from pp.181-188.

Lastly, the project offers a play, *Bloodlines, a Polish Memory,* (pp. 96-171) evolved from a combination of documentary research and interview. The play has been crafted with the methods, approaches and technical solutions that may contribute to conscious creativity in a traumatic subject area as a core concern.

1.1 Why This Project?

This project addresses the question, 'How do you write about trauma?' My own provocation for that question arose from the research for a previous play of mine, *Long Tan*. That play was based on the Australian Army's major battle in the Vietnam War, the Battle of Long Tan in August 1966. The script–my first genuinely large-scale work, with twelve actors–was derived mostly from the words of veterans of the battle via a series of interviews. Some way into these interviews, however, I hit a problem. The battle proper–of ferocious intensity–had lasted for between four and five hours. These men had all been present in it, fighting for their lives; but they remembered several key events utterly differently. They were, of course, suffering from post-traumatic stress whereby memories are carved into the psyche but present subjectively, unpredictably and sometimes contradictorily. In the end, I found that the only way to acknowledge this, and to be true to them, and to the story itself, was to make the fact that 'soldiers remember things differently' part of the fabric of the play (Laughton 2018, p.20). I had no theory behind this at this stage, but I'm glad that my instincts were sound.

Then, in 2015, I read Timothy Snyder's 2010 book, *Bloodlands*, about the middle European Baltic states during World War II. In it I found a snippet about two Polish sisters: Janina Dowbor, Poland's first female airline pilot, and her sister Agnieska, a Resistance fighter. Both had been killed in 1942: Janina by the Russians in the Katyn Forest massacre, and Agnieska a few weeks later by the Nazis in a Polish forest near Palmiry (Snyder 2010, p. 149). Their fate was symbolic of Poland, poised between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. They were two sisters, and I am one of three sisters, so, it resonated, it called me, and

the Dowbor sisters and the complexities behind their fate became possible elements in an as yet unwritten but hopefully again large-scale play.

Thus, the context for my choice of topic was–wanting to understand how to depict whole-society suffering and evil on a big stage, and how to depict those captured by its aftermath. I wanted to know by what means contemporary theatre artists have addressed, with ambition, the political and historical furies of their time. How had they done this in the English-speaking world? And with what specificities? And in Australia, too?

Theatre of traumatic events, like all contemporary theatre, grew out of the crucible of the early avant-garde (Innes 1993). From the late nineteenth century, revolutionary utopian theatre artists created text-based, but visually arresting, work that challenged then-conventional understandings of language and form. Other genres evolved, including several forms of documentary theatre influenced initially by Bertolt Brecht and Edwin Piscator's work and theories (Horsman 2010; Listoe 2004). After the high peak of modernism in the mid-20th century, a postmodernist approach–still reflected in the fluid truths of the current era–became dominant (Auslander 2006). A side-development was the 'postdramatic' as proposed by Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999, that is, collage-like, intuitive and highly imagistic theatre that builds its 'story' as much in the subjectivity of the audience as it does through a sense of crafted authorial narrative (Jürs-Munby 2009; Lehmann 2006) (Lehmann 1999 trans. Jürs-Munby 2006; Jürs-Munby 2009). Recent work has pushed even further into 'theatres of engagement', a performance paradigm that centres around hybridised, multi-platform and highly mediatised material alongside active spectatorship (Lavender 2016).

Pertinent to this project is the fact that during the same period as the development of avant-garde theatre, psychoanalytic researchers were uncovering the human response to what was at first called 'hysteria' (Shiraldi 2009; Van Der Hart, Brown & van der Kolk 1989b). In the late nineteenth century neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot, suggested that this behaviour was an encapsulation of "a coherent group of associated ideas which install themselves in the mind in the fashion of a parasite, remain isolated from all the rest, and may be explained outwardly by corresponding motor phenomena" (cited in Janet 1901, p. 267). Charcot's work was amplified in clinical practice by Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud (Carruth 1995, pp. 52-3; Young 1999, pp. 51-66). Their insights led to a body of work where psychoanalytic understandings illuminated the dissociative impact of such traumas upon narrative and

memory (Caruth 1995, p.7; Gluhovic 2013]. The key finding in that complex field is that ordinary memory, however insistent or unpleasant, is a process of linear recall which is under the conscious control of the individual concerned. Post-traumatic memory–an unpredictable eruption of the original experience recurring in the sufferer–is not (Cash & Weiner 2006).

As a working playwright, my prime interest is in text. Yet, some of my own great theatre experiences have been where the emphasis was on the *mise en scène*. Theatre of trauma brings the relative claims of text versus *mise en scène* into focus in that it is often asserted that the traumatic, being beyond reason, is beyond speech (Van Helphen 1999, p. 34 cited in Viljoen 2013, pp. 66-9). It is certainly beyond everyday speech, as my memories of Australian veterans trying to describe the battle of Long Tan would attest, or as–in this project–some of my Polish Jewish witnesses of Auschwitz and other atrocities stated (Kolt 2017, Appendix B; Saaroni 2017 Appendix B). I would suggest, however, that some theatrical wordsmiths *have* effectively conveyed the traumatic, but that it takes great skill and talent to do so. Many of them are postmodern writers. Much of this work is quite short in duration, although precursor Jean Genet's *The Screens*, for example, discussed in Chapter 3, is manifestly not (Genet 1988).

1.2 Methodology

The middle chapters of this exegesis comprise an artistic audit of how theatre artists have incorporated the issue of trauma. Much of this work is political, though some is not. Using the lens of genre, the chapters analyse the relationship between play and event through contrasting temporal, temperamental and intentional foci in a range of artists of broad motivational and geographic spread. The aim is an overview of different artistic perceptions of the 'truths' of the past, and different artistic choices made in how to convey them. Such choices range from the ultra-literal to the metaphoric. Some strategise the text itself, others the staging, still others the active participation of an audience. The different strategies used by selected artists to convey particularities and generalities of work about trauma provide a framework from which to interrogate my own creative practice.

Harris and Holman Jones have said

> A search of doctoral theses in Australia, the UK and the United States shows that of the many complete PhDs that included a stage script as a creative component, only a handful focus on performance writing as a *writing practice*…Scholarly work within (related) disciplines has been, for the most part, focused on published plays as texts to be hermeneutically mined, on the history of staging, publication and performance of plays in the canon…or on the social and cultural contexts in which these canonical plays were written, published or performed…Writing for Performance scholarship (on the other hand) has been more about writing for actors than about writing as a distinct creative and research practice (Harris A, & Holman-Jones 2016 , p. 175).

I would like to address this gap by writing specifically about that writing practice. My task has been to uncover through my research, and model through my playwriting, pedagogically useful writing strategies as a contribution to my field of knowledge. It has not always been a comfortable process. Like many creatives, I experienced a certain cognitive dissonance between the twinned tasks. The process of finding my way to a fruitful link between what to me comes naturally–writing my plays, hitherto a largely intuitive undertaking once the initial subject research had been completed–and what I needed to acquire–a systematically rigorous rather than creatively opportunistic understanding of the critically determined achievements of others–was confronting. As Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe stated:

> Practice-led research, particularly for the practice-led researcher, is unruly, ambiguous and marked by extremes of interpretive anxiety for the reflexive researcher. It is this way because it is deeply emergent in nature and the need to tolerate the ambiguity and make it sensible through heightened reflexivity is part of what it is to be a successful practice-led researcher in the creative arts (Smith & Dean 2009, p. 220).

I would attest to this ambiguity being part of the challenge of undertaking this work. Dealing with the impact of traumatic events and memories on those human beings whose stories form the primary research of this project has also taken a toll. It is a perhaps obvious finding of this research but worth stating, that one needs to consciously put in place defences against too much dubiety, whilst at the same time accepting the lack of closure that is part of both the creative and the traumatic. Trauma does not end. A work about trauma can only affirm an ambiguous ending or it is not true to the experience. It has been a mental and emotional tussle to find a way through to research conclusions on the one hand for the exegesis and creative openness on the other for the play. This state is typical of research-led practice but is perhaps brought into higher relief when attempting to deal with the traumatic.

With some qualifications, to trace this process I adopt a methodology outlined by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean of an ‘iterative cyclic web’ that sits in association with theories of creativity and guides to writing practice whose efficacy I have valued in past teaching

activities (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Rico 2000; Smith and Dean 2009; Van Itallie 1997; Yorke 2014). A second methodology is an outline of the poetics of my practice in this particular case, which includes within it primary research from survivors on the one hand and creative practitioners on the other, and–a third and perhaps key approach–a case study of the writing of *Bloodlines.* I offer the evolving diagrams of my own 'iterative webs', as a variation of Smith and Dean's model as an appendix (Smith & Dean 2009, p. 20) (see Appendix C). I address both poetics and the case study as the subject of my final chapter. In the text of the exegesis itself, I flip between a personal and an analytical voice in reflection of a working method where both aspects of intellect consciously engage with each other.

Thus, in a conversation between theory, data collection (reading, listening, spectatorship and interviewing) and writing, the exegesis investigates complications of memory and testimony in theatrical narratives of traumatic events, and the ways in which such accumulated understandings may usefully shape new work. It addresses selected works of other artists that are emblematic of possible artistic choices through a framework of key genres, in particular noting issues of ethics and authenticity in documentary theatre. The project includes interviews with creative practitioners in Australia, whose work offers insight into Australian singularities regarding trauma. To illuminate aspects of memory and inter-generational trauma, it also includes interviews with survivors of a large-scale traumatic event, World War II in Poland, and a range of their descendants. The creative project–a play–is offered as a case study that tests the research conclusions by providing an example of a new work that embeds understandings of culture, landscape, memory and loss in a Polish story within an Australian theatre landscape.

1.3 Research Questions

The project asks: how have a range of contemporary theatre artists–in particular in Australia and Poland–made theatre about overwhelming barbarities? And, is it possible to create a large-scale (Australian) non-documentary theatre work that does justice to the traumatic in a way that acknowledges complexities of memory and is informed by contemporary postmodern and postdramatic practice, but does not relinquish the centrality of text?

1.4 Questions, Problems, Outcomes

In Europe and North America work about traumatic events has often been large-scale, for example, many works of auteur directors Wilson, Brook, and Ariane Mnouchkine, and the site-specific work of newer companies like *dreamspeakthink* (Lavender 2016, pp. 65-76). In Australia, however, works made have tended to be smaller in scale, though of course there are exceptions (McCallum 2009, Milne 2004). Despite the recent staging of Andrew Bovell's *The Secret River* in 2013-17, which is certainly large-scale, and the past staging of pieces like Nigel Jamieson's *Gallipoli* in 2008 and Nigel Triffit's *The Fall of Singapore* in 1987*,* it is arguable that this imbalance by and large holds, though the very recent staging (2018/9) of S. Shakthidharan's Australian/Sri Lankan *Counting and Cracking* is a welcome departure from this tendency (Shakthidharan 2019). European theatre practice has also been shaped by the theorising of artists as much as by critics or academics, for example, the impact of Artaud, and Brook, of Meyerhold and Brecht on their peers. It is incontestable that, despite commentary by practitioners, particularly in the field of verbatim (Oades 2010; Valentine 2018; Williams 2014), no major artist has arisen in Australia whose body of theoretical work is as significant as his or her body of produced work. [1]

Two dominant issues in theatre of trauma, namely ethics and authenticity, come into high relief through the prism of documentary theatre (Trezise and Wake 2013). A preoccupation with the authentic again goes back to the avant-garde. In this case, avant-gardists wanted above all to accurately reflect the 'real' nature of the human; and the 'real' nature of the bourgeois-materialist society in which they found themselves (Berghaus 2005). The later impact of Brecht's re-positioning of the role of 'epic theatre' as truth-telling to society may well have led to a consequent claiming of the moral high ground in work that champions a cause and hopes for a result (Borowski & Sugiera in Jürs-Munby, Carroll & Giles 2013, pp. 69-71). This project argues that the obligation to authenticity may well be simply that the artist remain true to the *affect*[2] – the vivid resonance of the moment – of the traumatic experience/situation, as well as its accepted facts, which is usually an accomplishment of tone.

[1] The field of performance studies has a stronger basis in theory, but whilst some of this work has an indirect influence on key works and artists, it is largely outside the framework of this project (Hamilton 2008; Allen & Perlman 1999

[2] For clarity I have used italics here but elsewhere in the text have assumed recognition of the word in theoretical and common usage

There is also the ethical dimension. Deconstruction theory has made clear that no text is innocent; and no narrator can be entirely neutral (Gough 2008). In a postmodern world, an artist can and almost certainly should build an awareness of such complexities into an audience's reception of the material (Fisher 2011; Parthenau 2018). Another point is that no text that is going to 'live' in a theatre will not be, however lightly, revised for the ear in order to deliver to an audience the emotional, if not the precise literal truth of the telling (Oades 2010, pp. 59-63). Yet, much work to do with the traumatic does rely for audience impact on the assumption of the incontrovertible 'facts' of testimony (Martin 2013; Edgar 2008). As Amanda Fisher discusses, any artist working in this field needs to work within strict ethical guidelines (Fisher 2011). This project proposes some specific strategies to do so.

1.5 Pathways

Genre categories are constructed after the fact, but they are useful. Postdramatic theories, for example, offer an arena in which the subjectivity of the artist/maker can be viewed in a way that is arguably more sophisticated than the assumptions allied with much documentary theatre-making. Because postdramatic theatre presents experience through a web of associations rather than a series of explanations or revelations, it builds its (shifting) 'story' via the subjectivities of its author, characters and situation as well as in the subjectivity of the individual spectator in a highly nuanced exchange between creator, creation and recipient. Postdramatic techniques, as explicated by Lehmann (1999) and others, are likely to appear in works that reference the post-traumatic simply because they foreground the subjective, but do not actively work to suspend disbelief. They may thus offer a way to problematize and perhaps solve issues of ethics and authenticity that sit with such complexity within post-trauma as a whole (Jürs-Munby 2009).

The current ultra-mediatised era also offers insight into subjectivity. Recent works described by Andy Lavender, for example, as 'theatres of engagement' feature practitioners who use a specifically audience-interactive practice to depict states of being peculiar to 21st century life by replicating the new norm of continually framed and reframed linkages through media. For some, this work seems to have a bearing on the post-traumatic (Lavender 2016, p. 27). But it could also be asserted that most of this work is 'about' living within a peculiarly modern existential ambiguity, which is not the task of confronting trauma, except indirectly.

At the very least it is a different kind of trauma than the one presented by the ripping of a personal and communal ontology by a malignant other.

It is relevant to questions of landscape, nationality and culture in my play, that many of the works of precursor postdramatic artists Kantor and Grotowski came in a response–sometimes veiled–to the horrors of World War II in Poland. Their work does use text, but its major impact is via the design and directorial overview (Gluhovic 2013; Romanska 2014; Schechner & Wolford 1997). Both these Polish theatre artists, who were lionized in the West for their originality, were, however, greatly influenced by the Polish Romantics, in particular by Adam Mickiewicz, Stanisław Wyspianski and by the Polish avant-gardist, S.I. Witkiewicz (Witkacy) (Gerould 1997; Kowalczyk, n.d.; Segel 1977); As such, rather than being global originals, they were so very Polish. The extraordinary tonal qualities of Kantor's work, for example, sit within the Polish tradition of *kynicism*–a deadpan treatment of horror that uses savage understatement and unfunny humour to confront the reader/audience with unbearable pain (Sloterdijk cited in Romanska 2014, p. 67); and the religiosity of Grotowski's work has a clear derivation in the overwhelming and particular power of the Polish Roman Catholic church (Innes 1981, pp 159-63; Saaroni 2018, Appendix B; Schechner & Wolford 1997, pp. 1-2). Language, nation, history and culture must surely affect representation no less in Australia than in Poland.

1.6 Result

Australia is part of the contemporary West, and Australian artists have been influenced by all the movements discussed above. There is much moving work that negotiates the emotional battlefield of the traumatic. Enoch and Mailman's standout postmodern monologue, *7 Stages of Grieving* is an obvious example (Enoch & Mailman 2002). Jenny Kemp's moving and ambiguous *The Black Sequin Dress* is another (Kemp 1996). But, notwithstanding some exceptions detailed later, we have been reluctant as a theatre nation to take on the non-documentary epic in arenas of our own trauma other than the domestic (*Cloudstreet, The Black Sequin Dress*) or the military (*Gallipoli* and *The Fall of Singapore*), though there is now a body of work about refugees which may arguably be changing this imbalance (Balfour 2009). However, this is often very specific subject matter with a politico-pedagogical intent (Hazou 2009).

As a working playwright, I intend that this project will demonstrate a range of theatre-making practices, with text as part but not whole of the 'writing'. I seek to give insight into an evocation of memory and a manipulation of tone that will translate to a large-scale, globally-relevant work about an aspect of our national history. I also hope to uncover in what way the Australian works on difficult subjects might be 'so very Australian', and to consider if the denial of Indigenous Australian dispossession particular to our current culture might have parallels with Polish responses to the tragedy of Polish Jews.

Chapter 2: **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This project engages with the response of stage writers to events of mass suffering over the last hundred-plus years through a framework of practice-led research. This implies an overview of trauma, memory, and mass and individual human psychology in relation to barbarous acts. It requires analysis of contemporary theatre in the English-speaking world, including how genre specificities have shaped theatrical response. Given that the play, *Bloodlines*, is set largely in Poland, Polish history, selected Polish artists and the Polish emigré experience in Australia are also relevant, as are Australian works about traumatic subjects that demonstrate aspects of Australian culture and history. The methodological tools combine an audit of the work of others with a case study of the play, *Bloodlines*, and include the writer's poetics in a framework of practice-led research modelled via a series of iterative cyclic webs (Kroll & Harper 2012, pp. 14-33; Meyrick 2014; Smith & Dean 2009, pp. 1-38). The reading behind this is outlined below.

2.1 Background:

2.1.1 Theatre

The history of 20th century theatre is one of reaction to theatre as a performable literary text based on classic Aristotelian unities of time, place and action, grounded in theme, and explicated through character and dialogue. This reaction began in the nineteenth century with a refutation of the Classicism of the Enlightenment via the passion of the Romantics that folded into a turn of the century avant-garde theatre, closely allied to the political utopianism of the time (Brockett 1988; Kelly 1982). This theatre, powered by the 'make-it-new' of modernism was characterised by "a distinctive ideology (of) anarchic primitivism and radical politics…" (Innes 1993, p.4), and led to a schism between writer-oriented, text-based material and works dominated by the *mise en scène* and the body in space, which privileges an auteur director (Berghaus 2005; Innes 1981). Its aim was psychological and political change.

Simultaneous to the rise of the European avant-garde, researchers were uncovering the reactive mental disarrangement now known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the late

nineteenth century, neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot suggested that "problems of suggestibility…and hysterical attacks…are dissociative problems – the result of having endured unbearable experiences" (cited in Freud et al. 1953, pp. 189-221). Studies detail Charcot's, Pierre Janet's and Sigmund Freud's initial insights plus their growing confirmation of the disorder's impact on memory (Carruth 1995, p. 52 -53; Malkin 1999; Marshall 2016, p. 9; Young 1999, pp. 51-66). These understandings have been amplified in ongoing psychological practice (Reaveley et al. 2010, pp. 25 - 37).

Many of the great theatre artists of the 20th century were writers of deeply verbal texts, including the fountainhead of influence, Samuel Beckett (Bair 1978; Connor (ed and intro) in Beckett 2010; Tiggs 1991). As the cultural paradigm of the times slipped from modernist certainties to postmodern fluidities, others continued to work within a narrative tradition, but not a classic one, for example, Peter Weiss and Jean Genet (Funburgh 2004; White 2004; Williams 1988, pp. 53-60). Later influential 20th century European and English-speaking postmodern artists included Harold Pinter (UK) Jerzy Grotowski (Poland), Robert Lepage (Canada) and Sam Shepard (US), many of whom made productions of exceptional intensity, and often scale (Dundjerovic 2007; Inan 2005; Lehmann 2006; Miller 2007; Romanska 2014; Schechner & Worlford 1997). Whilst particular productions are not definitive, as a group they could be said to aim for a theatre that is essentially pluralist, disorienting and performative containing, in Elinor Fuch's 1983 description "fragmented, flowing and uncertain identities" (Fuchs cited in Auslander 2006, p. 103).

The evolution of the postdramatic–arguably a sub-genre of the postmodern–was not purely a theatrical one. For example, the work of premier postdramatic artist, the American, Robert Wilson, grew as much out of visual art in New York in the 1960s and 1970s as it did out of theatre practice (Shevtosa 2007, p. 16-25). And, the German, Heiner Müller, the postdramatic writer par excellence, and Wilson's frequent collaborator, came to his practice via theatrical experiments of form influenced by the work of Brecht, and an intellectual confrontation with deep contradictions of the personal with the political in postwar Communist East Germany (Kalb 1998; Lehmann 2006; Malkin 1999). Karen Jürs-Munby asserts a link between the postdramatic and the posttraumatic experience (Jürs-Munby 2009). For example, she argues that only postdramatic theatre–having at its disbursed centre the fluidities of memory and subjectivity and eschewing the mimetic stalwarts of fictive plot based on conflict between psychologically recognizable characters–can do justice to

existential apprehensions provoked by unconditional barbarity (Jürs-Munby 2009, p. 1). This is a dramaturgy that moves towards a postponed gestalt of the un-nameable rather than an immediate catharsis of logical shock.

In Poland, despite exceptions, many of the signature elements of the postdramatic can be seen in the work of Polish literary and theatre practitioners as they evolved alongside the political circumstances of 20th century Poland (Romanska 2014, pp. 8, 81,102; Sieradzki 2004, p. 4). Particularly influential were the actor-focused presentations generated by Jerzy Grotowski in his Theatre Laboratory in Wroclaw in the 1960s (Schechner & Worlford 1997) and the international impact of Tadeusz Kantor's highly visual oeuvre in the 1970s (Gluhovic 2013; Romanska 2014).

In Australia, on the other hand, whilst Australian performance practitioners have been influenced by postdramatic techniques (Hamilton 2008), much Australian work in that genre has been essentially that of cultural provocateurs, for example, the Sydney Front's *The Pornography of Performance* in 1989 (Hamilton 2008, pp. 15-21; Lehmann 2006, p. 4). Later work, such as the oeuvre of Jenny Kemp, is perhaps more about personal and domestic female psychic struggle than, specifically, the traumatic (Kemp 1996, 2002; Varney & Fensham 1999). More traditional Australian playwrights, in their turn, have written powerful narrative-based works about occasions of suffering, dealing, for example, with political convulsion–Stephen Sewell's 2003 *Myth, Propaganda, and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America* (Sewell 2004), or Caucasian/ Australian Indigenous colonial interactions– Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day* (Bovell 2001). These works, despite elements of the abstract, have been essentially naturalistic (McCallum 2009, pp. 222-223; pp. 362-3).

Theatre of trauma is often associated with the many sub-genres of documentary theatre (Hammond & Stewart 2008; Martin 2013; Olendahl-James 2017;Trezise & Wake 2013; Valentine 2018). The immense complexity of telling the stories of real peoples' lives and suffering for the entertainment and edification of others via a range of presentations, all of which rely on their "reality effect" (cited in Martin 2013, p. 5) has produced a body of perceptive and insightful commentary (Brown P 2010; Gibson 2011; Hernamoczki 2017; Parthenau 2018; Taylor 2016; Wake 2018; Youker 2012). Even more recent theatre practice combines elements of our now post-postmodern world via the highly mediatised 'theatres of engagement', which have absorbed elements of the postmodern challenge as well as the

specific subjective fluidities of the postdramatic into new forms of theatre that are grounded above all in notions of spectatorship (Lavender 2016; Williams 2012).

2.1.2 The Political

This project is framed by human violence on a mass scale, and the suffering and trauma of those affected by it (Borowski 1967; Clendinning 1998; Delbo 1990, 1995; Rosenberg 2005). Benjamin Valentino's 2005 book *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* adds statistical heft to the historical and psychological conclusions of writers such as Yuval Noah Harari (2017) and Anthony Storr (1972). Valentino's studies make it clear that it is a predictable extreme of human culture that an authoritarian core leadership group will see the perpetration of genocide as a logical step in situations where they assess they have exhausted all possibilities to 'solve' a political dilemma other than mass murder (Valentino 2004, p. 7). Storr's detailed argument that human violence is predicated by power relationships and a default to obedience, and Harari's compelling explication of the great arc of human life on this planet where it is the capacity to both cooperate and imagine–for good or ill–that most marks Homo Sapiens underpin the understanding that this is a species-specific practice that is likely to recur (Harari 2017, pp. 26-8, 134-5, 207-8; Storr 1972, pp. 99-112). Such situations have proved compelling to theatre artists, as discussed by Jeanne Colleran (2012), Mary Dahl (1984), Milija Gluhovic (2013), Yasco Horsman (2010) and Jeanette Malkin (1999).

The Creative Project through which I hope to demonstrate some of the findings of the exegesis is set in Poland, a site of unspeakable horror in the middle years of the 20th century (Brown SL 2018; Grynberg 2005; Lisakovita 1995; Milocz 1981; Montefiore 2007; Peichorah, Knapp & Ritchie 1995; Rees, Lawrence 2017; Rees, Lawrence, Williams & Keating 2008; Snyder 2010; Valentino 2004; Wajda 2007). The country has a long and difficult history of war and invasion and for thousands of years, a shared culture between Poles and Jews (Davies 1986; Gawenda 2014). In particular, its theatre tradition gave Poland some of its most prized national artists in Adam Mickiewicz and Stanisław Wyspiański, both of whom exemplify the highly nationalised aspirations of the Polish Romantics (Gerould 1977). Another significant artist was S.I. Witkiewicz, who anticipated the wider European avant-garde (Anders 2009; Gerould 1997; Romanowska 2007; Romanska 2014; Schlosser 2014; Segel 1977; Sieradzi 2002; Zakiewicz 2015). Poland is also the birthplace of two

signature artists of the last century, namely Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor, both radical theatre makers whose work was strongly influenced by the events of World War II (Colleran 2012; Dahl 1984; Gluhovoc 2013; Miklaszewski 2002; Romanksa 2014; Schechner & Woolford 1997; Temkine 1972).

Jeanette Malkin, a child of Holocaust survivors herself, quoting Saul Freidlander (1999), asked whether –

> …at the collective level, too, historical trauma may not "leave traces of a deep memory beyond individual recall" inscribed in a society, traces that continue to exist despite rational formulations, that cannot be tamed as a social construction (Friedlander, 1999, p. 32 cited in Malkin, 1999 p. 32).

Certainly, the stories of individual Polish Christians/Gentiles and Jews bespeak a lingering trauma that has stayed with succeeding generations despite the best efforts and attempts for new beginnings of the sufferers. My additional reading covered, in particular, post-war Polish emigrés to Australia (Rosner Blay 1998; Brett 1999; Gotowicz 1988; Hearst 2009, 2012a; 2016; 2018); Hearst & James 2016; Jedrezeiczak 1999; Kolt 2009; Kostanski 1998; Kreminski 2011; Saaroni 1989; Szubanski 2015; Wajnryb 2001; Zable 1991, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2011) to mention just some of the testimonies or art works available. This conclusion was also born out in interviews with survivors (see Appendix B).

Malkin's main focus is memory-theatre which she defines as "post-modern… multiple and horizontal, shifting, pluralistic, unfinalized" (Malkin 1999, p. 22), which casts an interesting light on culture and theatre in Australia. Australian culture shares two sorts of memory. Firstly, a 'deep memory' (not to be confused with Charlotte Delbo's explication of 'deep memory' in *Days and Memory*, 1990, which refers to post-traumatic experience, nor precisely equivalent to Friedlander's use of the term). This 'deep memory' belongs to the songs, dances and stories of 'country' of the First Nations inhabitants, a complex inter-weave of place and no-time which has been un-grounded by recent history (Carter 1996; Krin, Muecke & Rowe 1984;). Australia's other 'memories' are found in a relatively shallow culture of waves of immigrant-dispossessors who have embedded versions of their originating cultures upon this land, including traditions of European theatre (McCallum 2009; Milne 2004; Rees, Leslie 1978). The cultural ramifications of this dichotomy are currently in a state of flux (Bell 2018, Appendix A; Bovell 2018, Appendix A). Of the various forms of contemporary theatre, it is arguably documentary theatre, which pertains above all to the

factual, that has found the most fertile ground in Australian theatre practice (Brown 2010; Trezise and Wake 2013), much of it reflecting types of verbatim theatre initiated by English theatre-makers (Hammond & Stewart 2008).

Documentary theatre brings issues of ethics and authenticity into high relief. As Mumford, Garde and Wake said in the Paul Brown-edited *Verbatim Theatre* "[F]rom its very beginnings, documentary theatre is deeply entangled with politics, technology and an oppositional or questioning attitude towards mainstream media" (Brown, P 2010, p. 11). Garde later stated (following Suzanne Knaller) that

> …in discussion of verbatim plays, "authenticity" may also refer to the sense of being close to the real person whose story is being told. This may include the sense that the audience has "immediate" access to a real person's "language" '(Garde, in Brown 2010, p. 93; Knaller 2005, pp. 40-65).

This sense can and has been problematised in much commentary (Anderson & Wilkinson 2007; De Waal 2015; Fisher 2011; Gibson 2011; Martin 2013; Odendahl-James 2017; Parthenau 2018; Williams 2012) and remains pertinent to any work in this field. Specifically, ethical approaches to telling the traumas of others are relevant not only to overtly documentary material, but also arise for the makers of any art that deals with massive distress to living victims or their descendants. As Cathy Caruth said in her benchmark 1995 volume, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*:

> [T]he difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story, is a problem that remains central to the task of therapists, literary critics, neurobiologists, and filmmakers alike….[H]ow we can listen to trauma beyond its pathology for the truth it tells us, and how we might perhaps find a way of learning to express this truth beyond the painful repetitions of traumatic suffering' (Caruth 1995).

PTSD is thought today to be an actual change in brain functioning, that occurs because one's reason cannot intellectually assimilate the experience one has suffered, that is, cognitive dissonance on a catastrophic scale (Cash & Weiner 2006; Janet 1901; Kardiner 1941; Schiraldi 2009; Van der Hart, Brown & van der Kolk 1989a and Young 1999). The challenge this provides to representation is that any description of the original event will always be contaminated by the impact of the subjective 'memory' of it, and, whatever the memory's reality from an objective point of view, which may be unprovable, for the sufferer it remains utterly and devastatingly 'true'. In telling of such a trauma, one will therefore be dealing with

at least two but usually more ‘truths’. And one will be a dealing with a fragile ‘source’ (Gluhovic 2013; Hacking 1995; Hermanoczki 2017; Horsmann 2010.

Some such ‘tellings’ remain within the boundary of the personal. Mass murder and suffering on a national scale, however, have a built-in political dimension given that, as Lehmann asserts via a quote from Rancière: “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (cited in Lehmann 2013, p. 103). For a creative artist, this can be a teasing and fascinating proposition and Mateusz Borowski and Malgorzata Sugiera, in a chapter in the same book, detail the progression of political theatre starting with Brecht’s attempt to unveil the operation of capitalist economies via his epic theatre’s “parabolic form and manifestly anti-illusionist meta-theatricality” (Borowski & Sugiera in Jürs-Munby, Carroll & Giles 2013, p. 68). They follow through to the present-day where theatre has been squeezed out of the common-ground of everyday life by the fact that ‘it has ceased to be a mass medium’ (Bowowski & Sugiera, in Jürs-Munby, Carroll & Giles 2013, p. 69). Thus, distinct from the binaries of early verbatim, they assert that political theatre has begun to interrogate the cultural semantics of ‘the political’ itself. This point applies to both reflexively ironic documentary theatre, as evidenced in Australia by the work of *version 1.0* in particular (McCallum 2006, pp. 136-142) and to postmodern and postdramatic offerings in Australia and elsewhere (Hamilton 2008, pp. 3-23).

2.1.3 Process and Project

The literature above covers a diverse range of sources, a wider range, perhaps, than is ideal in doctoral research. For reasons of space, I have not detailed the great number of creative works by artists about traumatic subjects, all of which are relevant to the discussion. They are significant, and impressive, and I do deal with representative examples of them later in the exegesis. Yet, a finding of this research, my (necessarily subjective) suggestion is that to write a play, as opposed to analysing an aspect of theatrical practice–to craft a large-scale piece that draws on tragic sources of life in the recent past–it may be necessary to go broad as well as deep. The validity of the subjective in this case is supported both by research into creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 191-5) and attested by artists. For example, as poet Mark Strand says, “I will be in a daze…I will be very disconnected from everything around me. While I’m in a daze I’m creating a space for myself, some psychic space [from] which I

can work" (cited in Csikszentmihali 1996, p. 191). I would argue that in any creative endeavour, intuition is an inevitable guide. Consequently, I have adopted a research methodology that has allowed room for the to-and-fro of intuitive play. Certainly, when making this new work it has 'felt' to me that to try to absorb all that might contribute in however a shadowed and denied a way to a communal gestalt of this particular trauma was an essential task, including casting a wide net. The work of other writers, who were either survivors or sufferers in World War II, in particular the writings of Charlotte Delbo (1990, 1995), Tadeusz Borowski (1967) and S. I Witkiewicz (1996; Zakiewicz 2015) has been as important to my Creative Project as the original biographical snippet of the Polish Dowbor sisters (Snyder 2010, p. 149). And all five of the six have found themselves coexisting as characters in my play. The work of three key Australian authors, none of them playwrights (though Arnold Zable's work has been adapted for the stage by interviewee Thérèse Radic), novelists Lily Brett, Zable and linguist Ruth Wajnryb, has also been influential (Brett 1992, 1996; Wajnryb 2001; Zable 1991, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2011). I approach these findings through a discussion of my own past and present writing, alongside a more generalised poetics of the project as well as through interviews with other Australian creative practitioners, all of them writers themselves (see Appendix A). [3]

One question to myself as a working playwright must be, why this narrative situation and not another? Why, as a writer who is neither Jewish nor Polish, which may well be problematic at this place and time (Bovell 2018, Appendix A), was I pulled so strongly to this material? Amy Matthews, in *Navigating the Kingdom of the Night* offers a tour de force interrogation of the traps, ambiguities and challenges of intention involved in anyone other than a direct survivor writing any form of fiction about Holocaust-related subjects. She articulates her own dilemma, which was also mine. 'What if my made-up characters stood in front of the dead, obscuring them, killing their memory and substituting it with a story told by a woman who gleaned all her knowledge from books?' (Matthews, 2013, pp. 19-20). My own characters are based, with permission, on real-life human beings, as well as historical identities, but they are still 'my' version of those other human beings who suffered in a way I never have. As Matthews also says, 'Moral questions are foregrounded when we're discussing fictionalizing the Holocaust, but does that mean it cannot be written, or that it ought not be written or merely that we should beware writing it? Is it the sensitivity, responsibility and intelligence

[3] I also kept an artistic journal for much of the project, available on request

of the approach that matters? Do we merely wish the artist to be wary? We can feel discomfort when reading Holocaust fiction, but such discomfort makes us aware of the moral complexity of the issues involved and can be powerful in the hands of a responsible writer.' (Matthews, 2013, pp. 50-1). I will address some of these ambiguities in relation to theatre in the following chapters.

For now, my conclusions go back very much to my time, and place. I am a late-career artist formed in a society shadowed by World War II, but living in a country where the major national trauma– a story that a white Australian can perhaps no longer tell (Ross & Whitfield 2018)–has been denied, or diminished; and the narratives of waves of people fleeing trauma have been left very much in the shadowlands of 'official' national consciousness in our determinedly sunny, physical, adolescent, national self-consciousness (Balodis 1991; Persian 2017; Gorski 2017, Appendix B). As one of my interviewees, Andrew Bovell said, one of the tasks of an artist is to bring to consciousness material that has been denied or disavowed (Bovell 2018, Appendix A). My recent career trajectory has been to look firstly at a major trauma of the community of dispossessing Australians from which I am descended: that of the slaughter of World War I in *The Red Cross Letters* (Laughton 2016), then to the major national trauma of my youth, the Vietnam War, in *Long Tan* (Laughton 2018). Now I am addressing the major trauma of my century and my time-in-the-world, the Holocaust, that was imposed on Poland, alongside an example–the Polish diaspora–of the common heritage of most Australians, a journey from grievous loss to a new beginning. *Bloodlines,* through referencing the major English-speaking theatre experiments of the past 100 plus years, can perhaps contribute to a less-shadowed future.

Chapter 3: **CONTEXTUALISING THE TRAUMATIC**

Jean Genet said, "Images have a double function: to reveal and to conceal" (Genet 1991, p.89 cited in Funburgh 2004, p. 213). This is an apposite comment in terms of how creative artists have responded to trauma, a state which carries with it such a freight of subjective and objective truth, fear and compulsion. As Genet's words implied, we are talking about something that cannot be fully said or seen–most especially by the sufferer–and, yet, demands to be. To 'tell this truly', in full acknowledgement of the responsibility involved, is a task of some complexity.

There are no simple definitions of trauma, but Ian Hacking's description of it as a "wound to the soul' (Hacking 1995, p. 4) or Cathy Caruth's summation of "a breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world" Caruth 1995, p. 4) are evocative. Similarly, Yasco Horsman, in his discussion of Brecht's *The Measures Taken,* talked of the stranded corpse of the naively idealistic young comrade slaughtered by his fellow revolutionaries in that play as "a story about a body that remains unburied… [and that] this *unburied body* is the central "traumatic kernel" around which this tapestry of trials and judgments is woven" (Horsman 2010, p. 99, emphasis added). A trauma, in the sense in which I am exploring it, is an unburied–and possibly un-buriable–body, a source of massive, and resistant distress.

This chapter starts by addressing how understandings of trauma evolved alongside understandings of memory during the *fin de siècle* European avant-garde. It notes that the avant-garde breakthrough of sensibility and practice also laid the foundation for theatre-making up to and including the twenty-first century (Berghaus 2005; Malkin 1999; Marowitz 1999; Youker 2012). It suggests that a drive for 'the authentic' might be behind, firstly, strategies of style via sometimes counter-intuitive renditions, and, secondly, strategies of genre via attempts at facticity. It proposes a work of arch-stylist Jean Genet to suggest how the modernist avant-garde brokered a new and decidedly un-literal consciousness of the complexities of the traumatic.

3.1 Theatre and Trauma

It could be argued that the evolution of new theatre forms in the twentieth-century West, and the evolution of trauma studies both go back to the same moment; a shift in conceptual understanding of the human mind-brain-body that evolved out of the European neurological and psychoanalytic movement of the late nineteenth century (Cash & Weiner 2006; Hacking 1995; Jürs-Munby 2009; Van der Hart, Brown & van der Kolk 1989b). From this time, researchers recorded, evaluated and disseminated the experiences of people who had been subjected to traumatic situations. The gradual understanding of the psychological forces behind human behavioral responses to trauma led to increasingly sophisticated elucidations of the connections between trauma and memory (Caruth1995, p. vii-7; Cash & Weiner 2006, p. 4).

An historical point of departure was John Erichsen's 1866 studies into the phenomenon of 'railway spine'–the aftermath of railway collisions where complainants appeared to have no physical cause for symptoms. This condition heralded the existence of a post-event reaction manifesting in the bodies and behaviour of sufferers (Cash & Weiner 2006, pp. 51-66). The research and (highly theatrical) demonstrations of neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris in the 1880s clarified that this condition–not physical in origin–was parasitical in behavior (Janet,1901, p. 267; Marshall 2016, p. 489-583).

It was Charcot's student, psychologist/psychotherapist Pierre Janet, who developed these insights in clinical treatment (Van der Hart, Brown & van der Kolk 1989b, p. 1). Janet, and Sigmund Freud, his collaborator of the time, attested "… that the crucial factor that determines the repetition of the trauma is the presence of mute, unsymbolized and unintegrated experiences" (van der Kolk & Van der Hart, cited in Caruth 1995, p.167). Freud, however, highlighted that a felt need to dismiss unwelcome memories triggered active repression (Freud et al. 1953, p. xxii). The contemporary understanding of traumatic memory is in fact closer to Freud and Janet's earlier articulation (Young 1999, p. 55). Nevertheless, Freud's emphasis on neurotic sexual repression (rather than not-necessarily-sexual distressing experience) as the cause of 'hysteria,' and revelation as a cure led to intense interest in sexuality, repression and the dominance of the personality by the subconscious (Freud et al. 1953, pp. 3-15; Matthews, 2013, pp. 3-7).

A watershed confrontation with large-scale trauma occurred after the trench warfare of World War I, with many ex-soldiers struggling with 'shock'. It was not until 1941, however, that

Abram Kardiner in *The Tragic Neuroses of War* fully articulated that this kind of stress could present long after the causative event (Kardiner 1941). Thus, what we normally understand as (narrative) memory is a mental-emotional process which, whether or not it involves repression, adheres to an internal chronology. Posttraumatic 'memory', on the other hand, is provoked by unbidden triggers that prompt a re-experiencing of the original trauma in all its horror (Young 1999, cited in Cash & Weiner 2006, p. 8). One of the people to best articulate what it feels like to undergo such an imposition is Charlotte Delbo in her book, *Days and Memory* (Delbo 1990). Inga Clendinnen's description in her book, *Reading the Holocaust*, adds to Delbo's original:

> For Delbo even the act of remembering is perilous. It was not that she had forgotten: 'Auschwitz is so deeply etched in my memory that I cannot forget one moment of it.' It is rather that she 'remembers' out of two very different kinds of memory. First there is '*memoire profonde'*, 'deep memory', a lost physical, saturated with emotion and sensation: 'Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it away from my present self'. In daylight hours that terrible reality is sealed away, and she lives by what she calls '*memoire ordinaire'*: memory grounded in the everyday, and in ordinary narrative sequences. The words she speaks in daily life come from 'that external memory…from intellectual memory'. But in dreams and *when she writes*, that 'deep memory (which) preserves sensations as physical imprints' erupts, and she is famished, stinking, exhausted, in the grip of death again (Delbo 1995, cited in Clendinning 1998 p. 60).

This is an exquisite evocation of an appalling experience. In this view, PTSD might be described as a change in brain functioning, precisely because the reason cannot intellectually assimilate the experience that has occurred; thus, the experience is never consolidated within the sufferer's personality, but abides within her as an unpredictable but overwhelming state of distress.

Christopher Innes' 1993 book, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992,* is possibly still one of the best overviews of the subject. As Innes said:

> …The mainstream of the avant garde is not simply defined by shared stylistic qualities…rather [it] is essentially a philosophic grouping [with] a specific attitude to western society, [and] a particular aesthetic approach [that aims to transform] the nature of theatrical performance; all of which add[s] up to a distinctive ideology…[of] anarchic primitivism and radical politics (Innes 1993, p 4).

As Innes pointed out, an ongoing exploration of aspects of primitivism–dream states, myth, magic, ritual, again all supposedly accessed via the 'primitive' subconscious–was part of the ferment of the times and this, too, became a distinguishing feature of the avant-garde (Innes 1993, p. 3). Here, a particular influence was Freud's sometime protégé, C.G. Jung, whose work expanded the frame of reference from the individual to the universal through suggesting

the existence of a collective unconscious and an innate drive towards inner growth (Jung 1960, pp. 190-7). The possibility of a source of meaning and transcendence that could be reached through ancient and, perhaps, new-made ritual, proved provocative for many late avant-garde artists, such as writer Peter Weiss (Weiss 1965) director Peter Brook (Heilpern 1977) or, much later, the contemporary director Ariane Mnouchkine (Miller 2007).

In 1842, the coiner of the name 'avant-garde', the revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, also contributed a phrase (taken from his credo) that could act as a motto for the movement: "The passion for destruction is also a creative passion" (Ryan & Carr 2016, para. 2). From Jarry to Artaud to Brook, from Strindberg to Barrault to Kemp, the artists associated with the avant-garde emphasised a necessity for a violent breaking of old forms in order to liberate the new. Paradoxically, their work also took inspiration from the atavistic 'purity' of fixed and traditional primitive ceremonies and ancient, often Eastern, artistic traditions. For the theatre-makers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the arc was thus from the rationalism and order of the Enlightenment to the unveiling of the archaic pull of the subconscious; from a Darwinian loss of faith to a yearning for a humanly achieved communal transcendence. Added to this was a profound sense of the hypocrisy and dishonesty of life lived at a surface level in bourgeois/materialist Western society: and threaded within all of it, new understandings of both the fluidity and contradictory intransigence of memory, provoked by investigations into the operation of 'hysteria' (by now more specifically neurosis) and 'shock' (trauma).

The assertion and the confidence to re-make the false certainties of the past that made modernism the overarching meme of the period had a range of implications for the 'new theatre'. Following on from the Symbolist, Alfred Jarry, whose rambunctious, scatological, and carnivalesque *Ubu Roi* in 1896 was perhaps the outstanding precursor of the avant-garde, practitioners aimed to disrupt the status quo (Jarry 1968, pp. 17-73). In a right-turn from, for example, the highly verbal, character-based problem-plays of Henrik Ibsen in the late 1870s to 90s, director Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) emphasised a 'theatre of silence' in which a production's almost wordless opacity became a contradictory sign of its authenticity (Innes 1993, p. 19). This privileging of gesture and suggestibility in stylistic choices in service of 'the authentic', owes much to the Expressionist theatre of the 1920s, when artists such as Strindberg, Toller and Hasenclever required a production style that emphasised emotion and intensity in order to affect an audience 'subliminally'. Words and rational logicality were not

seen as effective means for reaching and–keeping in mind the utopia in the political air–thus *changing* the 'spiritual' core of audiences by confronting them with their own repressions. This dismissal of the primacy of text is another ongoing propensity of the avant-garde and the theatre forms that evolved out of it.

From the comic precursor figure of *Ubu Roi*, to the outrage of Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty (Innes 1981, pp. 58-110); to the development in isolated Poland of distinct but parallel practices to those of Artaud in Jerzy Grotowski's unfolding incarnations of theatre 'laboratories' (Grotowski 1968); to the mutually-influenced Jean-Louis Barrault's and Peter Brook's group-based investigations into the fundamentals of theatre, the avant-garde was a ferment of experimental practice (Innes 1993, pp. 126, 132, 134). In particular, most avant-garde practitioners echoed Maeterlinck's demand for 'authenticity'. In the 1960s, the aim to express 'truth' on stage led, for example, to an agonised physical embodiment of thematic material in Ryszard Cieslak's legendary performances in the Grotowski-directed adaptation of Calderon's *The Constant Prince* (Richards 2016; Temkine 1972). But it also led, in the 1950s, and 1960s, to the late-modernist minimalism of Beckett and, later, (the postmodernist) Harold Pinter, where words *were* the point, but reduced to an essence (Beckett 1986; Pinter 1981, 2001). Above all, it foregrounded the intention of artists from Artaud through Grotowski through Barrault through Genet through Brook, that the ritually oriented practice and product of art might be an avenue for convulsive societal change (Innes 1981). This stream of work was defiantly anti-naturalistic.

The demand for authenticity, however, also led to a genre of theatre that was allied in its utopian aims but different in its more pragmatic, and specifically political, theatrical practice. The epic theatre of Brecht and Piscator from the 1920s onwards (Brecht 1950, pp. 33-42), was echoed in the Living Newspapers of the Federal Theatre Project in the United States in the 1930s (Brockett 1988, p. 217) and the Mass Observation Movement of 1937 and the work of Joan Littlewood and Peter Cheeseman in the 1940s–1960s in the United Kingdom (Lavender 2016, p. 36). This work was just as critical of the status quo, but more explicit in its didactic practice than that of mainstream avant-garde artists. It also laid the basis for the documentary theatre explosion in the UK and the US in the 1980s and 1990s (Garde, Mumford & Wake in Brown P 2010).

Here, in a conflation of 'the real' with 'the true' that seems in 2019 to be naïve, the link is the notion of truth-telling rather than the exploration of inner states, leading to a focus on narrative memory–the linear telling of a tale via raw contributions transcribed from the testimony of victims of antagonistic events–rather than memory in operation in an injured consciousness. The response of critics and audiences to material that presented as being closer to objective truth via its reliance on witness testimony is a late echo from both artists and audiences to utopian ideals (Billington 2012; Kelly 1982). The one undeniably 'true' thing on any stage–the body of the actor–is a key link between avant-garde, documentary and postmodern expressions of 'the authentic'. Grotowski's research sought a mechanism for transcendence through physical and emotional disciplines. Beckett's writing asserted the primacy of consciousness itself, of simply being in a body in space and time. And, in documentary productions, the actor is the spokesperson for the real-life experience of another. All these present bodies will also have past bodies, encapsulated in memory, but they vary in their treatment of memory itself along a scale of would-be objectivity–the documentary–to vertically subjective–in a work like Heiner Müller's *Explosion of a Memory* where the spectator is both inside and outside a possibly unreliable memory (Müller 1995).

3.1.1 Playwrights and Practice: Genet

Since a ground-breaking change of theatrical style was the outcome on which all the constituent aspects of the avant-garde converged, it is a useful perspective from which to assess how avant garde tropes might express the traumatic (Berghaus 2005, pp. 35-7; Innes 1993, p 4). The work of French arch-stylist, Jean Genet, is well positioned for such an evaluation. The tone of Genet's work is reminiscent of the equally original Polish playwright, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, with whose work Genet was, however, unlikely to have been familiar (Witkiewicz & Gerould 1992). Instead, Genet was influenced by artists of early Western European avant-garde, and his work is more often seen as paralleling the impulses articulated, if not successfully practised, by Artaud.

> …gestures to be unnatural…vocal tones…distorted and arranged into a complex, quasi-musical score…actors…to turn themselves into animals…emotional states to be presented in absolute terms…larger-than-life props…actors' make-up mask-like… (Innes 1995, p 114).

Genet's peers were other artists of the avant garde – Brook, Barrault and, later, Lindsay Kemp, all of whose work cross-fertilised with his, and Genet's oeuvre in its turn influenced

several generations of Western stage writers. His transgressive violence and role-playing finds echoes in the work of Joe Orton and Edward Bond, and his stylistic experiments resonate with the work of Robert Wilson and Heiner Müller, who together engaged in deliberate dissonances between scenography and text, as did Genet. This last effect is particularly striking in Genet's late drama, *The Screens* (1961), a work that, whilst locating the dramatic action within a traumatic political setting, eschews a moral standpoint.

A comment of Glenn Schiraldi, made in relation to trauma, might be particularly relevant to Genet's writing and, indeed, life, where Schiraldi said:

> Intentional human traumas… are typically the most degrading and cause the most shame, (as) they often involve feelings of being stigmatized, marked, different, or an outcast... Man-made traumas are also most likely to cause people to lose faith and trust in humanity, in love and in themselves (Schiraldi 2009, p. 7).

An author's life is not, of course, the entire explanation for his or her work as Innes, for example, is at pains to stress (Innes 1993, p. 115). Nevertheless, Genet's life-experience of childhood abandonment from his prostitute mother, brutal fostering, criminality, incarceration, dishonorable dismissal from the military, work as a rent-boy, and ultimately celebrated author and intellectual cannot be discounted (White 1993). He glorified in 'perversity', the revolutionary, and the convoluted; the upside-down, and the inside-out. All of Genet's work references death (Innes 1993, p. 108). In addition, much of it ponders the centrality of shame; but none more so than *The Screens.*

As Charles Marowitz described it, "*The Screens* appears to be about some great social topic (the Algerian War of 1954-62) but is essentially a private fantasy couched in convenient social imagery" (Marowitz 1966, cited in Williams 1988, p. 55). That is, the Algerian uprising is used as a means of expressing Genet's personal worldview, rather than Genet's skill as an artist being used to further the Algerian (or the French, or any) political cause beyond a generalised advocacy for revolution. His topic is not war, but a psyche-oriented metaphysic. Two key components of *The Screens* are that on one level it is a *tour de force* depiction of the unreality of any given reality, and, on another, it is an embrace of extreme damage that actively chooses to celebrate the (high) status, rather than the victimhood, of 'being-damaged', by elevating the experience of shame.

It depicts the degradation and death of Saïd, an Algerian Arab who possesses no redeeming qualities, and of his physically repulsive wife, Leila, whom he loves/loathes as the perfect parallel for his own inadequacy. The third member of this unholy trinity is Saïd's Ubu-esque monster of a Mother, who dominates them both. The play–written, in fact, as a poem, not a drama–has a repetitive structure of loosely related scenes and relies for effect on the brilliance of the verbal and visual imagery with which Genet surrounds perpetually shifting associative disjunctions. These shifts could be described as mimicking the eruptions of a traumatised psyche. Despite the circularity, there *is* a through-line that leads from Saïd's decision to marry Leila, through an Arab uprising against caricatured colonialist French overlords, to the death of the majority of the characters in a pivotal scene (Scene 15) where one by one they pass through screens – by now filling the stage – to a life-in-death, where they await the climactic moment of Saïd's perversely triumphant disappearance into pure nothingness ('pure' because his degradation is so complete).

It is in the scenography of *The Screens*, however, as Clare Funburgh pointed out, rather than in the text that Genet breaks new theatrical ground, a literary master who has privileged the *mise en scène* as a means of advancing the action, a directorly approach for which writers tend to be scolded today (Butler 2018, Appendix A). As Odette Aslan said,

> Whilst textual dialogue is often held sacred and permanent, the playwright's projected set and costumes are understood more as suggestions…Peter Brook, who directed an incomplete version of *The Screens* in London in 1964, states that Genet's scenographic indications are as significant to the play as his dialogue (Aslan 1973, pp 126-7 cited in Funburgh 2004, pp. 206-7).

In *The Screens*, the majority of objects and events, such as the burning of colonialist assets like tree plantations, are drawn by the actors on to the screens as part of both set and action, a device by which Genet abstracts the scenography of the play. The screens represent an arbitrary and manipulate-able metaphor for the surface elements of this particular 'reality'. At Genet's insistence, too, the characters are a riot of colour and mis-dressing. During the first production in 1964, Charles Marowitz, Brook's then-collaborator noted,

> In the last weeks of rehearsal, *The Screens* looked murky and gauze-covered (but)…in the space of four hours (the hours during which costumes and design were added), the play was transformed into something bold, brazen, aptly rhetorical and hieratic …(and)… the costume and décor produced – in one day – two-thirds of the *truth*, only one-third of which had been evoked in six weeks of rehearsal (Marowitz 1966, cited in Williams 1988, p. 55).

Thus, in *The Screens,* Genet looks back to the atavistic primitivism so beloved of the avant-

garde in his emphasis on the ceremonial. And via his personal predilection towards glorification of the transgressive, he tilts against the contemporary bourgeois status quo, sub-texturally hinting at the utopias so bruited by the avant-garde. He bleeds his sympathy for the underdog into the framing device of a revolutionary political situation (the Algerian War) that maximises the currency of the play's dramatic action, anticipating the pull of documentary theatre. He also embellishes the play's tonal accuracy–its 'truth'–via the key contribution of the décor and costumes, through which he insists on the unreality of 'reality'. This last anticipates an element of postmodern drama when Genet conceptualises the function of the sign into the scenography of the piece, and points towards a key trope of performing the traumatic, namely the primacy of authenticity. As Funburgh put it:

> Elements in Genet's theatre are not simply staged, but they engage in the process of sign production and signification…The screens both separate interior from exterior and are fluidly continuous with their surroundings… Genet's lines traced in space both conceal the void of the empty stage or the blank screen, and reveal it, through their performative act of concealing. ….*Genet indicated how 'falsity', 'absurdity', and 'negation' are implicit in any notion of truth.* [His] images revolve in perpetual quotation of their own artifice (Funburgh 2004, p. 215, emphasis added).

In Genet's world of revolving illusions, everything that can be seen or known is another temporary skin for the void. Thus, Genet is not particularly engaged with memory: memory might be no more reliably 'real' or 'unreal' than the world in general. He does, however, engage with trauma, if only because his attitude towards the traumatic is so provocatively transgressive. As an artist, Genet is engaged in a permanent-present-tense celebration of so-called perversities of crime, squalor, sexuality and a paradoxical embrace of degradation, both of oneself and others. He thus co-opts the traumatic into his worldview when he asserts there is only one authentic behaviour possible in context of the void, namely, that the only pride available to a human being is an embrace of one's worthlessness in an orgy of shame. Emotional pain can be bypassed because it is, in fact, a joke. If we are not real, then neither is our pain; by being alive, he infers, we are inside the traumatic anyway.

3.2 Lessons for Writing

In Genet's work, it is the preoccupation with form that is the window through which an audience can observe the pain of victimhood without either sentimentalising that pain or tipping into avoidance via the claiming of a pointless moral high ground. And this is perhaps his main gift for other writers attempting something of the same task. One must prioritise the

form. Speaking for my own work in *Bloodlines,* given that I was quite destabilised by the content, it took several drafts before I really undertook this task via a more formal structure and a less formal chronology. Genet's other lesson is that in his case stylistic flamboyance represents a means of addressing pain from the inside out that is perversely authentic. He opened a palette of tools available to express the 'inexpressible' in a way that brought the whole stage into the equation but did not reject or attempt to confound text. Other writers have tackled trauma from the outside in. That effort will be addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: **DOCUMENTARY THEATRE AND THE TRAUMATIC**

> There is no "really real" anywhere in the world of representation. Depending on who you are, what your politics are, and so on, documentary theatre will seem to be "getting at the truth" or "telling another set of lies." Representation creates multiple truths for its own survival; oral, textual, and performed stories invite repetition, revision, and reconfiguration (Martin 2006, p. 14).

Carol Martin's comment encapsulates the core problem of making theatre about 'real' events. Is there a 'truth' for a particular situation? And can the way such a 'truth' is presented tarnish the reasons for and processes of representation? Any theatre that attempts to deal with traumatic subjects will engender problems of both ethics and authenticity; and indeed, much of the literature about the topic engages with precisely that (Gibson 2011; Little 2011; Martin 2013; Odendahl-James 2017; Parthenau 2018; Tresize & Wake 2013). Specifically, as Ariane de Waal suggests, citing Martin's reference to Roland Barthes' 1968 description of a 'reality effect', the inherent problems of documentary theatre, seemingly well-placed as an avenue to the traumatic, demand a practice of responsible self-reflexivity (De Waal 2015, p. 18). This chapter addresses ethical concerns in making and representing, and a range of claims and counterclaims for 'truth' and 'authenticity'. It considers a spectrum of writing strategies used by exemplar theatre artists. As part of the 'web' of iterative research into and out of practice, it also draws some examples from my own work. Lastly, by reference to 'testimonial dramaturgy' it suggests a way forward for attempts to represent real-world occurrences that might be labelled un-representable (Fisher 2011, pp.112-22).

4.1 Background

One of Genet's achievements in *The Screens* was its 'perverse authenticity': above all, a tonal achievement involving a kaleidoscope of visual and verbal images, and echoes of 'real-life' political and personal trauma within an engineered artistic one. His process came about in part because of the foregrounding by the avant-garde of the desirability of 'truth' in place of a carapace of conventional and comfortable lies. This demand for authenticity, however, also led to theatre that, employing documentary techniques, was just as critical of the status quo, but had a more active and explicit presence. It has spawned a genre with many variations. Caroline Wake offered a detailed definition:

> Plays characterized by a central or exclusive reliance on actual rather than imaginary events or dialogue, song, and/or visual materials (photographs, films, pictorial documents) 'found' in the

> historical record or gathered by the playwright researcher, and by that disposition to set individual behaviour in an articulate political and/or social context (Wake 2010b, p. 3)

The genre has a long tail. Timothy Youker's useful discussion sees 'demonstrable relationships of influence and collaboration [between]… early documentary theatre-makers and members of the historical avant garde' (Youker 2012, p. 18). As Youker said:

> …most importantly, documentary theatre practices tend to fit…the essential characteristics of avant-garde art [in an] approach to art practice that aims to alter audience perceptions about how both documents and the theatre are produced, received and evaluated…by employing avant-gardist tactics of estrangement, juxtaposition, genre-splicing, and audience confrontation. Through these tactics, documentary theatre presents criticisms of and/or alternatives to the ways in which the dominant culture *constructs, circulates and hierarchizes the material of memory* (Youker 2012, p.19, emphasis added)

4.1.1 Evolution

The disruptions of the avant-garde remain the single strongest echo in contemporary theatre practice. Despite the similarity of strategies, however, versions of the 'theatre of the real', were initially seen as offering a journalistic facticity unavailable to either conventional or avant-garde dramas (Hammond & Stewart 2008; Martin 2013, pp. 4-5). The evolving stream of work varied from the theory-based epic theatre of Brecht and Piscator in the 1920s: to the Russian Futurists and the German pre-Expressionist Frank Wedekind in the same period (Willett cited in Youker 2012, p. 18); through to the Workers' Theatre Movement in the United Kingdom in the 30s and 40s (Gooney, n.d.); through to the Living Newspapers of the Federal Theatre Project in the 30s in the United States (Odendahl-James 2017, para 2). These movements were followed in the US in the 60s by the work of the Living Theater and the Bread and Puppet Theater (Brockett 1988 p. 217). In Europe came the radicalising work of Peter Weiss, in particular *The Investigation* which addressed the documentary record of the Holocaust, albeit via a poetic structure (Weiss 1965). Later cross-Atlantically influential works included Eric Bentley's transcribed 1972 docu-drama *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?*' about the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in the 1950s (Billington 2012) after which the documentary theatre explosion continued in both the United Kingdom and the United States in the 1980s and 1990s with artists such as Hare, Norton-Taylor and Nicholas Kent (Brown P 2010, pp. 9-16), where productions were appraised via their 'real-life' connections (Hammond & Stewart 2008), but in which, for example in Richard Norton-Taylor's *Nuremberg: the War Crimes Trial* a simple rendering of unspeakable experience still has the power to shock (Norton-Taylor 1997). It devolved to Australia with the first

large-impact production being *Aftershocks* by Paul Brown in 1991, about the Newcastle Earthquake of 1989 (Anderson & Wilkinson 2007, pp. 157-160). All this work benefited in its critical and public reception from its seemingly higher moral claim to an audience's attention, seen for example in A.D. Atkinson's laudatory critique of British writer Robin Soans' 2005 *Talking to Terrorists* (Atkinson 2005, para. 2). He called the play "an unmissable piece of theatre and an unforgettable experience" precisely *because* he felt it to be 'real' (Atkinson 2005, para. 5).

As De Waal said in her 2015 article in *Performance Paradigm*, 11:

> In this kind of theatre, there is an obsession with forming and reframing what has really happened. There is the desire to produce […] a form of citation that [that confers] the status of legitimacy upon the artwork with the concomitant sense that what is represented is real or has a relationship with what is real (De Waal 2015, p. 18).

The emphasis in most of these works (Weiss's poetic extravagance would be an exception) is towards a text-based, society-changing content that presents a particular social evil in a pragmatic, semi-naturalistic style. The genre is characterised by a proliferation of sub-genres ranging from works like the Brecht's 1930 *Lehrstück* agit-prop cantata, *The Measures Taken,* from which my favoured image of the 'unburied body' derives, to autobiography (Spalding Gray in the US in the 80s and 90s) (Gray 1985), to edited witness statements performed by many actors (Moisés Kaufman et al's *The Laramie Project*) (Kaufmann et al. 2001) or the same kind of witnessing articulated by sufferers (Daniel Keene's *The Long Way Home*) (Keene 2008) ; to one person inhabiting the experience of the many via interview (Anna Deveare Smith's oeuvre) (Keen 2017, pp. 44-61) ; to verbatim interspersed with lightly fictionalized real-world events (David Hare's *Stuff Happens*) (Hare 2004); to tribunal theatre (Richard Norton Taylor's work in the UK) (Norton-Taylor 1997) to headphone theatre, such as by Alecky Blythe in the UK (Blythe 2001) and, in Australia, Roslyn Oades, where actors wearing headphones reproduce the words and speech patterns of interview subjects (Oades 2002). Other work such as that of Australia's *version 1.0* with its ironic tone and highly mediatised content sits on the cusp between documentary and so-called 'theatres of engagement' (Lavender 2016; McCallum 2006). Through these many modes, the ferment of documentary theatre has provided a platform for interrogating high-impact political and social failure in Western societies, with the desire to change political morés as an aim. Each different manifestation brings its own complexities to the central ethical questions.

4.2 Key Issues: Ethics (process) and Authenticity (content and presentation)

As Janet Gibson said,

> (The) key critical issues and ethical dangers inherent in verbatim theatre creation (are) the problem of the interview, the manipulations of the writers and the nature and transparency of the collaboration between, and the power relationships of, subjects and writers, often purposely obfuscated in the work (Gibson 2011, p. 3).

Gibson frames her discussion through the lens of Anna Deveare Smith's *Let Me Down Easy* and Kaufmann et al's *The Laramie Project*. In Deveare Smith's case, she mentions problems to do with interviewees either feeling uneasy about their contribution some years after the event, or where interviewees appear not to have been consulted regarding the evolution of their stories in performance (Gibson 2011, pp. 7-9), though other documentation refutes this (Keen 2017, pp. 49 - 61). Similarly, with *The Laramie Project* some participants felt semi-colonised by the sheer success of the play and questioned motivations regarding the making and conclusions of the piece (Gibson 2011, pp. 9-13).

As Gibson states,

> […] when the silenced and traumatised are silenced and traumatised again, by the excision of their characters after interviews and/or by other lack of consultation and/or discussion on the script, the rhetoric of the social and political efficacy of verbatim theatre becomes empty (Gibson 2011, p. 12).

The task is a complex one, as is evidenced by the volume of plays staged in Australia about refugees, where an interviewee may also be a text-bearer in performance. On the one hand, there is the experience of works such as Ros Horin's (unpublished) *Beyond the Wire* (Anderson & Wilkinson 2007, pp. 160-2 and Wake 2010a, pp. 122-149). By these accounts, *Through the Wire* was a piece that offered empowerment to many of its contributors and a spur to action for its audiences, though Wake does also thoughtfully detail some problematic aspects in its making and presentation. On the other, an article by Amy McNeilage describing a school drama project where traumatised immigrant students spoke about their coming to Australia, comes across as perhaps risking the vulnerabilities of those concerned. A school counsellor is quoted: "Often trauma controls its victim, coming back as unwanted memories, flashbacks and nightmares," she said. "But when you perform something, you control the story and this sense of control is very therapeutic" (McNeilage 2013). Such an outcome is not

automatic, as attested in the previous chapter (Caruth 1995; Schiraldi 2009). Thus, even to assert it in such an uninflected way signals a need for caution. In my interview with writer Arnold Zable, however, he mentioned a very positive (in his view) collaborative project of the Fitzroy Learning Network, *Kan Yama Kan* (unpublished) directed by Robin Laurie in 2002, where practitioners, many of whom had been working in the field for decades, took immense care to keep refugee co-performers safe. This positivity is attested to by other commentators, such as Rand Hazou (2009). Nevertheless, according to Zable, by the final night, most of the nonprofessional actors were greatly relieved to step away from performing their pain (see interview with Arnold Zable 2017, Appendix A).

Another facet of the debate about authentic representation involves the degree to which a theatre text might faithfully represent the precise offerings of its subjects' interview material. As Meg Mumford put it:

> The creation of distilled narratives involve [s] an erasure of the traces of the event that [has] generated them, the real-life interview …and…the reason for this is that the writing… [is] also shaped by a desire to create an entertaining and enduring drama… (Mumford 2010, p 40).

This contradiction between serving the perhaps vulnerable human beings who have provided the subject content for a play and serving the demands of an audience for a satisfying theatre experience provided much of the emphasis in earlier commentary, as seen in interviews with pioneer British verbatim director Max Stafford Clark and writer David Hare in Hammond and Stewart's influential volume *Verbatim, Verbatim* (Hammond & Stewart 2008, pp. 49-75). And it is true that much of the work in the 1980s and 1990s had a kind of innocence of presentation and response because both audiences and practitioners experienced it as a 'true' personal record. It used only the witnesses' words, therefore it presented as an exact representation of their suffering.

In fact, none of it was as honest and innocent as it seemed. As Anderson and Wilkinson said, "To assert verbatim recounting as a test of authenticity is disingenuous as it ignores the process of change that any verbatim text is subjected to as it becomes theatre" (Anderson & Wilkinson 2007, p. 155). Furthermore, there are indications that work that does not take on a degree of textual manipulation may contradictorily be less effective than work that does. Suzanne Little's discussion of Young, Halba and Company's 2010 New Zealand verbatim piece, *Hush*, provides an example. Here, adhering to strict university ethical standards, artists

interviewed sufferers of domestic abuse. As Little said, "The source material is often harrowing […] However, the restrictive nature of this particular form of verbatim theatre threatens to becalm the material and render it distant and as a subject for sympathy and not action" (Little 2011, para14).

As a practising writer, I would concur with these findings. My example here is from the first truly verbatim play I wrote, namely a piece called *The Red Cross Letters* (Laughton 2016). The documentary material on which this play was based was bundles of correspondence held at the State Library of South Australia that related to World War I veterans and the South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau. The writing task was quite straightforward: to construct from a tiny portion of the 8,000 bundles available, a picture of that time and those people. There wasn't a word in the resultant script that did not come from those letters and records. However, the way one experiences words read on the page is very different from the way one hears them on stage. A writer would be naïve not to acknowledge that any writing can be edited to be better, so in each new draft I did tighten the text through targeted cutting and juxtaposition. Then in rehearsal, when the director, the cast and I could experience the piece on the floor, we also made dozens more small adjustments that didn't change the sense of what was there, nor the emotion behind the words, nor the facts concerned, but did add to the impact of its delivery by the actors.

In her article about Deveare Smith's work, *Let Me Down Easy*, Janet Gibson said "She appears to speak *for*, rather than *with,* her subjects" (Gibson 2011, p. 8). As a practitioner, all I can say is, yes, this is what happens. You speak *with* your subjects in the first instance in order to speak *for* them later. You place the 'authentic', which I would define as the gestalt of the exchanges that make up the text, above the literal 'truth', the precise unedited syntax of the witness. And you have to trust your judgment as an artist that you have accurately identified that gestalt. In the case of *The Red Cross Letters,* the 'speakers' were dead, though I did negotiate with descendants where possible. In the case of the next play, *Long Tan* (Laughton 2018*)*, where many of my subjects were still alive, the process of re-negotiation was constant. The need to deal so very carefully in such a process was one of my guides in choosing to interview sufferers for my Creative Project was to request interviewees' permission that any use of verbatim material would be limited, and that some material might well be lightly fictionalised.

4.3 Process

What I took out of these experiences for my own practice was a four-point guide for decision-making by an arts practitioner in this field**,** namely that the key points in 'telling trauma', especially given its complicated connection with memory, are as follows. Firstly, if you are to tell such tales truly you must observe protocols to protect your sources' mental health when interviewing them. This is an ethical task. My example here is a seemingly simple one but during this project I wanted to speak with a female Aboriginal playwright who has written quite a lot out of her own pain. I tried to get in touch with her, but she didn't respond. Once, I'd have kept on trying. Her work is interesting, and I like to think I would document it well. But now I have a policy–guided by academic ethics' requirements–of 'two failed requests and you stop asking'. For whatever reason, this person is not ready to respond. I have to respect that and find other alternatives.

Secondly, an artist must observe protocols to protect her sources' mental health when presenting the testimony they have granted to an audience**.** This is also an ethical task, but it may impact on the artistic one in that one may have to modify some content. For example, in *Long Tan*, family members of one of the dead soldiers objected to the way one of my sources had described his mother. The source had given me permission to use the material but then got blowback when his family saw the play. Sadly, I couldn't do anything about that except to say I was sorry for not having anticipated this, but I have modified that phrase in the published version of the script. It isn't as good, nor, I think, as 'true' as the original description, but my own artistic satisfaction was secondary at this point.

Thirdly, the creative practitioner must bring an understanding of the complexities of authenticity to her representation, that is–as writer in this case–she must remain true to the affect of the experience/situation alongside its accepted facts. In practice, this is usually an accomplishment of tone, which is firstly textural–the responsibility of the writer–but may imply other dramaturgical strategies. For example, even in a seemingly 'simple' script, like *The Red Cross Letters,* precise manipulation of tone may necessitate directorial, designer and actorly support, and an artist must be sufficiently skilled to know how to ensure this. This is an emotional, but mostly artistic task, and one that can only occur as an artist grows in capacity. We all learn in public in this field. I may not have been able to 'land' such a result earlier in my career. I feel I do have this capacity now.

Fourthly, because both the event and its remembering are twinned elements of the testimony, ideally, the practitioner will make memory itself an explicit part of the telling. This is mainly an intellectual task, but it will have artistic ramifications. It is also a reflection of the many years now of postmodern theatre practice. Any contemporary audience will, whether consciously or not, experience echoes of a generation's practice of the deconstruction of 'grand narratives' and the fallibility of assumed truths. A contemporary artist will need to touch base explicitly with this to retain a sense of a shared social paradigm in a genre which is all about the authentic. Again, *Long Tan* provides an example. In the interviews, one of the soldiers had complained that they might go about their ordinary lives but that come August, the anniversary of the battle, someone–in this case, me–would ring them up to ask them about it one more time. It was just the one comment, but he made it pointedly. I ended up putting that line very close to the end of the play. I hoped that the audience would be inside a suspension of disbelief until that moment when they would be tipped into a quick consciousness of the play's making. It may or may not have worked like that, but that was the intention. One mark of the success of work based on a traumatic origin that I have taken out of my research for this project–and which I have tried to address in the making of *Bloodlines*–is whether or not artists find a way to integrate these four tasks within their process.

4.4 Conclusions

As flagged in Task Three above, writing from *within* trauma rather than writing *about* a trauma may demand a particularly conscious approach. Amanda Stuart Fisher articulated the dilemma in a 2011 article about two case studies: one of a verbatim dramaturgy, and one of what she describes as a 'dramaturgy of testimonial theatre'. Her discussion provides considerable insight. Fisher's questions were: "How can dramaturgy engage with the *aporia* of an experience that is irreducible to the facts of a situation? And in what way can theatre stand as an authentic examination of the existential crisis of trauma?" (Fisher 2011, p. 118).

Fisher echoes definitions of trauma that stress the impossibility of the subject's attempt to integrate the impact of her suffering within the rest of her life and psyche: that is to say, to apprehend the 'unburied body' within (Horsman 2010, pp. 91-132). Framing her argument through Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein ('being-towards-death'), whereby Heidegger

suggested that humanity's key existential difference is the fact that humans can ponder the fact of their existence, and its end (Heidegger cited in Fisher 2011, pp. 19-24), Fisher quoted that:

> '…trauma is therefore best conceived as a limit experience, since it can neither be articulated nor comprehended within experience. On the contrary, it is the point at which experience confronts its ownmost (sic) impossibility' (Brantley 2002, cited in Fisher 2011, p. 7).

Whether or not this statement is wholly true, and I would argue that it is not quite, as there are examples of work such as Charlotte Delbo's 1990 *Auschwitz and After* where trauma is indeed apprehended and articulated, it does, nevertheless, in its near-truth, have implications for any attempt to perform trauma. Further, Fisher's point (2011, p. 112) that it is often at that point where wordlessness and extremity strand the suffering self that insight spears in is borne out by accounts of the traumatised, which then implies that an artist must be able to find a way to both use and convey this moment **(**Delbo 1990, 1995; Levi 1988; Wajnryb 2001).

In a statement which had implications for my practice writing *Bloodlines*, Fisher articulates the following:

> While verbatim theatre could be described as being constitutively–that is to say, dramaturgically–incapable of engaging with the radical asymmetry of trauma, theatre of testimony uses poetry and metaphor to open up the possibility for an authentic reflection on how the resonance of trauma has transformed the life of the individual who has lived through it (Fisher 2011 p. 17).

She illustrates this by reference to Yaël Farber's *He Left Quietly*, about the life of Duma Kumalo, one of the Sharpeville Six (Farber 2008). In this impressive work, made in collaboration with Kumalo, Farber evokes the subjectivity of the suffering, the anguish, awareness and ultimately performed expression of Kumalo. Renouncing a literal chronology, Farber splinters Kumalo's telling into multi-lingual (and, thus, sometimes texturally opaque) direct address that embraces metaphor, poetry, and action in a way that, in Fisher's words, means … "[t]he text […] discloses a 'traumatic now' in which the events of Duma's arrest and his incarceration on death row *reverberate through his attempt to grasp and take hold of his own existence*" (Fisher 2011 p. 13, emphasis added). Duma has since died, however, and I am not sure whether the piece would have the same impact using another performer.

4.5 Lessons for Writing

Nevertheless, this is a dramaturgy that places memory, and its fluid operation, both narrative and traumatic, at the structural subverted heart of a piece and as such offers another model of an approach that does not relinquish words but is not constrained by them. It has provided a model of the kind of dramaturgy I have needed to access for *Bloodlines*. My experience has been that, once I had written a (second) draft of *Bloodlines* that did indeed contain disrupted chronologies and narratives but still adhered to an un-traumatic logic, I then needed to break apart the separate (fictionalised) narratives of survivors that provide much of the context of the play and reconstitute them within the psyches of one or more sources of testimony. By the fifth draft, I had retained only a few phrases of direct testimony, and have tried to weave around those words, as Farber did in *He Left Quietly*, a sense of metaphor and slippage to work at cross-purpose to the factual rendition. One complicating factor, however, was that *Bloodlines* attempts the political and social task of evoking more than the one exemplar memory. Thus, in a play which will be looking for sources of cohesion, it cannot access that particular unity, unlike *He Left Quietly* where the three actors on stage are all either direct or indirect refractions of Kumalo's core experience.

Additionally, there were questions of scale, and, thus implications for staging. This has a bearing on intentions for the directorly task of the *mise en scène,* which will be approached in Chapter 6. Before then, however, it is useful to consider how other writers–more precise perhaps, and less concerned with their own flamboyance than Genet, but still predominantly focused on text–may have approached the broken temporal shifts of trauma through text. This becomes the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 5: TEXT AND THE TRAUMATIC

The intention of documentary playwrights considered in the previous chapter is to give an overview of a particular historical or political situation. The intention of playwrights whose work is considered in this chapter is more to engender in their audiences an ambiguous, nuanced response to a situation or state of mind that is painful to the point of intense suffering. Given that their chosen creative task is to evoke states as simultaneously overwhelming, ambiguous and confronting as terror and extreme emotional damage, these writers have responded with an emic (subjectively inside out) rather than an etic (observationally outside in) writing strategy. Their writing process is more than usually intuitive, and their techniques aim towards evoking mood, and sustain~~i~~ng tone, rather than providing information or improving understanding. They withhold closure rather than offering a point of view, yet, whilst the material may suggest to a director that it be framed via a sophisticated *mise en scène*, the primary tool of the artists in question is text.

This chapter discusses selected works of Samuel Beckett, (the German) Heiner Müller, Harold Pinter, and Sarah Kane as an approximate chronological trajectory of text-based work in contemporary Western theatre that responds to the traumatic. Eschewing strict genre definition, the works considered all problematise issues of memory or perception alongside personal or communal trauma. And they have all been part of the cultural canon for long enough to ensure that there is consensus to them as 'authentic' representations of those conditions. Through consideration of their artistic impact, I seek to uncover what the writers' intentions were, how they fulfilled their creative task, and in what way the resultant works suggest a basis for other writers to approach similar material.

5.1 Playwrights and Practice: Beckett

Samuel Beckett was perhaps the major paradigm-changing writer of the twentieth-century stage, whose example of aggressive textual minimalisation led to discoveries regarding the use of elision and silence (Beckett 2010; Tucker & McTighe 2016). His 1952 breakthrough work, *Waiting for Godot,* heralded a thematic obsession of conscious humanity enduring the unendurable through the trapped and endless waiting of two tramps hoping to see a man who never appears, and clearly never will (Beckett 1986, p. 7-88). *Waiting for Godot*, written, as

Steven Connors said, in four months between October 1948, and January 1949 (Beckett 2010, p. 8), has the relief of Beckett's sly humour and vaudevillian japes and, thus, becomes an expression of existential angst that leaves room for an 'other' (the audience/reader), in a way that *The Unnamable*, the third and final novel in Beckett's early French language trilogy of *Molloy, Malone Muert* and *L'Innomerable*, perhaps does not. It was the 1958 play *Krapp's Last Tape*, however, with its then-radical embedding of technology into the action that heralded the as-yet unimagined impact of mediatised performance in the twenty-first century (Beckett 1986, pp. 213-223).

Both *Krapp's Last Tape,* where the ageing Krapp plays and replays excerpts from his store of taped memories, and *The Unnamable*, where the nameless protagonist simply attempts to move forward and self-reflexively ponders upon his past, derive from the breakthrough moment that gave such power to Beckett's burst of writing in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

> …in the spring of 1946 something occurred which was to be of great significance for Beckett's later oeuvre. In a kind of revelation, he suddenly realized where the essence of his creative power was hiding…." (Tiggs 1991, p.345).

Beckett evokes this moment for his protagonist in *Krapp's Last Tape*:

> "…that memorable night…when I suddenly saw the whole thing. The vision at last…What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely … […] …the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most – (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds take forward, switches on again*] – unshatterable association…." (Beckett 1986, p. 220, elisions added)

Beckett's was an art of melancholy and nostalgia, made of the smallest possible fragments of life, of incidentals and seeming banalities signposted between extreme moments which become peaks of memory in the retrospective gaze (Bair 1978). In *Krapp's Last Tape* the protagonist lurches from peak to peak with his memory machine arbitrarily delivering chunks of the past to be ruminated over and usually discarded, only to echo yet again.

> The gist of the matter is that Beckett discovered he was a writer of the night, of twilight and withdrawal, of ashes and the bare bone… In a letter of 1946 he writes: '…optimism is not my way. I shall always be depressed, but what comforts me is the realization that I can now accept this dark side as the commanding side of my personality. In accepting it I shall make it work for me' (Tiggs 1991, p. 346).

Krapp's Last Tape was the work in which Beckett elucidated the moment of discovery but the longer, more intractable text of *The Unnamable* was the one in which he struggled to

solve the creative problem of his own darkness. His solution: to allow himself (and his characters) to sit within the sheer banality and 'stuckness' of the simultaneous unavoidablity and irrelevance of suffering is perhaps his gift to all who seek to penetrate the mystery of their own writer's voice. In *The Unnamable*, the full bleakness of Beckett's point of view is on display. His struggle in both the writing and the translation of this text became a touchstone for him. The uncompromising result of that struggle is also what makes his evocation of literary and existential extremity a ground zero for later writers.

It takes enormous writerly charisma to successfully state such an artistic case as this, and any other writer attempting the same task will simply appear 'Beckettian'. In relation to works about politico-historical trauma, neither *Krapp's Last Tape*, nor *The Unnamable* is about an imposed trauma (other than the imposed trauma of existence itself). Nevertheless, Beckett's breakthrough into stating the problem of an agony of consciousness unveiled a style of writing that other writers could use to confront the other unnameable of deliberate evil. Beckett's own offering in the arena of political evil was very brief, and explicitly political, in a 1982 playlet dedicated to Czech playwright/politician, Vaclav Havel, namely, *Catastrophe*, where a theatre director is depicted minimalising in excruciating detail the physical image of a shattered man on stage, cutting and cutting to the essential image: a whitened cranium (Beckett 1986, p. 461).

Although Beckett is a literary playwright, dedicated to a struggle with words as primary expression and foregrounding the script above all, what Beckett's process evolved into could perhaps be described as large-form postdramatic. His oeuvre became dozens of small, suggestive scripts that circle around the same mood of darkness, miscommunication and shadow, with a bleak tone and cipher-like characters who are mostly nothing more than irritable jumbles of nostalgia, vehicles for text rather than representations of the human. But when all of these separate elements cross-reference and evoke each other, as they do when considered as a whole, it builds a shifting, multi-associative picture of an afterworld of grief (Beckett 1986).

5.2 Playwrights and Practice: Müller

During the same period that Beckett was writing, German iconoclast, Heiner Müller, was creating his radical, savage works. The relevance of his work to this project is that in addition

to his connections with a generation of English-language writers, most significantly the 'In-Yer-Face' school of British writers that includes Sarah Kane, along with Martin Crimp and Mark Ravenhill] (Lehmann 1999, p. 6), Müller also had a long collaboration with the American postdramatic artist, Robert Wilson (Holmberg 1996, pp. 22-29). He was, thus, a literary playwright who made some of his best work with one of the most extreme visual consciousnesses in contemporary theatre. Further, his writing came out of the period around World War II, when Müller, a small boy in East Germany when his father was imprisoned by the Nazis, and later an ambivalent if loyal citizen of the German Democratic Republic, began a lifetime of reaction to social and personal extremity (Kalb 1998, pp.5-7).

Like Beckett, Müller is a writer whose work is powered by memory, though in his case, "Müller's "memories" are not only about remembering, but about the memories themselves" (Malkin 1999, p. 71). For example, the eight-page, single-sentence *Description of a Picture*/*Explosion of a Memory* (Müller 1995, pp. 133-8) occupies a central place in Müller's work somewhat similar to that of *The Unnamable* in Beckett's (Gluhovic 2013, pp. 129-145). It, like much of Müller's work, circles relentlessly around a sense of the insistence of memory, as it combines and suggests fragmentary scenarios of violence and pain. It is impossible to précis, with its use of capitals which do seem, it could be argued, to be made for the eye rather than the ear, much as that 'single sentence' could seem to rely on the use of semi-colons. But it is exquisite writing. And it is all about an abstracted incidence of the fluidities of insecure memory. Again, it is short-form.

Milija Gluhovic, who writes so illuminatingly about Europe and memory, makes a useful distinction between three types of memory, when he referred to the "three aspects of memory discourse: the historical (relation between histiography and individual/collective memory), psychological (trauma, mourning, and melancholia), and philosophical (subjectivity) (Gluhovic 2013, p.24). Gluhovic further said:

> In contrast to mourning, melancholia is characterised by the inability of the subject to separate itself from the object (that is, by the ego's identification with the lost object) and an essential misrecognition of what has been lost. As Freud puts it, "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (1957:245). In other words, the difference between a "normal" and "pathological" affect here is that in mourning the lost object is always perceived as distinct and "existing outside the ego", where in melancholia that what (sic) has been lost constitutes an enigma. And while both in mourning and melancholia the subject dwells on the past, the melancholic appears unable to leave the past behind – grief does not end (Gluhovic 2013, p. 57).

This statement captures the endless reverberation of affect that so troubles Beckett's protagonists, the version-after-version of Müller's constructed 'I' that appear throughout his work, and also my own topic: the momentous and unfathomable loss that happens to individuals when their whole society is destroyed by a malevolent 'other'. Though, again in a nod to the short-form, melancholy would seem to sit more precisely within an individual consciousness than a communal one.

Müller, like Pinter, wanted the content of his work to stand as the thing-that-it-is, rather than its hermeneutic interpretation. His intent was to privilege his own writerly task of creating a series of 'synthetic fragments' that would have an (overwhelming) effect on his audience via a dramaturgy of 'flooding', rather than to add to a discourse on a subject, or to impose an authorial point of view (Malkin 1999, p.72). Most of his work pushes against logical transparency. His 1979 play, *The Mission* is, however, about an explicitly political subject, a twinning of the 1789 French and 1831 Jamaican Revolutions. This play, in a loop of fragmented storylines and character 'moments', does show how this particular traumatic situation came about; who was to 'blame', who profited, who lost. Nevertheless, the most outstanding aspect of *The Mission* is the compellingly reverberative language of the text itself that evokes a sense of quixotic, contradictory, unreliable and embellished memory. And although *The Mission* is a full-length play, it is made of a multiplicity of fragments whose logic does not reveal itself in the moment but only by effort, after.

5.3 Playwrights and Practice: Pinter

One of Beckett's direct inheritors was fellow Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter, the overtly political dimension of whose career emerged in his later years. Mircia Aragay, in an interview with the playwright quoted by Dilek Inan, described Pinter as saying, "I do not have an ideology in my plays. I just write; I'm a very instinctive writer. I don't have a calculated aim or ambition; I simply find myself writing something which then follows its own path. And that path tends to include acts of violence of one kind or another, because it is the world in which I live. And so do you" (Inan 2005 p. 40). Talking about his 1996 (short) play, *Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter said, "*Ashes to Ashes* is about two characters, a man and a woman, Devlin and Rebecca. From my point of view" (cited in Gluhovic 2013, p. 297). He later described that interaction:

> The woman is simply haunted by the world that she's been born into, by all the atrocities that have happened. In fact, they seem to have become part of her own experience, although in my view she hasn't actually experienced them herself. That's the whole point of the play. I have myself been haunted by these images for many years, and I'm sure not alone in that. I was brought up in the Second World War. I was about fifteen when the War ended; I could listen and hear and add two and two, so these images of horror and man's inhumanity to man were very strong in my mind as a young man. They've been with me all my life, really. That's the point of *Ashes to Ashes*. I think Rebecca inhabits that" (Gluhovic 2013, p. 51).

And 'that' has obvious connections with the second-hand 'memory' that some children of survivors of violence so struggle with (Brett 1992; Wajnryb 2001; Blecher, see Appendix B; Rosner Blay, Appendix B). In *Ashes to Ashes* the dramatic action starts with dialogue, more and less teasing and threatening that plays with notions of sexual domination and elusive scraps of either memories or fantasies in the manner of many of Pinter's plays. The last scene of the play, however, moves past 'story' to identification, where Rebecca takes on the identity, more than the role, of a (Jewish?) woman whose baby is taken from her by a nameless (but reminiscent of a Nazi) guard. Like the work of Beckett and Müller, *Ashes to Ashes* circles around the fact and process of memory. Pinter's great affect in *Ashes to Ashes* is to present his audience with a moment of 'deep memory' (Clendinnen 1998, p. 60). As a writer, I 'feel', and this is a moment where I will claim validation for the efficacy of the 'hunch', (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) that, similar to Beckett's *The Unnamable, Ashes to Ashes* is a piece that found itself in the writing, as if Pinter started out to write a play in the vein of his existent work only to discover, as he wrote, that what he was referencing was the image of (Jewish) prisoners being escorted on a death march, and, as Rebecca slips into her identification with the grieving and unfairly culpable Jewish mother, so do we, as audience or reader.

This is the core of the play. In a process similar to Delbo's 'two-fold being' (Delbo 1990, p. 3) the moment when Pinter evokes the dead child is a moment of horror, when a detail of testimony takes us, however briefly, inside an experience when one is changed. Like a significant act of cruelty out in the terror-dominated world, there is no going back. The detail becomes part of one's emotional constitution.

> REBECCA: And I said what baby
> ECHO: what baby
> REBECCA: I don't have a baby
> ECHO: a baby
> REBECCA: I don't know of any baby
> ECHO: of any baby
> *Pause.*

REBECCA: I don't know of any baby
Long silence.
BLACKOUT. (Pinter, 2001, p. 83–84)

5.4 Playwrights and Practice: Kane

If Beckett's is a poetry of silence, Müller's of contradiction, and Pinter's of pain and threat, then Sarah Kane's is a poetry of the body: attacked and suffering and non-negotiable in its vulnerability to disaster. The body suffers, and the body holds the pain. Her work is not overtly political. Even in *Blasted*, for example, which is perhaps her most political play, the political implications of Kane's shocking revelation of pain are not spelt out but they are there in the unspoken connection of the warzone evoked in that play with the conflict in the Balkans that was occurring when Kane was writing the piece (Kane 2001). As Jeanne Colleran said (in reference not to Kane, but to Pinter and Caryl Churchill, but the comment applies):

> …another group of plays written against…war is committed to examining the mechanisms of power and control. These works… may make no reference at all to any specific conflict; instead they depict rationalizations of torture, the workings of traumatic memories, connections between late capitalism and oppression, violence and sexism, authoritarianism and cultural genocide. In comparison to the documentary or issue plays, these investigations into structural violence are indirect, even purposefully obscure; however, they too want to expose operative discourses of power. In addition to asking spectators to understand the veiled power dynamics underlying specific kinds of brutality, they also invite us to consider connections between representational violence and political violence" (Colleran 2012, p. 9).

Kane's *4.48 Pyschosis,* on the other hand*,* simply *is* the condition of trauma. It is disputed by Alex Sierz, for example, but David Grieg, who was a friend of Kane's, asserts in his introduction to the published play that Kane *was* making a record of her own suffering before she died (Kane 2001, p. ix; Sierz 2000, p. 90). Whatever her intentions, in this play she offers a model of extreme beauty and extreme sadness in the disjuncted voices, permeable boundaries, ongoing humiliations of banality, bodily shame and complete emotional stasis. Anyone writing about these issues is in her debt because nowhere has the violation of self by contemplation of cruelty and meaninglessness been better expressed.

I've never understood
What it is I'm not supposed to feel
Like a bird on the wing in a swollen sky
My mind is torn by lightning
As it flies from the thunder behind (Kane, 2001, p 239)

5.5 Tone

The lesson from these masters for me is that the treatment of memory needs to employ the tool of tone. Tone itself, is of course an ambiguous quality. The Lexico Dictionary defines it as “The general character or attitude of a place, piece of writing, situation etc” (Lexico Dictionary n.d.). But perhaps the synonyms the Lexico offers are more useful, namely “mood, quality, feel, style, note, air, attitude, character, spirit, flavour, grain, temper, humour, effect” (Lexico dictionary n.d.). It is hard to pin down because in relation to a work of art tone is sensed in a global manner rather than identified in a linear one. But for example, Beckett’s austerity, Pinter’s darkening cloud of threat, Müller’s multiple nostalgias of memory and Kane’s reverberating sense of impending horror are all tonal achievements.

5.6 Conclusions

The finding of a voice with which to communicate the brutality of extreme suffering– especially if such suffering has no ‘reason’, which, in itself, constitutes the unsalvagably horrific–is perhaps the greatest technical achievement of the writers considered in this chapter. If one can find a meaning somewhere, even so muted a meaning as Rebecca’s identification with the bereaved mother in *Ashes to Ashes*, or Ian’s word of ‘Thanks’ at the end of *Blasted,* the ‘answer’ might be in the operation of empathy, which is attractive to me as a writer and which I do assert in the final scene of *Bloodlines.* This last point is borne out by Mary Anne Butler’s insistence in her interview with me that despite the perceived dark aura of her work, she prefers to leave her characters with at least a suggestion of a new choice (Butler 2018, Appendix A). Beckett, or Müller, however, would likely reject that.

It is, of course, extremely hard to sustain an explication of this sort. Words *are* inadequate, except in so far as they can set up silence, as Australian playwright Tom Holloway suggested (Holloway 2018, Appendix A). The voice itself can be variable. Writers like Beckett, or Pinter insist on distance; Kane in the end obliterates it; and Müller games the audience with a series of contradictions. But it is significant that much of this writing is quite short. The extremity of suffering means that ‘less is more’. An audience can enter into a brief scene in the way a reader can enter into an extended poem and give it the kind of attention it demands in order to be fully experienced. But 260 pages (of *The Unnamable* for example) simply overwhelms.

5.7 Writing Lessons

The stage dramatist who seeks to convey a long-form depiction of trauma via text will almost certainly need other dramatic techniques to sustain their subject in a way that takes care of their audience. Certainly, the material may necessarily be fragmentary–short-form within long-form–and disjunctive. It could be argued from the above list that the writers who *do* succeed in this arena are all artists who are as much poets as playwrights. The success of Robert Wilson's collaboration with William Burroughs and Tom Waits in *The Black Rider* (2004), where all members of the creative team were poets of their own area (Waits and Burroughs of dialogue and song; Wilson of light and the *mise en scène*) is a persuasive example. On the other hand, as Mary Anne Butler also pointed out, a writer who relies on stage directions to convey his or her essential points is extremely vulnerable (Butler 2018, Appendix A). Given the right collaborators, however, I would argue something extraordinary–and long-form–can succeed. The following chapter considers Poland–the locale of *Bloodlines*–and Polish theatre in the light of two exceptional Polish artists of the *mise en scène*.

Chapter 6: TRAUMA AND THE *MISE EN SCÈNE*: POLISH THEATRE AND THE POSTTRAUMATIC

> There are years and places, sometimes whole decades and entire nations in which history reveals its menace and destructive force with particular clarity. These are chosen nations, in the same sense in which the Bible calls the Jews a chosen people. In such places and years history is… 'let off the leash'. It is then that individual human destiny seems as if shaped directly by history (Kott in Borowski 1967, p. 12)

During World War II, from 1939-45, the twentieth century's most unspeakable acts of trauma occurred in the mid-European nation of Poland (Valentino 2004, p. 73). This chapter addresses Poland's history and culture, and the effect of domination by other nations upon its national psyche. It considers the influence of Polish Romantic theatre and the Polish avant garde on the work of mid-twentieth century artists Jerzy Grotowski (1933-99)–an artist of the traumatic–and Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990)–an artist of memory (Davies 1986; Gerould 1977; Romanska 2014; Segel 1977). These auteur directors are examples of theatre workers who, coming from a tradition of the (visual) artist-playwright and living in a repressive political state used the *mise en scène* as their primary tool in a world where words were dangerous. The chapter further considers how their work disrupts logical narrative in ways reminiscent of trauma's disruption of memory. It asks what the practices of these particular artists may offer to the creation of a (text-based) work about a traumatic Polish-Australian subject (Gerould 1977; Kobialka 1992; MacTaggart & Grotowski 1968; Romanska 2014; Segel 1977; Temkine 1972; Wasja, Andrzej 2007; Wadja, Andrezj, Kantor & Smulsky 1977).

6.1 History

Magda Romanska quoted Milan Kundera as follows: "Poland's central location (is) a site of perpetual geoschizophrenia" (Kundera 1984, cited in Romanska 2014, p. 16). That is a fair summation. Poland is indeed a vulnerable nation that has struggled more than most to exist. For most of its history the territories that made up 'Poland' were occupied by Germans (Prussians) from the west, or Austro-Hungarians from the south, or Imperial Russians from the east, with the Baltic Sea to the north. Unifying factors have thus less been borders than shared cultural memes, for example, language, Slavic ethnicity, the Roman Catholic religion and Polish artistic achievement.

Norman Davies described how, in the twentieth century, aside from the German occupation during World War II, the major occupier was the communist Soviet Union with a postwar puppet communist regime dominant in Warsaw. As Davies said: "The essence of Poland's modern experience is humiliation" (Davies 1986, pp.61-2). That is–shame. Humiliation (shame) was also at the heart of the peculiarly intense nineteenth century Polish Romanticism, itself another reaction to Russian aggression (Segel 1977). The Polish Romantic movement, from the 1820s to the 1860s, was based around a fervently 'spiritual' literary affirmation of the primacy of Polish national culture as enunciated by a number of Polish poet-playwrights. In dramas as much literary as theatrical, these artists of the heroic homeland formed a cultural leadership for many Poles, both emigrant and otherwise (Segel 1977, p. 7). Polish culture was preferred as *the* core value because neither politics, nor economics, nor alliances with the West could offer an uncompromised sense of national identity (Davies 1986, p 249; Segel 1977, pp. 21-71). This funnelling of nationalistic fervour into art was to be a significant influence in the development of Polish theatre. Where politicians might lie, artists would be telling if not *the* truth, then *a* truth–complicated, romantic, martyred–as perceived by their countrymen.

Of the nineteenth century poet-playwrights, the master was Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), author (in 1832) of the enduring *Forefathers' Eve* (Segel 1977, p. 8). The work of the Romantics was still more or less linear, adhering to an overarching protagonist model where the writer was the hero was the writer, so dramatic conventions of form remained unchallenged; but the bleed between material and artist was such that the poet-playwrights were seen as the inspirers of national political revolt, for example in the Uprisings of November 1830 and January 1863, both of which were ruthlessly repressed by Poland's Russian overlords. Unsurprisingly, the Romantics then fell into disfavour, but their significance remained, and the next artist of major national consequence was the artist/poet/playwright, Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907), who looked back to Mickiewicz and *Forefathers' Eve* for inspiration in his own great work, *Akropolis* (a version of which became a signature work of Grotowski's) rather than to his immediate (Positivist) predecessors. As Daniel Gerould said:

> Wyspiański's plays live less in their literary texts, which serve rather as scenarios, than in their theatrical potential for realization on stage. Taking both ancient Greek theatre and Wagner as his models and making use of folk arts, village customs, popular ceremonies, processions and Christmas puppet shows, Wyspiański created a total theatre that is all image – shapes, colours, sounds… that

> succeeds in uniting many different arts… (to propose) an ideal theatre of the future that would be native (in) inspiration and messianic in goals… (Gerould 1977 p. 19).

Wyspiański's work thus heralded a mutation of theatre form, and the style and the range of Wyspiański's dramas functioned as a template for the upcoming generation of the Polish avant garde who were writing during the Second Republic, the brief period of Polish political independence between the World Wars. Many of these artists, such as Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz, exhibit the quality of Polish 'kynicism', that is, "a rejection of official culture by means of irony and sarcasm" that Peter Sloterdijk identifies as a peculiarly Polish literary/theatrical defence mechanism (Solterdijk 1987, cited in Romanska 2014, p. 67). Linking both eras was the outrageous, multi-talented playwright and, again, visual artist, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939) who went by the pen name, 'Witkacy'.

Despite his notoriety and influence, Witkacy was roundly criticised during his own lifetime, and it was not until 1956 that his reputation was revived with a performance of *The Cuttlefish* by Kantor at Cricot 2 (Gerould 1977, p. 85; Schlosser, 2014). By then, however, Witkacy was long dead, by his own hand in September 1939 just ahead of the Russian invasion of Poland. Witkacy's writing has an almost shocking energy, reminiscent of a less scatological Jarry. He upends chronology, manners, expectations and even life and death. Years before Ionesco, his ghosts don't die but retain full physicality (Ionesco 1995; Witkiewicz 1966). The polymathic Witkacy was also an amateur but serious philosopher, and his 'Theory of Pure Form' stimulated him to deconstruct consensus theatrical reality with almost self-righteous abandon (Kiebuzinska 1993). Witkacy asserted that to shake an audience into apprehension of the true, contradictory, chaotic nature of reality the artistic object–the play–must become "maximally irrational, individualistic, deformed and offensive to bourgeois tastes. Deformity, deviation, and the shocking quality of art is "a kind of narcotic" (Anders 2009, p. 58) that through its exquisite arrangement of form would mainline an experience of the ravishing nature of existence or, as Hans-Thies Lehmann more plainly put it, "The play is to adhere solely to the law of its internal composition" (Lehmann 2006 p. 64).

In a classic diversion of creative iteration, Witkacy became something of a game-changer for the writing of *Bloodlines*. Apart from his sheer charm (a gift to a playwright dealing with difficult material!) his manic playwriting offered both philosophical and technical solutions. Thus, by the end of the first draft of *Bloodlines*, Witkacy had leap-frogged into the text as a

mordantly irreverent quasi-narrator (a source of unity in the large platform of the play); a means of articulating the most serious questions of life and death; and a way of self-reflexively enunciating theatrical choices. In particular, he became a means of linking the memory-trauma of Zosia, the daughter struggling with the trauma of her emigrée mother and the dramatic action of the play that had evolved from interviews and subject research. The point about creative writing is that you can't predict this kind of thing–you can't set it up as a research goal. All you can do is be alive to the serendipities as they present themselves and respond to that.

6.2 Poland and the Jews

The Gentile-Jewish juxtaposition in Poland is a complex one. Since the tenth century, Poland had been a welcoming destination for Jewish communities. During World War II, however, Poland became a killing field (Gluhovic 2013, p 26). Of those Polish Jews killed during the 1940s, a "staggering 89% of Poland's pre-war Jewish population of 3.3 million were murdered during the period of the Nazi occupation" (Schwarz 2016, para 12). It was the German Nazis who perpetrated those murders, and there were many Poles, like Janek Kostanski, father of my interviewee Andrew Kostanski, who, despite the threat of the death penalty, helped their Jewish countrymen (Kostanski 2017, Appendix B). But there were many who knowingly lived alongside the killing factories or transport links, and some who actively assisted the Nazis out of prejudice or greed (Rosenberg 2007). Another of my interviewees, the child of a very damaged Holocaust survivor, talked to me in an icy monologue for over an hour spelling out chapter and verse of such connections (Carl B, 2017, Appendix B). His neighbour, a woman the same age whose parents had suffered but not been as traumatised, bore the Polish no ill will and had yearned all her adolescence to return to Poland (Kay R, 2018, Appendix B). There are no easy answers.

In the grimness of the post-World War II Soviet era this country could be described as a nation with a wounded soul, perhaps a rare example of communal melancholia. So, a stress on martyrdom and extreme self-punishment from Grotowski, or on loops of death-centred irony from Kantor is unsurprising. It is also unsurprising that in an environment of liberty-threatening censorship, the use by theatre directors of ironic visual metaphor in the *mise en scène* was privileged over possibly dangerously unambiguous text (Lehmann 2006;

Romanowska 2007; Schechner & Wolford 1997). Yet I myself am a playwright who works primarily with words, so how relevant really is their example to other such writers?

As it turns out, very. As the impressive Magda Romanska asserted, every word spoken (or sung) in Grotowski's *Akropolis* or Kantor's *The Dead Class*–used here as exemplar Polish works–had its folk, classical, village or literary derivation and carried an intended effect for an audience familiar with that context (Romanska 2014, pp. 12-28). Secondly, she suggested that the work of both owes more to their derivation from the Polish Romantics, the Polish avant-garde, the history and culture of Poland and the trauma of World War II than it does to the kind of radical originality touted by their early Anglo and European admirers (Romanska 2014, pp. 4-9). Her argument has its detractors (Schutis 2013, p. 399). Nevertheless, given the many occasions where the centrality of text as a key element of stage work has been questioned, for example, in an interview of Grotowski by Richard Schechner, director of the Performance Group (Schechner & Worlford 1997, pp. 46 – 54), or Peter Brook's remembrances (Brockway 1973), it could be argued that Romanska's precise and informed scholarship and familiarity with the range of textual reference in the work of both artists is a necessary corrective. This is clearly of interest to a text-based writer.

There is not space here to considers either artist's work as a whole, but there are significant lessons in the chosen works to assess its effectiveness in conveying both trauma and traumatic memory. Firstly, trauma. As Daniel Listoe said, 'Stripping art and history of their flesh is paid for by the eventual encounter of what Jean Genet in *The Screens* called the "stink", the "rot that rots…"" (Genet 1962, cited in Listoe, 2004, p. 110). The existence of a psychological drive within humans that is predicated on a choice to inflict deliberate harm to unprovoking others is indeed horrifying when accurately and uncompromisingly reflected (Borowski 1967; Delbo 1995; Valentino 2004). For example, Peter Brook, when interviewed about the impact of Grotowski's *Akropolis* said: "[I]t's like black magic happening in front of you" (MacTaggart & Grotowski 1968).

6.3 Grotowski

And Grotowski's *Akropolis is* an intensely disturbing work. Its setting is the concentration camp at Auschwitz and its dramatic action is the building by the prisoners of the gas chamber in which they will be consumed. As Christopher Innes explained, the play invokes

Wyspiański's notion of the 'cemetery of the tribes', a necropolis rather than an acropolis, where the actors play neither ghosts nor zombies, but a form of the animate dead (Innes 1981, p. 160). There are many testimonies to the impact the piece had on audiences (Temkine, 1972).

Grotowski's own *raison d'être* became the exercise of art-making–acting practice–ahead of the art made. In the bulk of his produced work, however, while the subject matter–drawn from Shakespeare, Wyspiański and Calderon amongst others–was important, the suffering germane to that subject matter almost overwhelmed the original material (Essential Drama 2018). Through this work, Grotowski presented the acceptance of inescapable pain as the only means whereby a human being could overcome humanity's core ontological dilemma; that we live in a world where at any time we are utterly vulnerable to the willed evil of others of our kind. Just as Genet suggested Saïd, his protagonist in *The Screens*, had only one choice, which was to go further into an extremity of shame, Grotowski's characters have only the 'choice' to embrace an inevitable trajectory of suffering. I wondered if one of my own writing tasks might be to evoke the shame of suffering, and if that shame might be an echo that must eventually be dissipated if individual and population are to return to health. To depict this unequivocally would have been a falsity but, from Charlotte Delbo's spirit-sustaining memories I took the premise that art that might offer an ambiguous intimation of potential change (*Bloodlines*; Delbo 1999).

A further note for my own practice was that if one is looking at a society-wide event, then one is almost inevitably looking at scale, and perhaps my desire to work at scale had had something to do with my original choice of such an ambitious subject. It perhaps worth noting that work at scale is not generally facilitated in Australia and that an artist who does so consistently, like Nigel Jamieson, for example, whose work is discussed in the following chapter, is the exception rather than the rule.

Society-wide scale is something the Polish Romantics certainly understood with their huge plays. The fact that Grotowski's *Akropolis* takes its title and structure from Wyspiański's poetic drama of the same name is perhaps a pointer to that. The action of Wyspiański's original takes place in the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow, the 'holy place' of all Poles, and high point of its culture. And the four-part structure of that piece is firmly modelled on–Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. Between drafts two and three of *Bloodlands,* when I was

looking to disrupt the linearity of my original text, I wondered if, given that I, too, am aiming for scale but need to find a way to manage that alongside a fluid chronology, there might not be something in the structure as well as the Polish resonance of *Forefather's Eve* that might give shape to my piece in the way that the musical structure of Tom Holloway's Australian piece about Port Arthur, *Beyond the Neck*, holds together the experiences of the people who are haunted by the Port Arthur massacre (Holloway 2008). It might offer an arbitrary self-limiting device that could function as a way in for an audience or a reader. So that possibility became an iterative choice at that point. (Ultimately, there is a five, not four-part framework to *Bloodlines*, but it is not overt).

6.4 Kantor

It could be argued that Tadeusz Kantor stands with the great artists of memory. In Kantor's oeuvre, images from his life as a Polish village boy with a Catholic mother and estranged Jewish soldier father (who died at Auschwitz in 1942) are mediated through an eclectic range of the work of the Polish avant garde (Kobialka 1992). Like Grotowski, and indeed Witkacy, Kantor passed through a series of conceptual frameworks for his thought and practice. The final period of his great works that includes *The Dead Class* came during his 'Theatre of Death' phase where the 'characters' are not ghosts nor ghouls, but strangely autonomous 'living corpses'. They have a sense of life, albeit thwarted life, to them, however, that the *Muselmänner* of Grotowski's *Akropolis* and Auschwitz itself lack (Soranio 2010; Wajda, Andrezj, Kantor & Smulsky 1977). *The Dead Class* depicts a group of agèd school students in an early twentieth-century Polish village classroom. They are the already dead, who dance, play games, attempt lessons, but above all repeat and repeat themselves in a circular dance of death under the watchful eye of their creator, Kantor himself (Kobialka 1992, pp. 126-133).

Milija Gluhovic emphasised Kantor's "obsessive reflection on the nature of time and human memory" (Gluhovic 2013, p. 182). He also discusses how mnemonics was the ground zero for Kantor's Theatre of Death period.[4] As Gluhovic explained, in *The Dead Class,* Kantor presents the classroom as the site whose objects are prompts for memory. During the play, it becomes clear, however, that the memories thus evoked have a life of their own and simply

[4] Briefly, the practice of mnemonics goes back to the mythical sixth century example of the Greek poet, Simonides, who, by an act of visual memory, recalled the sitting places, and thus identified the casualties of an entire dining hall of people who perished in a catastrophe from which he himself narrowly escaped.

will not be controlled by their creator/experiencer, Kantor himself, as he prowls the edge of the stage; and that,

> This merging of past and present creates a sense of simultaneity, as in traumatised recall. The insufficiency of voluntary memory – the illusion that the "storehouse" of images can be locked, unlocked, and used at will – becomes obvious… (Gluhovic 2015, p. 23)

Kantor's practice suggested that perhaps the first task in making work about memory might be to find *the* 'place of memory', as Wyspiański did with Wawel, or Grotowski did with Auschwitz, or Kantor did himself with his antiquated village classroom–the ground, sacred or profane, that can lend itself to a version of the dining hall of Simonides. The other great theatre artist of (traumatic) memory, Heiner Müller, also replicates the notion of the memory room but in his case this 'room' can be a two-dimensional picture (*Explosion of a Memory*) or a set of cultural references (*The Mission)* so the task does not have to be literal. In her volume Romanska made a detailed analysis of Kantor's sources for *The Dead Class*. These included Witkacy's *Tumor Brainiowicz*, signature works of Schulz and Gombrowicz and, once again–if indirectly–framing the piece as a whole is Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve,* in particular the ritual of the raising of the dead (Romanska 2012, p. 216).

6.5 Writing Lessons

As it turned out, the 'place of memory' was not a first task for me, but rather an imposed, later one, because I came to it from the research rather than from a prior understanding. Nonetheless, it was a hugely clarifying realisation. My mnemonics became a reiterative cycle of the ancient forests of Poland; the grey streets of the ghettos; the old nationalistic honours accorded to General Dowbor; small, crowded spaces that are trap, hiding place and cell combined; and the existence of Auschwitz itself.

The circularity and repetition that are part of both *The Dead Class* and *Akropolis* speak to trauma; the sense of living inside a relentlessly eternal present where the strings of one's actions are pulled by something pitiless and malevolent to create a state of compulsive recurrence. But does one simply state the case, and offer no 'after'? Perhaps so. Given that most trauma does not end, it may be that to impose an arc of resolution on the experience in a theatre piece would be to falsify it. And yet, what about the intimation of the dissipation of the echo of shame? Such questions become their own iteration in the making of a creative

work. It is uncomfortable sometimes to sit with them, because the answers seem to arrive in their own way at their own time and not by a process of deduction (see Chapter 7).

Magda Romanska said, “Jerzy Grotowski’s theories and methods influenced directors such as Peter Brook, Richard Schechner, and Joseph Chaikin, and groups like the Living Theatre, the Wooster Group, the Performance Group, and the Open Theatre” (Romanska 2014, p. 6). This is a roll call of influential theatre makers of the twentieth century, particularly those who have been interested in formal experiment and postmodern structure. Their work, in turn, has fed into that of other more conventional artists to the degree that audiences now take for granted multiple platforms, varied audience-actor relationships, and, above all, a focus on the body of the actor in the performance space as a core definition of theatre. As Romanska also summed up, “Tadeusz Kantor’s aesthetic has influenced Reza Abdoh, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Moisés Kaufman, the Quay Brothers, and many others” (Romanksa 2014, p. 6). This is a different lineage to that which derived from Grotowksi but equally important to present-day theatre artists. Either directly, or through this lineage, most artists working in performance and the postdramatic owe a debt to Kantor and Grotowski.

Similarly, with the quality of *kynicism.* It comes across as a darkly ironic, hopeless pragmatism that nevertheless continues to dance, even if always towards inevitable death. It threads through both *Akropolis* and *The Dead Class* and the works that inspired them. If indeed it was this state of mind, this paradigm of being and response that set peculiarly twentieth century parameters around the work of the Polish artists considered here, and if it did derive from a response to the particular traumas of their history, then this, too, has a place in my evolving work. There’s a warning here, though. I have to be wary in that *kynicism* is not a part of my natural writer’s voice, which I am of an age and experience to understand, and which I don’t want to fake. Thus, because character is one of the things that has always come naturally for me, I decided to situate the *kynicitic* in a particular character, again drawn from the history of the time, namely Taduesz Borowski, the Polish political prisoner who survived Auschwitz to author *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* amongst other writings, and who was *kynicitic* through and through until he, too, killed himself post-war (Borowski 1967).

It has been the focus of the Polish part of the research to analyse the national specificities of history, landscape, repression and unrealisable yearnings that have impacted upon the art

made by its people. The research has also suggested the specific tonal accuracy of the *kynicitic* in response to Polish trauma. It raises the question, too, whether there might be something about the dispelling of shame that may play a part in dispelling the traumatic. If so, should the play, whilst factoring in a necessary ambiguity about the imposition of 'closure' to the narrative arc also evoke this?

Finally, quoted at an exhibition held in October 2017 at Melbourne's Parliament House's Queen's Hall and curated by the Jewish organisation *Courage to Care*, Jordana Silverstein, a third-generation Melbourne Polish Jew, said "We learn to live without stories, with gaps and silences. We learn to re-learn the stories, from scraps. Poland, then, today is perhaps both a metaphor and a psychological place; an imaginary site and a wilful interruption" (Silverstein 2014)

It is my task in *Bloodlines* to evoke that.

Chapter 7: THEATRE OF TRAUMA IN AUSTRALIA

If the artists of Poland's 'wounded soul' produced a praxis of savage irony, ritualistic mourning and defiance in the face of death and degradation, then what particularities of Australian culture and history might mark the work of Australian artists? This chapter discusses work by Australian playwrights about historical and political trauma. Using primary research provided by interviews where possible, it looks to particularities of landscape, culture, scale and genre in a range of works and writers, seeking to define an Australian traumatic.

7.1 Background

Australia is a country where technologically superior invaders have attempted to silence or even obliterate the sites of the many-thousands-of-years-old culture that had lived so lightly within it (Carter 1996; Krin, Muecke & Roe 1984; Pascoe 2014). It is a land where the 'official' history is a few hundred years old, tarnished with evasions and imperialist assumptions (Grant 2017) and peopled by humans fleeing if not always the traumatic, then the difficult or the opportunity-killing. This history looks back to other cultures, antithetical to the Indigenous cultures for its triggers to meaning, gripped by a nostalgia of yearning for an ideal of 'home' that is profoundly 'other' to the actual physical life of its transplanted inhabitants, so that in some ways the majority population is 'other' to itself (Hughes 1988; Massy 2017).

In the same way Poland's 'martyred history' became a cover for the shame of repeated failure to push back aggressive powers, followed by helpless complicity in monstrous crime, what is the dominant paradigm that has shaped the emotional climate in Australia? What is our shame? Have we made theatre that deals with the deep personal, political and social disruptions in our population? Or has that perhaps suffered from shallow attention, shadow and silence?

When I asked Andrew Bovell what seemed to him to be the urgent subjects to address in contemporary Australia he said:

> I still think as a culture we're engaged in identifying and telling the great national narratives. Who are we? Where have we come from? What kind of country do we need to be? … But – I think that's contested ground. So therefore, I'm engaged in the contest. So, it's still important to me to argue through my work for an historical accuracy around the way this country was colonized, and therefore the legacy of that colonization. That for me remains an urgent subject of national significance (Bovell 2018, see Appendix A)

As a person, and as a playwright I agree with Bovell that acts of colonisation and dispossession are the likely outstanding source of shame and silence, the things so many do not want to confess. And Bovell's work in the 2001 *Holy Day* and the 2013 adaptation of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* attempts just this task. I will come to these texts later. But the other source of shame is perhaps the simple fact that the waves of people who have come to these shores have also been defeated and denied in their original lands like the original invaders. Perhaps part of the reason that their stories have been unwelcome to the majority might be because they have echoed an original trauma–the one that 'forced' the act of dispossession. The newer emigrants have been both silent on their own behalf (Wajnryb 2001) as well as being another silenced 'other' by the majority (Hearst 2018, Appendix A). But, as Alana Valentine puts it in her argument for the 'close-work theatre' of her substantial oeuvre, "The act of seeing oneself on stage, in all its unpleasant truth, is a human right and not simply a middle-class one" (Valentine 2018, p.67). If it is a task of art to unveil the unseen, to speak the unspoken, as Bovell, Bell, Holloway, Butler, Jacobson, Zable, Hearst, and Radic also all (in different words) suggested, have our artists attempted this?

7.2 Theatre

European theatre in Australia began in 1796 when ex-convict Robert Sidaway opened the first theatre in Bell Row, Sydney (though the first performance had been in 1789 with a convict performance of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*). In the years that followed, actor-managers were paramount in an arena where the main player by 1879 and onwards was the J.C Williamson's commercial touring theatre network. The overseas-dominated conventional dramas that toured major cities in Williamson-owned theatres were supplemented in the late nineteenth century by melodramas that reiterated stock 'Australian' characters such as "the bushman, the new chum, the girl of the bush and the loyal "mate"" (Morley 2002).

According to Michael Morley, it was Louis Esson who first articulated the contradiction at the core of Australian theatre. Through his storytelling in *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* (1912) Esson intimated that

> …for the 'settlers', vastness, silence and stillness were perceived more as enemy than inspiration. They were happy to identify with the land through the homely and conventional characters of bucolic comedy and fable – with Dad and Mother Rudd and their sentimental, battling family in the popular play and film versions of Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* (1912) (but they) did not want to celebrate a place of contradictions, moods and caprices – less still a land which was at some fundamental level not theirs at all (Morley 2002)

During the 1920s – 1950s Australian-written work of increasing complexity alternated with overseas imports and a strong native vaudeville tradition. From the 1950s onwards, Geoffrey Milne notes three waves of Australian theatre: a period from 1953 – 1969 when the pace was set by artists associated with the fledgling Melbourne Theatre Company, ranging from playwright Ray Lawler to satirist Barry Humphries (Milne 2004): then, from 1966 – 1981 came the rise of the so-called New Wave. In pushing back against the conventional pieties of empire that had driven national pride from colonisation through two World Wars and after, the New Wave asserted a bolshie, demotic, working-class version of 'Australian', largely masculinist and Anglo-centric, though with a dawning awareness that these were in fact assumptions, in such works as John Romeril's *The Floating World* (1975) and Alex Buzo's *Norm and Ahmed* (1968). These works were political in intention, often roughhouse postmodern in form, and highly physicalised in presentation, though most were relatively innocent in their use of media (McCallum 2009; Meyrick 2002).

Milne's third wave, which came from 1980-1998,

> …challenged those paradigms, taking the theatre away from the proscenium arch, diversifying the established stage voice with those of Indigenous and multicultural Australia, women, and regional Australians. Orthodox spoken-word drama began to cede ground to other forms like physical theatre and new circus, visual theatre and puppetry, and contemporary performance [Milne 2014]

In the twenty-first century theatre practitioners have consolidated these streams of theatre, though reduced funding has affected the overall scope as well as potential cast sizes. In recent years adaptations of novels and classic plays and a focus on collaborative work made by teams of artists have also cut into opportunities for playwrights who work predominantly with text. Of that work, a range of artists have made work with traumatic subject associations. The style and approach of many derive from Milne's 'third wave'.

The sunny land of physical unthinkingness that privileges an inarticulate male point of view has been remarkably resilient in Australia's national consciousness. Esson may have made an intellectual offer in 1912, but it was not taken up in any measure. There are always exceptions, of course, but the broad sweep of the canon from Lawler's *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll,* through Peter Kenna's *A Hard God*, through Alan Seymour's *One Day of the Year*, through the oeuvre of David Williamson and including to a degree Dorothy Hewett's work (where many of her protagonists are variations of the 'belle of the bush'), the major works of the Australian theatre have mostly valorised or interrogated this character or his cohort. For example, the protagonist in Romeril's *The Floating World*–which explicitly meets Japanese culture in form and content, an innovation at the time–is still a recognisable angry male battler whose wife presents as his silenced mirror (Romeril 1975). [5]

Thus, my premise aligns with Bovell's comment to suggest that the marker for the Australian traumatic is the actions taken by men like these: everyone's fathers and great-great-grandfathers brought unwillingly or opportunistically to these shores, given that it was the men who had agency in that era, so that actions taken were mostly theirs. These were the physical, mental and emotional acts of dispossession and the culture controlled by such men has wished to assert these actions were not done, or if they were, were done out of innocence or necessity. Bovell's 2013 adaptation of Kate Grenville's novel, *The Secret River* is the first play to tell the whole of this story explicitly (Varney 2015). It's been a long time coming. In the meantime, the veil of avoidance has been hard to shake.

The reflexive choice for work about traumatic subjects in Australia has been the genre of documentary theatre (discussed in Chapter 3). The subject would fill several books, especially given that some of the most articulate responses to troubling work about troubled subjects have come from critics, scholars and practitioners focused on this genre (Martin 2013; Trezise and Wake 2013; Valentine 2018). In the limited space here, however, I consider the degree to which the tone of both documentary and other works accurately addresses an 'Australian traumatic' of dispossession, avoidance, shame and silence.

[5] Performance work from the 1980s and 1990s onwards, which quite often did and does engage with the difficult and abstruse, if not always precisely the traumatic, and which also builds on the style of 'third wave' work is outside the limits of this project (Allen & Perlman 1999; Hamilton 2008). I make one exception for a particularly pertinent analysis, discussed shortly.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in Australia, there have been five main strands of work that have dealt with trauma: historical, migrant, refugee, Indigenous and the contemporary political, including modern terror. Some of the works discussed here fully address the silence at the core of trauma-telling and the lack of resolution for sufferers, and a number of them parlay that treatment into an accuracy of tone that takes an audience respectfully inside an experience of the traumatic but, with precise ethical judgment also conveys them safely to the ordinary world of everyday, with increased empathy but without exposure of dangerous vulnerability. Most of them, in some way, attempt to come to terms with Bovell's questions of "Who are we? Where have we come from? What kind of country do we need to be?" (Bovell, 2018, Appendix A). Some attempt scale. Most do not.

7.3 Scale

English-born director-deviser, Nigel Jamieson, is one artist who could be described as an artist of scale. In an interview with Paul Taylor, he said, *"*Australia is such an outdoor culture that the only way of talking theatrically to a mass audience [is] through large-scale, site-specific work". Taylor also stated that Jamieson "…founded Trickster Theatre Company in London, a group with one rule: use any theatrical medium you like but no words" (Taylor 2001). It is interesting–in a wide-ranging and impressive oeuvre–that according to reviews of productions (to which I would add my own subjective responses to productions I have seen) those of his works that privilege action over dialogue have been more successful, particularly in terms of evoking a sense of the authentic via tone.

The 2006 production *Honour Bound for Freedom* was conceived, directed and co-designed by Jamieson, with choreographer Garry Stewart to tell the story of Australian Guantanamo Bay detainee, David Hicks. This was highly political theatre, dealing with modern terror from the point of view of government complicity in ambiguously (il)legal incarceration. As Hilary Crampton said,

> Film, voice-overs, the repeated clash of metal as gates clang and performers hurling themselves against the wire-mesh cage are carefully blended. The performers in the orange overalls that have become a symbol of incarceration move with panic-fuelled energy. They crash, tumble or hang trapped in mid-air, but remain voiceless (Crampton 2006).

The limited text used, consisting of verbatim quotes from officials and Hicks' family, was distanced via voiceover. The production–bodies, film, lights–presented as a visually exciting machine of finely-judged entrapment with the audience both inside and outside Hicks' experience and that of his sundered family. Silence, isolation, and choreography in place of words all combined to create a sense of the cost of 'being there'. Reviews attest to the fact that the portrayal 'felt' urgent and 'true', speaking to a sense of national psychology, to a collective sense of identity, perhaps because it successfully evoked a sensation of being complicit with something that someone in authority wanted to keep hidden away, with the convict Hicks voicelessly at its centre (Crampton 2006; Sykes 2006). The piece told of a contemporary shame that was also a metaphor for our under-acknowledged history.

7.4 Historical

One can contrast this with Jamieson's less successful 2008 production of historical trauma, *Gallipoli,* where the spectacle overwhelmed the content and the subject matter became ensnared by conventional pieties. (This is not to say that some were not deeply affected. I was in the opening night audience and can attest to that). James Waites' critique is, however, telling where he said,

> In doing such an amazing job of shaping a chaotic war zone, and all the goings-on behind it, into meaningful form, something necessary for theatre has been bypassed… I discovered nothing new in this telling of the tale; and I felt virtually nothing for the soldiers' horrendous predicament. This is an epic without a centre (Waites 2008, para 11).

Waites' noted a consistent, cast-wide declamation of text that effectively delegitimised the narrative. This is a problem of tone in that, given physicality and scale, pyrotechnics that are not linked to empathy will work against the effort they involve. As playwright Tom Holloway emphasised – '…[Y]ou also have to know where to put silence, (and then) before you conjure (the sadness) again, (the moment when) when you need to step outside the story….' (Holloway 2018, Appendix A). That is, in dealing with the unthinkable, one must leave space for silence, for what cannot be said, and for disjunction where nothing can be done.

7.5 Modern Terror

Holloway's own *Beyond the Neck* is a highly stylised work that places the psychology of response to a contemporary domestic terror at its centre. It is set ten years after the notorious Port Arthur massacre when a youthful drifter, Martin Bryant gunned down bystanders near Hobart's old Port Arthur Gaol. This piece is structured like a musical quartet, with an overture and coda. The narrative is woven through four individual voices that segue between an individual viewpoint and a choral function. This presentation allows both distance and intimacy via a sense of formal artifice that flips between the slow reveal of where the characters were on the day of the massacre and their present-day as one guide and three visitors unveil why they have come to the old prison complex, what damage each is carrying, and why they have kept it to themselves. So, part of the telling is the history of not-telling. The gradual reveal works like a wave of grief that builds and then breaks. Holloway also uses a device of the chorus saying 'Stop!' whenever a character gets close to a moment where the truth might break through their defences. It is very conscious and effective writing that evokes the state of trauma with great control of tone.

7.6 Migrant

And what of the new 'invaders', the latter-day migrant communities fleeing war and broken societies? Janis Balodis' 1981 *Too Young for Ghosts* is the standout play of his *The Ghosts Trilogy* which follows the generational (mis)fortunes of a group of Latvian displaced persons who emigrate to Australia in 1948. In a feat of significant literary-theatrical accomplishment, Balodis parallels their story with that of Edwardian explorer Ludwig Leichhardt's first expedition into the Queensland interior. Balodis' evocation of the land itself is masterly. It contrasts the circularity of Aboriginal understanding (ironically articulated by Leichhardt's soon-to-be-dead companion, the Anglo Gilbert) with the linearity of the European as effectively as any offering in Australian theatre.

> GILBERT TO LEICHHARDT: …sit still a moment. Notice this tree grows in this soil, that this beetle is found on this tree and the bird feeds on its berries. Look deeper still. Open up the bird, split the tree, dig in the soil…You can learn so much just sitting here. Move fifty yards in any direction and everything is different. My world is what is within my field of vision. If I go to see what is there, I miss what is here. I build a picture of this clearing by putting together the little things that make it up. I build a picture of Australia by putting together the clearings.
>
> LEICHHARDT: This is no ordinary adventure Mr Gilbert. We are in a new land in a new time. You look, and you see specimens and you see danger. You are not seeing the woods for the trees, I am discovering a way for your "others" to follow and the trees I will mark will stand as monuments to our achievements. Thousands will come from the stagnant civilisation of Europe where men kill each other for a pocketful of soil. They will come with knowledge that is hundreds of years old and cultivate this

> Eden. The future is all around, larger than life, innocent and without secrets. There are no ghosts in her closets.
>
> GILBERT: Except for the natives and their whole host of spirits.
>
> LEICHARDT: Pah! Black men and their vineyviney. Thousands of years they have been here and who can tell? They have hardly marked the soil (Balodis 1991, p. 29)

Balodis' characters remained trapped in their original trauma. It spirals through their lives pulling them back into bitterness at periodic turns. There's no resolution, simply an eventual acceptance of having been 'done-to' by life and other humans, of having to live with what's left in order to survive.

> [W]e didn't find any joy or wonder because we're overcome by this disease, this inertia and worst of all I haven't the will to overcome it (Balodis 1991, p. 156).

Arnold Zable is another second-generation child of European immigrants, in his case, Polish Jews who left their country of origin before the war but who lost most of their families who had remained behind. Zable has written a life's work around the subjects of migration, loss and trauma. He is a prose writer–a master storyteller–but has been part of the creative team in the adaptation of one of his novels, *Café Scheherazade* (Radic 2011) and the making of *Kan Kama Yan*, a 2002 collaborative stage piece working with refugees (no script available). He stressed that –

> **[**T]hese characters are not victims, they are larger than that factor in their lives…it is very important to get that across – the understanding that the characters are not defined by what has happened to them, that they are more than that... When writing in whatever form, it is very important to be aware of the way the story is told and why. It misses the point if you don't get that down… (And) you have to be very careful not to gild the lily. This suffering is very deep and intense. There is a danger in for example New Age philosophies – that thing of 'Now I have attained closure'. It doesn't work that way. There's no closure to be attained (Zable 2017, Appendix A).

Zable is as sensitive to landscape as Balodis is, but, in his work, the spaces evoked are either the dense interplay of urban Melbourne or they are the lands from which the emigrants escaped so long ago but which have remained vivid foci of yearning. His use of place is another reflection of the way in which trauma both integrates and dominates the lives of his characters.

> In a lot of my work I aim for…Primo Levi has a term 'the eloquent episode' in people's lives – if you spend enough time you come across these episodes… and the vision of the village in the sky that you mention from *Café Scheherazade* is one of these. This man was working as a slave labourer in Siberia when he saw this extraordinary sight, and it lifted him and helped him. But next moment he was back to his physical extremity and lack of hope. And you have to go there too. *For this [the gap between] is precisely what you're dealing with* [my italics] (Zable 2017, Appendix A, emphasis added)

The work of Melbourne playwright Elise Hearst is a generation removed from Zable's. But she attests to the echoing trauma of her emigrant grandparents' lives in her work. Both her parents were the children of Holocaust survivors and, even given her own happy childhood and capable, successful, supportive antecedents, the Holocaust still dominates her literary imagination.

> …I guess I have to say that just the Holocaust has cast a shadow over my whole life and existence. I don't feel that's true for everyone who grows up in this community. Though it *is* overt. It *is* a community which is obsessed by the Holocaust, the Melbourne Jewish community, that is what it *is* essentially… I didn't know anyone growing up whose grandparents didn't have an accent. Everyone was…in a similar boat to me. And I just think that…as a creative person, from a very early age that just…sparked my imagination (Hearst 2017, Appendix A).

When asked why theatre is her chosen medium, her words paralleled those of Mary Anne Butler (see Butler 2018, Appendix A).

> I just think that theatre lends itself to a visceral experience which you don't necessarily get from just reading off the page, and which you don't necessarily get when dealing with …such shocking or horrific events, the historical events like war and the Holocaust, massacre… They're almost… They're so big, I feel that (the viscerality of) theatre is one of the best ways that we can tackle it. And I guess that's (also) one of the reasons why I've very rarely been specific in my work, about where something is or what it is because I just feel like it's too big and I just feel like if I'm too (precise) about it then I almost I can't do it justice (Hearst 2017, Appendix A).

Her 2012 play, *The Sea Project* attests to the power of this decision. This is the story of **"**a woman washed up on a shore without a single memory" (Hearst 2012b, pp. 46-7). Eva, a woman from nowhere, but a nowhere a lot like Poland has washed up on an unnamed shore, but that shore has an Australian feel to it. She is taken in by Bob, a seemingly simple man. She is pursued by her ghosts, one whom might be a dybbuk in search of a woman a lot like her but who is probably her dead sister. There is a boy who works the shoreline collecting detritus that seems to be from an immigrant ship, but might not be, who admires Eva in a distant fashion. (She is admirable). The piece is a dreamscape, like a lot of Hearst's work, peopled by characters who resonate with Hearst's personal history, who have come to a scrubbed social environment that is antithetical to them but offers them physical safety at the bottom of a probably un-scale-able social ladder. It is a hauntingly beautiful work with its heroine who cannot remember what it is that has disturbed and at the same time made her. It throws out a challenge to a mainstream Australian audience (Hearst, 2012a).

> … I feel like the Australian audience is very sheltered … and very repressed, so yes, I hope that it would kind of take them out of themselves. There's so much about, I suppose the Holocaust, or the Jewish experience is such a rich experience to explore, maybe it could offer an Australian audience a way to reflect on its own history, grief, repressed trauma, shame? (Hearst 2017, Appendix A).

7.7 First Nations Peoples

Another of Hearst's plays links to Indigenous work of trauma. *Bright World* was a piece that evolved, at Hearst's suggestion, with Indigenous writer Andrea James in which each wrote a twinned story of their older relatives: Hearst's her grandparents, Hans and Alice Herskovix making their escape from Nazi-occupied Austria and James' the story of a great-uncle, the young William Cooper, an Indigenous man who scraped his literacy from an inspired Mauritian Tamil missionary and went on to present a petition to the German ambassador in 1938 to protest Germany's treatment of the Jews (Hearst & James 2016).

> That was a really, really interesting and challenging experience. And I think that's because I feel like I have the luxury of being distant from my trauma whereas I was working with a writer whose trauma was… still being played out in day to day life. … I come from a very hyper-vigilant community that's obviously been very deeply scarred but …working with Andrea James and an Aboriginal cast…was very eye-opening. We talked a lot about trans-generational trauma…which we both experienced**.** But it became very clear to me that *we have a whole generation of First Nations' people here whose trauma is unacknowledged, that it's not spoken about in the public realm and there's a whole wave of people who are not prepared to acknowledge it…so that is very damaging, very traumatising* (My italics) (Hearst 2017, Appendix A, emphasis added).

Arnold Zable, who also works as a storyteller, contrasted his own storytelling structure with that of Indigenous storyteller Boori Monty Pryor. As he said:

> We did a number of things together…and it was interesting to observe the differences between an Aboriginal and a Jewish storyteller. As a Jewish storyteller, you will have a theme and you then go on a diversion – eventually you have to come back and tie the theme and the diversions together. An Aboriginal storyteller like Boori had a more circular notion – he would circle and circle – there would be something hinted at, alluded to and then left there – he would pull away and then bang, near the end, it was there, and it was devastating (Zable 2017, Appendix A).

This storytelling structure parallels that of a number of Indigenous Australian monodramas, including *7 Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman. This semi-fictive piece is based on an amalgamation of real-life experiences that depict Indigenous suffering, sensibilities and experiences in 21st century Australia through by turns ironic, humorous, shocking and sad anecdotes of generational dispossession and oral memory of trauma. It uses symbolic props such as suitcases as part of the metaphorical interweave of place and time but the over-riding image, of an enormous block of ice that slowly melts but never finishes

melting over the course of the play, becomes an image of a frozen and unfreeze-able (in the present time anyway) emotional state (Enoch & Mailman 1996). It does not and cannot end. As Jane Harrison, author of the 1998 play about the Stolen Generations, *Stolen*, said:

> I know a lot of people who are in the Stolen Generations and that trauma is part of who they are. Even though they might be beautiful people, successful in their lives, there's still something that can never be returned, something they can't get back. That's their normal (Harrison cited in Harris LC 2018, para. 14).

Works like Andrea James' *Yingali, Yingali* which tells of the Yorta Yorta nation's fight for land rights, or Harrison's *Stolen* or Wesley Enoch's *I am Eora,* which valorises the triangle between Indigenous identities Bennelong, Pemulwuy and Barangaroo, are all traumas that are named by its victims (by descent). In the play, *Holy Day* and stage adaptation, *The Secret River,* the author, Andrew Bovell is 'other' to the characters whose traumatised experience is central to the narrative. As Bovell himself said, such stories can perhaps no longer be told by non-Indigenous authors, given that appropriation of suffering, however well-meaning, can be re-traumatising to those seeking a way out of perpetuated identification with victimhood.

> Now(adays) the narrative is one of survival. So, it's very difficult to show annihilation. So Rachel Maza's criticism of *The Secret River* is – that that is not the story that she wants to show her children. But my response is – it's the story that I want to show my children. Because it's the story as white Australians that they need to understand…. we can't just have stories of Aboriginal triumph and survival. We must have those, and there's been an absence of those… [For example] *The Season*, Nathan Maynard's play …[is] all about the survival of …[Aboriginal] culture, and the acknowledgement of …trauma… but in the end it's a very different message… [On the other hand, in the] final image in *Secret River*…this broken man is saying ['This…My place']. I find the end of *Secret River* very powerful and very potent, and for me it's saying – 'Despite what's been done to us, we're still here and our attachment to our relationship and ownership of his land is undisputed, is undeniable'. That's how I read it. But Indigenous people read it very differently (Bovell 2018, Appendix A).

With this important qualification in mind, it is hard not to discuss *The Secret River* at this point. Perhaps one of the reasons that *The Secret River* has had such a powerful effect on non-Indigenous audiences is that it is *the* story that has been unspoken: a life-traumatised outsider, exile and survivor stakes a violent claim to a country inhabited in a way that he is unfit to understand. The protagonist, William Thornhill, does violate the moral standards of his own culture; but he doesn't even know what the norms are that he also violates of the culture he is dispossessing. He can't 'hear' or 'see' them, though his younger son, it seems, can. Bovell's other play with an Indigenous story at its heart, the 2001 *Holy Day,* is Greek in its impact of the violence that unfolds via the symbolic muting of the younger generation of

both black and white characters at the hand of someone that Bovell in his interview with me resisted calling 'evil' (Bovell 2013; Bovell, 2001; Bovell 2018, Appendix A).

The great arc of Bovell's work circles around the notion that abuse creates abuse and trauma will re-traumatise down the generations until, perhaps, the moment of hope and healing that we see at the close of his 2009 play, *When the Rain Stops Falling,* where a sinning father and sinned-against son finally break bread together. If I am looking from Bovell's work to my own writing of *Bloodlines*, from my readings of Valentino and Storr, Borowski and Delbo I am not so sure that such a thing as evil is not, sometimes, an irrevocability in some humans. Perhaps that will be a difference in our plays (Bovell 2009; Storr 1972; Valentino, 2005).

7.8 Refugee

Theatre made about and sometimes by refugees has come to the fore in recent times and is nearly always highly political and often polemical in intention. Some of this work has been discussed in Chapter Three. Such works about people with immense suffering behind them, and the ongoing impact of that suffering, walk a line between empowerment, necessary documentation, ethical responsibility to the vulnerable and possible (no doubt well-meaning) exploitation (which I am not suggesting in the discussed works). Issues of ethics and authenticity (also discussed in Chapter 3) come into particular focus, given the subject group's ongoing vulnerability. More times than not a production may have a socio-cultural function of explaining refugees to themselves and others. Michael Balfour suggested that it is only when the alterity of the refugee is fully present to an audience that that such works do legitimate service to their subjects. He suggested that the clear maintenance of a sense of alterity is the key to successful work in the sub-genre (Balfour 2009 p. 2-3).

This sense being open to new experience via de-stabilised empathy with an 'other' is precisely what the best theatre hopes to achieve. In an article highlighting refugee theatre as impetus to political activism, Rand Hazou teased out the distinctions between theatre *for* and theatre *by* asylum seekers. He offers *Kan Yama Kan* (unpublished, staged 2002) as an example of a piece that achieved both through a combination of its story-telling structure, the 'innocence' of performance by untrained refugee performers, the implicit support by the four trained actors–a reassurance of conscious ethical responsibility–all of which created a piece

that was moving and compelling in its own right, quite aside from its possible social or political intentions (Hazou 2009).

I had mentioned earlier that performance is outside the remit of this exegesis, but an astute recent discussion of a particular performance piece raises specificities of Australian practice that should not be set aside. Namely, referring to 'the role of theatre as a memory medium', Briony Trezise asserts that,

> While Australian theatre has been shown to produce the work of cultural memory, it is less often characterised as a memory *object* in its own right–as an artefact that encodes the affective repertoires of the time of its production as well as the ficto-historical time(s) that it recalls (Trezise 2019, p. 130).

As author, I can't say whether or not *Bloodlines* constitutes such an object, but certainly the impulse to make the play derived from a desire to interrogate that possibility, especially given the influence of Kantor, an arch-proponent of 'theatre as a memory medium'. There is not space here to fully discuss all aspects of memory evocation, contradiction and performance that Trezise raises, but given the relevance of her arguments to my topic overall, I would like to take the space to address one aspect of it.

Trezise further states "when considering theatre as a memory object rather than an event, its status as a material form with the capacity to preserve and record the conditions of its emergence – as well as the conditions which it seeks to represent – are emphasized" (Trezise 2019, p. 136). In theatre of memory this dual consciousness does indeed represent a confluence of attention on the part of makers to issues of ethics, authenticity and integrity of affect that are situated within the performance of experience and testimony. Trezise's article overall addresses the impact of 'meta-affect' with which she implicates 'the spectatorial experience of sensing affect at work' (Trezise 2019, p. 156) which challenges 'the enfoldment of spectators in the political dimensions of uncritically emotional encounters' (the 'suspension of disbelief' of traditional theatre). My argument would be that a work can engage an audience in a 'critical encounter' without necessarily surrendering undistanced narrative, which is perhaps to say that ambiguities of reflexivity may sit as well, if less directly, within third-person narrative of theatre as in a first-person narrative of performance.

I would suggest that in some works this self-consciousness–'the meta-affect that works against uncritical empathy'–may sometimes work more in the service of the performance itself–most relevant to the performers–than in the subject matter–most relevant to an audience. For example, the exemplar 'memory object' through which Trezise approaches the making of memory is *a room with no air* by Regina Heilmann and Deborah Leiser Moore. This piece, first staged in 1998 is about two women of clashing descent, German versus Polish Jew, negotiating the pain and assumptions that each have grown up with in the context of the inherited guilt and trauma of their own (immediate) 'present-day'. Reviews of the first staging in 1998 seem to imply that critics/audiences felt the performers were involved in the story as much for their own sake as for the sake of the spectators (though a 2001 version of the piece did not evoke this response) (Jones 1998; Gallasch 2001; Kablean 1998, cited in Trezise 2019, pp. 138-9).

This is not to invalidate a clearly deeply experienced production. Nevertheless, this piece, like much performance work adopts a presentation where the performers are self-consciously representing their real selves, memories, contradictions and assumptions in a theatre work that borrows from a mixture of the testimonial and the postdramatic. My point in relation to my own practice in the writing of *Bloodlines* is that such making is a fascinating excursion into interrogating memory but that it may well rest to a degree for its effect on *who owns the memories*. In the same way that Yaël Farber's *He Went Quietly* loses impact (though not excellence of writing/making, nor interest of form) without the performer on whom it was crafted (the wrongly imprisoned Sharpeville Six-member, Duma Kumalo), Heilmann and Leiser Moore's *a room with no air* would seem to have derived at least some of its impact from the verisimilitude of the performers enacting their actual opposed ethnic inheritances (Farber 2008; Heilmann and Moore 2002). There would be something missing in a remount of the piece without those particular performers. As indeed, a remount of Kantor's *memory object* theatre without Kantor himself at the core loses much of its authority (Romanska 2014, pp. 280-282).

I would also suggest–aside from my own attempt in *Bloodlines*–that a theatre work can indeed act as a memory-object by encapsulating a reverberating sub-textural resonance within its own integrated form and content. An example is Noëlle Janaczewska's *Slowianska Street*, a radio/stage piece with a strong choral through-line (Janaczewska, 1998). This short piece evokes the particularities of a city street and its inhabitants in an unnamed country (highly

evocative, however, of Poland during the late 1930s and early 1940s, and there is in fact a Slowianska Street in Krakow, Poland). In it, Janaczewska constructs an experience for her audience with exquisite skill, multi-sensual nostalgia and a cool control that does not, it is true, 'record the conditions of its emergence' (Trezise, 2019, p. 136) but nevertheless confidently asserts the play's status as a memory-object in itself. [6]

7.9 Writing Lessons

My intention in *Bloodlines* is different, as Zosia herself explains (pp. 75-76). Some of the impact on an audience in *Bloodlines* will undoubtedly come from the fact that its multiple storylines derive from 'real' individuals, but the piece itself is not specific-actor-dependent and its insistence on the role of narrative, even if a tandem-narrative, provides a holding basket for these experiences. This form is more 'traditional' than the overall unsettlement of the postdramatic despite the fact that narrative choices within the play have been influenced by the shifting temporal and psychological disruptions common to postdramatic practice. The combination of both invites a 'meta-affect' that sits both within and without emotional identification to allow, as Suzanne Hermanoczki describes it, the material to pierce the Barthesian idea of punctum–the wound of traumatic experience–in a way that is as valid as any other (Hermanoczki 2017, p. 6). That is to say, *Bloodlines* is not postdramatic in presentation in the way *a room with no view* is but rather borrows the affect of the postdramatic within a 'memory object' status of narrative–which Zosia herself argues for and which for me encapsulates the uneasy demand of the creative for its own space within the situational arena of a particular research-led practice (see Chapter 8).

A last point is that another layer of complexity comes with the fact that a writer will always have a choice about how they respond to a perception of the traumatic in others. As Thérèse Radic said "As time passes, because what was told to you may or may not be true… you're going to test it. … I think that's the role of that [next] generation… I do think you can inherit the trauma–(but) it takes different forms and it can be very ill-informed, so it's not a matter of inheriting the information, it's the emotional impact" (Radic, 2017, Appendix A).

[6] Thanks to Dr Laura Ginters for drawing this text to my attention

Australian theatre is perhaps at a hinge moment where the unsaid and shameful story of the dominant social group has finally been articulated, alongside a proliferation of stories of those 'others' whose human centrality has been less acknowledged. The service artists do to society is encapsulated by this small move towards honesty of social discourse. It may take more than the three generations of Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling* before whole segments of the Australian polity are able to tell a life-story not dominated by a traumatic past (Bovell 2009). But if artists are society's canary in the cage of awareness, then perhaps we have made a start. The lessons for writers attempting the same task (on stage) are to know your silences, to know your history, to maintain respect, to embrace ambiguity, to honour multiplicity and the lack of easy and perhaps even any answers and–crucially, as many of the above works indeed do–to maintain humility in the face of the sufferings of others.

Chapter 8: BLOODLINES AS PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH PROJECT; ITERATIONS, POETICS AND CASE STUDY IMPLICATIONS

The writing of both the play, *Bloodlines,* and the research process behind it has been an exercise in multiplicities and synthesis. This chapter aims to convey where those multiplicities have resolved themselves most elegantly into synthesis, what this has meant for the play; and what this model might mean for other writers. Thus, the chapter addresses the arc of 'the creative project' from the general to the specific. Firstly, it offers a definition and examples of art-making and creativity. It further considers what practice-led research may bring to our understanding of the making of art. In particular, it considers the iterative cyclic web as a means to track the detailed interaction between creative and analytic during the project, framed in (secondly) the context of my own network of artistic theory and practice: my poetics. Lastly, it offers the case study of the writing of the script of *Bloodlines* as a gestalt combination of all of the above.

8.1 Art and Creativity

As Joseph Campbell said, "Art is not, like science, a logic of references but a release from reference and a rendition of immediate experience; a presentation of forms, images or ideas in such a way that they will communicate, not primarily a thought, or even a feeling, but an impact" (Campbell 1959, p. 42). This is something where felt experience takes priority over deduction. As Andrew Bovell said in reference to Mary Anne Butler's play, *Broken*, "…the key to why *Broken* is such an effective piece of writing [is that] [t]he whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Bovell in Butler 2016, p. vii). This dichotomy between 'wholeness' and constituent parts is a running theme in any discussion of creativity and art, and points to the slipperiness of the task of situating research into artistic practice.

Nevertheless, whilst creativity may well operate in the psyche as a sudden delivery of wholeness, the steps by which it does so *are* authoritatively studied. Mihaly Csikszsentmihalyi's seminal 2002 volume, *Creativity: the Art of Flow* is still perhaps the most clearly articulated analysis of this process. While Csikszentsmihalyi's thesis refers to both individual and society-wide creative action, in the following, the focus will be on the individual. His starting definition is helpful. As he said, "Creativity is any act, idea or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And

the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain or establish a new domain" (Csikszsentmihalyi 1996, p. 25).

Csikszsentmihalyi's analysis of a typical creative process involves five steps. First, 'a period of preparation': here, the creator becomes engaged, perhaps obsessed, with the topic at hand. Secondly, 'a period of incubation'; at this point connections, perhaps unusual ones, are made, drawing on a wide knowledge of the domain and rendering a sense in which the material at hand is provocative of a response. Thirdly 'Insight'; that 'Aha!' moment. In practice there may be iterations of incubation and insight leading to several such epiphanies, but they will all lead, fourthly, to an 'evaluation' in which the creator internally tests the new knowledge against her own knowledge of the complex understandings of her field. Finally, 'Elaboration' in which the new understanding is established and, which, like Step Three, may also go through several cycles of incubation and inspiration before the close of the process. After this the new object goes out to the domain, where its impact will be assessed by both peers and history (Csikszsentmihalyi 1996, p. 79).

As Csikszsentmihalyi also said, "Occasionally it is possible to arrive at a creative discovery without any preparation…but usually insights tend to come to prepared minds, that is, to those who have thought long and hard about a given set of problems' (Csikszsentmihalyi 1996, p. 79)

Oliver Sacks illustrates the creative process–in particular, the 'incubation' period but also the notion of what a master of the domain may bring to the process–with a percipient example. He described the moment when, in 1982, a package arrived for him from Harold Pinter in London. It contained the script of a new play provoked, Pinter said, by a case history that Sacks had described in his 1973 book, *Awakenings*, about the impact of L-Dopa on previously 'frozen' sufferers of Parkinson's disease (Sacks 1973). Pinter had read the book in 1973. He felt at the time that it would make a great subject for a play. Nothing eventuated, however, and he forgot about it. Then eight years later upon waking one morning, the impulse returned along with a clear image and the first words of the play. 'Something is happening', in his mind. And the play unfolded very cleanly over the following weeks. As Sacks said,

> I could not help contrasting this with a play (inspired by the same case history) which I had been sent four years earlier, where the author, in an accompanying letter, said that he had read *Awakenings* two months before and been so "influenced," so possessed, by it that he felt impelled to write a play straightaway. Whereas I loved Pinter's play — not least because it effected so profound a transformation, a "Pinterization" of my own themes — I felt the 1978 play to be grossly derivative, for it lifted, sometimes, whole sentences from my own book without transforming them in the least. It seemed to me less an original play than a plagiarism or a parody (yet there was no doubting the author's "obsession" or good faith) (Sacks 2018, cited in Popova, n.d.).

I can attest to this from my own background. In the year 2000, I moved to Sydney. I had been reading Paul Carter's work, *The Lie of the Land*, which continues to be of interest in this current project, along with Tom Kenealley's, *The Great Shame* about the nineteenth century potato famine migrations from Ireland to Australia (Carter 1996; Kenealley 1999). I was displaced from my home in South Australia. I had lost the big farmhouse kitchen that had been so much a part of the early years of my young family; my own myth, if you like. I had said goodbye to a significant older woman in my life who was descending into dementia. I was angry and conflicted about the loss of possibility of writing at all in an unsympathetic environment. And I had experienced the trauma of a stillbirth only to be given the miraculous re-birth and ultimate recovery of my son in circumstances most such parents do not receive. I had an idea for a play that synthesised some of these thoughts and yearnings, but, in the busy-ness of the move, no chance at all to write it. It waited nearly a year until one morning, I found myself formulating a rough plan that looked more like a map than a piece of writing and then, a bit like Pinter with *A Kind of Alaska*, the play unfolded in a few bare weeks. It went on to become the Griffin Prize-winning *Burning* and the first of my plays that emphatically engaged with land and loss (Laughton 2000).

Rosemary Malague in her discussion of the work of theatrical autobiographer, Spalding Gray highlighted the challenge to pedagogy of practice-led research where she said, "Gray concluded, "I've come to know my life through the telling of it". Gray intuitively …embraced the fundamental principle of performance as research: *knowing* is the result of *doing*" (Malague 2009, p. 19). A non-negotiable state of not-analysing and not-deducing is clearly core to new creation. Over and again, writers emphasise the necessity for an acceptance of a loss of control, a reverie that leads to a kind of willing trance that allows something other than that which is occupying the surface of the mind to take over and, like Pinter's experience 'to write itself.'

David Malouf described this process as follows:

> I want books to unfold as if they were dreams and even have the logic of dreams…I deliberately don't plan where the writing is going so that things can happen with the same unpredictability, the same process of association rather than logical unfolding. That provides something for the reader as well: the reader has something like the same sense of discovery that the writer does…As a writer, discipline for me is to learn more and more how to fall quickly into that state [Malouf cited in Cosic 2009)

8.2 Practice-led Research

The above points suggest that, while the preparation for creative work may happen as a deliberate gathering, the incubation will take place at an unconscious level, and the (first) writing occur in a non-deductive, illogical, sometimes trance-like experience of surrender that has addictive qualities of affect that may be the core motivation for the artist to have chosen the creative as a life-choice; but that with the emergence from that state the artist-researcher is in a position to analyse their own process.

And in fact, methodologies suggested for research-led practice all tussle with the revolving cycles of the etic and emic positions of the creator/researcher/projected audience: the 'outside' and 'inside' of personal stances towards one's research. The shuffle between these stances can be addressed via at least three methodologies.

8.2.1 The Iterative Cyclic Web

Hazel Smith prefaces hers and Roger Dean's suggestion of an iterative cyclic web with an example of her own intertwined research and practice with a period of research prior to a creative project that then provoked two related academic papers. As she said,

> I assembled and read the literature about gossip without attempting to write a research paper on it or make an original contribution to the field. Rather, the original contribution would be the radio piece, a work which contained fiction and poetry but also some theoretical allusions …this work was then (temporarily) rounded off with two attempts at documenting the process and theorising some aspects of the piece (Smith and Dean,2009, p. 13).

This example combines subject research leading to (an emic) fictive/documentary essay that nevertheless integrates a range of techniques found, assessed and analysed within the research, after which the creative whole is itself assessed from an etic stance by its creator from the point of view of its potential audience.

8.2.1.1 An iterative cyclic web: *Bloodlines, a Polish Memory*

If one extrapolates from Hazel Smith's outline above to this project, one could expect firstly to research trauma, memory, the makings of theatre pieces in all their complexity and political ramifications alongside the 'normal' research of historical material and related reading. This, I have certainly done, and this material is covered in chapters 1 to 6. One could expect that the primary research would follow this, with interviews with survivors and descendants (Chapter 6; and Appendix B: Survivors), as well as creative practitioners (Chapter 7: and Appendix A: Practitioners), alongside self-reflection (Chapter 8; and Creative Journal – available on request), the ramifications of all of which should be integrated in the first draft of the play. After that, one would draw the theoretical conclusions regarding process and product (Chapter 8, Appendix C: Iterative Webs), before returning again to the play to redraft that with a keener insight into one's own process.

The iterations between making and analysing, seeking and concluding, did broadly follow this pattern but with much more of a tussle between what I can only call brain-states, so severely did I sometimes experience the clash between the two. The details of these constantly shifting iterations are documented via the visual map of the iterations of this particular project (Appendix C). The connections between the various elements are more unruly than the neat clockwise/anti-clockwise, task-based model offered by Smith and Dean; even so, much of the actual chaos of the experience is refined out of the model for the sake of clarity, so the diagrams feel like a partial rather than a comprehensive record. I am glad to have done this work as it clarified my thinking about the constituent parts of the project, but it stands more as a record than a guide in that in practice each of those neat boxes in the diagrams represents not a logical plan but an embroilment of messy discoveries many of which were discarded almost as soon as they appeared. This approach has been validated by a number of researchers in the past two decades, and explicated by creatives, for example by Katherine Coles:

> 'Over time, I no longer knew my own work. It shed its carefulness, its overt constructedness, which I had so carefully fostered but no longer seemed to care for. I could no longer look at a page and say whether what I had put there was coherent or not, whether it was a poem or not." (Coles, K in Biggs et al, 2017, p.6).

A comment like this addresses the kind of resistance I experienced in my working method of troubling my way through confusion in multiple and sometimes divergent iterations. I did,

however, value the explication of the idea of iteration, which dovetailed nicely with, for example, Csikszsentmihalyi's research and that of Gabrielle Rico (Rico, 1983).

Overall, I was confidently at home with the emic stance, even when the work was not proceeding unambiguously. It may have been frustrating in the moment, but it was familiar ground. Where I was uncomfortable was not in learning new procedures about writing. For example, the sometimes-abstruse language around the postdramatic gave a theoretical framework to decisions about text that clarified theatre experiences and strategies that I, as a person and playwright who values 'meaning', however disrupted that 'meaning', might otherwise have been tempted to reject (Lehmann 2006, p. 148). Whether or not it shows in the eventual playscript, I felt I could put Lehmann's insights to use in my own writing. My difficulty was rather in learning new procedures about learning, namely, the theorising around practice-led research itself. The material about trauma I had studied, the narratives to which I had been exposed from my interviews, and the testimonies about writing from great artists and my Australian peers alike seemed to be so deeply serious that I felt that a description of the process of iteration, however valid, was almost an obstacle to going deeply enough for real engagement with the difficult material at hand. This raises the question of why this reaction might have occurred.

There is not space for a whole other iteration, but Bernie Neville's seminal 1989 book *Educating Psyche: Emotion, Imagination and the Unconscious in Learning* argues effectively for a range of differently-abled intelligences native to a particular individual's brain (Neville, 1989, pp 325-377). In my own case, I am only too aware that I possess deficiencies in spatial intelligence. For example, I find maps hard to read–I have a tendency to get lost in even quite simple streetscapes–and I find, for example, electronics diagrams irritating. This may be why I experienced the diagrams offered via Smith and Dean's work as having limited usefulness as a direct creative mechanism, and as trivial compared to the subject matter to which I felt such responsibility. My brain may have been resisting them because it found them uncongenial, a digression from the real job at hand. The method was in fact *too* direct. My own creative intelligence is situated far more within words and shifting intuitions of mood and atmosphere until I find my way to a new understanding by responding to a fertile mix of verbal evocations ('language'), newly discovered elements of a situation ('action'), personality ('character') and sensations of place and time ('setting'), be it the natural environment or a humanly-created one. These are the things I find interesting both inside and

outside of my creative practice. They have been triggers for new making and new thinking possibly all my life. For me, an initial lack of clarity is uncomfortable but ultimately fruitful, and the attempt at clarity of process offered by Smith and Dean's model one that paradoxically obscured the elusive thing(s) that I was seeking to bring to light.

It was useful, however, to be jarred into and out of my long-held assumptions about my process and my overall conclusion is that the iterative web offers a model related to the natural functioning of creativity in the human brain that, whilst it may simplify what is required to access the traumatic, nevertheless stands as a useful methodological tool to clarify one's intentions or process. The qualifier, as outlined above, is that this, too, in relation to creative writing is predominantly subjective. In my own case, I was clearer about what it is I had done after the event, and I'm certainly grateful for that, but it offered a guide of limited usefulness whilst inside the 'making'.

Thus, I wanted more tools to assess my own process. This has led me to consider other methodologies. For me, the answer was to go back to research about creativity itself which 'felt' both enlightening and urgent in its conclusions, and of great practical as well as theoretical use to a practicing artist. This also aligned with aspects of my former teaching practice where I had found Gabrielle Rico's creative-writing pedagogy to be a creativity-based rather than analytically-based explication, but which anticipated the iterative cyclic web via so-called 'left-brain/right-brain' flipping from incubation to analysis and back again (Rico 1983). Exercises drawn from Marilee Zdenek's *The Right-Brain Experience* (which again are based on techniques into and then out of a 'right-brain' trance state) were similarly helpful (Zdenek 1983) and Jean-Claude van Itallie's series of exercises in *The Playwright's Workbook* offered access by doing (reminiscent of Spalding Gray's comments) that emphasised creative practice rather than analytic description (Van Itallie 1997). I then considered the prospect of deepening my hold on my own process by articulating a poetics of the writing of *Bloodlines*, which I felt might amplify my understandings by defining key triggers to this particular project.

8.2.2 Poetics of practice

Kim Lasky suggested that the development of a personal poetics can be a useful tool for analysis of a creative product. As she said:

> '[P]oetics' here refers to the means by which writers across a range of genres formulate and discuss a critical attitude to their own work... this formulation recognizes a range of influences: the traditions they write within and against, relevant literary, social, and political contexts, and the processes of composition and revision undertaken (Lasky in Kroll & Harper 2012, p. 14)

She used the examples of William James' Preface to *A Portrait of a Lady,* John Fowles' *Notes on an Unfinished Novel* and Doris Lessing's Preface to an early edition of *The Golden Notebook* (Fowles 1998; James 2003; Lessing 1971). All of these texts illuminate the writing process of the authors concerned in a way that specifically acknowledges their influences. All writers will, of course, have master-mentors whose articulation of their own practice has proved directly or indirectly pedagogical. Australian playwright Mary Anne Butler mentioned a period of obsessive pursuit of Irish dramatists followed by the good fortune of speaking with some of her [writing] heroes (Butler 2018, Appendix A). Tom Holloway mentioned the impact of the work of Sam Shepard when he (Holloway) was starting to write plays (Holloway 2018, Appendix A). Hilary Bell in a more generalised statement said, "I love collaborating. In most of my experiences in workshopping and rehearsing, a collaborator has taken my offer and made something better of it, or they've challenged me to think harder/write leaner" (Bell 2018, Appendix A).

I have myself been a working playwright for many years now. If I were to truly detail those who have been of influence on me, I suspect there may not be room for the rest of this exegesis. But, key texts might be my talisman text, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Ursula Le Guin's essays, *Dancing at the Edge of the World;* Seamus Heaney's *Preoccupations*; the entire oeuvre of Joseph Campbell but in particular *The Myth of the Wild Gander;* the writings of C.G Jung (Campbell 1969; Heaney 2014; Jung et al. 1964; Le Guin 1989; Shakespeare 1914) and books about craft from playwrights such as David Mamet, David Hare, David Edgar, and John Yorke (Edgar 2009; Hare 1991; Mamet 2000; Yorke 2014). These would include similar books by mentors who are not successful creators themselves but who show a canny understanding of craft, such as Louis B. Catron, whose chapter on dialogue is a gem (Catron 1993). Interestingly, apart from Shakespeare, there is no one playwright whose body of work has reached me like the poetry of W.B. Yeats did in my youth, or Campbell and Mircea Eliade's writing on myth did some years later, or Charlotte Delbo's prose rather than her plays did for this project. Mary Anne Butler describes seeing plays by particular writers as "[blowing] the back off my head". (Butler 2018, Appendix A). I think, for me, those

experiences have tended to be extraordinary productions of classic texts: a Peter Brook production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1971 that was my first theatrical experience, for example. I have never gotten over it.

8.2.2.1 A Poetics: *Bloodlines, a Polish Memory*

What, however, is 'the poetics of *Bloodlines*?' Key productions might be: trigger works by Kantor (*The Dead Class* in 1978), Robert Lepage (*The Dragon's Trilogy* in 2005), and Wilson (*The Black Rider* in 2004), and the sheer ambition of other so-called 'Festival' pieces like Brook's *Mahabharata*, or Mnouchkine's *Caravanserai.* From my research, an indirect influence is Genet's *The Screens*, less for the piece itself than for the insight into shame and signification (Genet 1962). And, obviously the traditions of writing about trauma, in particular the postmodern and postdramatic 'masters' of text and tone such as Churchill, Müller and Pinter, particularly Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, (Churchill 2000, 2002; Müller 1995; Pinter 1981, 2001). My last two plays, but particularly *Long Tan* and the soldiers who spoke to me; Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* (Snyder 2010); and Valentino's *Final Solutions* and Storr's *Human Destructiveness*, all of which emphasise the intractability of violence within the human species. Alistair Kershaw's (2000) writing about Hitler, Simon Sebag Montefiore's about Stalin (2007) and Lawrence Rees (2017) about the Holocaust itself and the enduring, hideous and fascinating problem of human evil. Milija Gluhovic's *Performing European Memories* is probably my outstanding reference book, the one which has played into the play the most, though Malkin and Romanska were also crucial (Gluhovic 2013; Malkin 1999; Romanska 2014). The oeuvres of S. I. Witkiewicz; and Tadeusz Borowski, who were my avenues into suffering Poland, were also key, and above all, Charlotte Delbo, the atmosphere of whose work with its cut-glass accuracy has been my guide for the moments in the play when I wished my characters to be inside the unspeakable (Borowski 1967; Delbo 1990, 1995; Witkiewicz in Gerould 1977). The novels of Lily Brett in their combination of insouciance and sorrow encapsulated part of the legacy of second-generation survivors of trauma (Brett 1992 1999). Also (apart from Howard Barker, whose *Scenes for an Execution* and *Victory* are only not discussed in this exegesis for lack of space, and some works of Mary Anne Butler, for example *Half Way There*) frankly, Brett was the only writer of trauma whose work is both funny and sexy, so Brett's example was inspirational when I was writing the scenes between Czesława and Witkacy, which needed to have those qualities. Ruth Wajnryb's *The Silence,* with its emigré Australian perspective, was always with me, and

was particularly relevant to the writing of the memory room sequences, which were also strongly influenced by Anna Rosner Blay's written and spoken account of her mother's and aunt's suffering, and, though rarely directly expressed, her own (Wajnryb, 2001; Blay 2018 Appendix B). There are short sections in Blay's book, *Sister, Sister* that refer to her effort to come to terms with what she–after long silence–is learning from the two women she loves most (Rosner Blay,1998). She mentioned to me (not in the interview) that her publisher had been keen to excise those sections. I am glad she insisted they remain.

The memory rooms scenes in *Bloodlines* derive in part from the poetic nostalgias of Blay's reminiscences, and those of Carl B, and in part from the example of Tadeusz Kantor. And both Blay's focus on sisters and Judy Kolt's aching memoir of herself and her sister (Kolt 2009, 2018 Appendix B) also played into the sequences about the Dowbor sisters, as does my own experience of sisterhood. And all of the interviews with Polish survivors from which I have not been able to quote as much as I'd have wished for reasons of space, but in particular the testimonies and books of Judy Kolt and Sarah Saaroni and the example of their fierce, and not-quite-forgiving fortitude I have found both heart-breaking and deeply impressive (Kolt, 2009, 2017; Saaroni, 1989, 2017). I have a small stuffed squirrel on my writing desk that I found serendipitously after reading Judy's 2009 *Tell it to the Squirrels*. It will stay there until the end of this project, whenever that may be.

8.2.3: The case study

The above discussion dovetails somewhat with the offering of the case study as a methodology that facilitates the slicing of the Gordian knot of intertwined analysis, inspiration and temporal practice in a way that responds to the demands of academic rationalisation. As Julian Meyrick said, "the case study is a flexible approach, able to extract from the singular experiences of the phenomenal field, research objects that are plausible, comparable, and about which valid conclusions can be drawn" (Meyrick 2014, para 5). Consideration of the work at hand as case study allows the play as 'artwork' to stand as a referent to which one can apply the multiple perspectives of iterations of what Rico would call left and right brain thinking, incorporate the context of a personal or even simply work-specific poetic and also open the piece out to consideration of its (whole-vehicle) impact on potential audience. Thus, my discussion of the writing of *Bloodlines* that follows will weave iterative and poetics perspectives within its record of process.

8.2.3.1 Case Study: *Bloodlines: a Polish Memory*

In a neat and logical world, I would have followed the process outlined in Hazel Smith's discussion of her process (Smith & Dean 2009, pp. 13-14). But…creativity is neither neat nor logical and in practice I went off on a huge tangent involving subject research. But I do this anyway in all my work. And, given the size of the subject, perhaps I needed to do so to feel safe to start in the first place. As mentioned earlier, in this area of research, any model will need to factor in the subjectivity of the researcher/practitioner in a way not required in other areas of research. It behooves the artist-researcher to 'know thyself'.

It is also interesting to me that I did not start my PhD journal until half way through the second year of my doctorate when I was at something of a coalface with the production of *Long Tan*, the research for which provoked the doctorate in the first place, and the production of which in April 2017 had been by no means assured until early in 2017. During the previous year, I had undertaken the production of *The Red Cross Letters*, which had been scheduled for September 2016 prior to taking up my studies, but that had been a smooth process. *Long Tan* was different. I did try to maintain both etic and emic perspectives to that production as I thought it would be useful for this doctoral task, but in the end, I simply had to surrender to the necessity to situate my working brain in a creative space. It had become counter-productive to the rehearsal process and to my psychological wellbeing not to do so (Journal pp. 3-4, pp. 7-9).

It took a little time after that to re-find my analytical self. This was not problematic. I simply used that period for the mechanical ordering of the elements of the research, a plodding exercise, but a necessary one. Again, I'm very used to that. Then I went into the period of interviewing trauma survivors and their families. Once again, I was thrust out of any sort of comfort zone. As also noted in my journal (pp. 16-17), one of the things that makes me an effective interviewer is that in such situations I have access to a high degree of empathy. This is not self-surrender in the creative sense, but it does mean setting analysis aside for the period that one must serve one's interviewees. It was a humbling experience to talk to a 90-year-old woman who had lost most of her family but who had herself lived through the Holocaust on her wits and her luck, and another 89-year-old woman who had barely survived but then lost her beloved sister years after their mutual escape to Australia from Nazi Poland.

This and other testimony was changing me, which is another learning outcome of this kind of work, that is incidentally supported by the experience of perhaps Australia's most lauded 'close-work theatre' (as she terms it) artist, Alana Valentine (Valentine 2018, p. 136). I had come to this project after three years of quite difficult work on *Long Tan*, and three years before that (on and off) on *The Red Cross Letters*. You can get lost in such sadness after a while, and there were periods when I felt I was. This sensation is articulated rather beautifully in Bernard Schlink's *The Reader* (Schlink 2017). For example, there was a period when I kept coming up against documented references (including from some of my interviewees) of Nazi murders of little babies for a kind of sport. I pondered for a long time whether or not to include Borowski's tale of the suffocated babies on the transport to Auschwitz as such detail is, inevitably, almost too shocking (*Bloodlines*, Act 1, Scene 1; Borowski, 1967, pp. 39-40). In the end I decided that these horrors must have happened over and over for the references to recur at random, and thus it, too, was part of the story and I would be failing those little lost lives if I did not acknowledge them.

I then turned from interviewing into creative work proper when I wrote the first draft of my play in January/February 2018 soon after gathering the testimony of my survivors whose stories played into my multi-weave of plots. There is not space to cover this in detail, but perhaps some examples will suffice. It was the primary research, the interviews in particular with survivors, that became the lightning rod for the piece. They were all important, and the range of generations was helpful to the task. For example, I used none of Jana G's (third-generation) testimony directly in the play, but her experience echoed that of Elise Hearst, the playwright and another third-generation emigrée Polish Jew in its combination of the unexpected centrality to their lives of their grandparents' experiences, and the sheer moral force of both of their characters. If trauma has some unfortunate legacies it can also produce individuals of particular strength and deep empathy who are an absolute force for good in the world. This, to me, was my source of hope, not falsely imposed with a view to some kind of closure in the ending of the play, but a nod to resilience and the fact that humans as a species are capable of good as well as evil. I've made mere brushstrokes of this in the memory room exchanges and I hope, at the closing of the play, Charlotte's recall of the music of Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* is again the faintest suggestion of that same resilience; the one that will allow her at least, if not her comrades, to survive the original trauma. It is not a coda that implies closure, because her books make clear that is impossible, but on a macro scale it gives a hint of what Martin Shaw delineates as the regenerative core of myth.

> For many of us, wound means truth. …[but] [m]yths say no, that the deepest position is the taking of that underworld information and allowing it to gestate into a *lived wisdom that by its expression, contains something generative*…The wound is part of the passage, not the end in itself. It can rattle, scream and shout, but there has to be a tacit blessing at its core (Shaw 2016, p. 9, emphasis added).

In the light of this comment, found only recently, it is interesting that I was blocked from starting to write the play in the first place until I found the blessing (adjusted from an original Celtic blessing) that forms the prologue of the piece.

I interviewed Mary Anne Butler after I'd written the first two drafts of the play but that acknowledgment of a poetry in resilience was counterpointed in my discussion with her, when she emphasised that the through-line of her own work was not trauma, but resilience, and which comes to the fore (but with impressive restraint) in both *Broken* and *The Sound of Waiting* (Butler 2016; Butler 2018). She said that she likes to leave her characters within the aura of a turning point, though, as is evidenced by Hamid in *The Sound of Waiting* who is so barely alive, this can still be a catastrophic reality (Butler 2018, Appendix A).

I also used none of one of my interviewees (Carl B)'s testimony in the play itself. But the extremity of his rejection of Poland and the Poles was a sober reminder to me of how much must remain unforgiven in this cohort, and with reason. His image of himself as a small child comforting his overwhelmed and dangerously distressed mother, of having the role of being her confidant imposed on him but his compassion for her not allowing him to reject that role became symbolic to me of what is done to people by those they love, but whom they cannot blame for it. There is a little of that in the memory room sequences, but it is implied, not asserted.

In an ideal world, I would have finished my interviews with Australian creative practitioners before writing my play, but I was not ready for this and I knew it would be essential to have completed a first draft before rather than after my research trip to Poland as I would need to have a focus for further incubation from which to work after my return. As to why I knew this, I was unsure at the time. In retrospect, it may in part have been because I suspect I have deliberately developed a sensitivity to environment–I'm quite obsessive, I have done exercises and kept journals all my life and place has been a chosen focus of interest in all of them. So I may have anticipated the impact that Poland itself might have on me. Given that I

could anticipate a certain emotional vulnerability in situ, I may have wanted the safety-net of a template on to which I could then impress my sense-impressions of the land and people rather than creating it during or after the volatility of the event. The writing of the first draft did, however, involve another iteration in that by now I was deliberately applying the lessons learned from my research into major European artists of the traumatic to my own theatre work. And I had my 'cast' of significant influences also playing in my head through reading of S.I Witkiewicz, Delbo, Borowicz, Pinter, Kantor, Grotowski, and others.

My original impetus for *Bloodlines* had been Timothy Snyder's anecdote about the Dowbor sisters. As it turned out these were the hardest characters to write and it was only after visiting Pawiak Prison where Agnieska was held in 1941-2, and the grave in Lusowa where the remains (head only) of Janina are buried with her father the general and his second wife (Agnieska's mother, not her own) and a long talk (again serendipitous) with the Polish historian at the Muzeum Powstańców Wuelkopolskich in Lusowa (on Janina's birth-and-death-day!) that I got any kind of usable fix of who they might have been. I re-wrote their scenes in the second draft, but they remained a bit intractable. It was only in the third draft when I deliberately extended the shattered chronology of the piece (another iteration! I had tried to do this quite early on) that they integrated with the rest of the material. Charlotte Delbo–inconveniently a Frenchwoman and a political prisoner–became, however, the lodestar for the piece from the moment I first read about her in Inga Clendinning's *Reading the Holocaust* and then followed with her own books (Clendinnen 1998; Delbo 1990, 1995). In another creative iteration, I was unsure why I 'knew' Charlotte, but I did. This is clearly an emic process, so has a bearing on my understanding of my own practice. I have wondered since if it might be something to do with her verbal facility and her need under duress to orient her identity within the artistic or 'magical', as well as the way she was characteristically 'secret' to herself and others, and the difference between her persona and her writing self, which comes through strongly in her late writings in particular (Delbo, 1995). This is a process that is familiar to me. Either way, she will be with me always, play or no and walking where she had lived in Auschwitz-Birkenau felt like a pilgrimage. I didn't lie down on one of the bunks there–that would have been like sacrilege–but I wanted to.

Charlotte was also one of the two keys into writing memory into the action of the play. One of my epiphanies came when I realised that I could embed her practice of re-willing her memories of past experiences of art as a mental talisman for herself and her 'kamarades' into

an active sequence in the play. The other key to memory was Kantor's practice as elucidated by the insightful Milija Gluhovic (Gluhovic 2013, pp. 180-215). I took guidance from Kantor's deliberate memory rooms and the placing of objects within them. Kantor imposed his own memories upon his plays and used his own memory objects as well as a sophisticated conceptual underpinning to the notion of the object-as-action to illuminate his material. *The Dead Class* thus has a strong mnemonic quality. It stops and starts like the fragments of a song that replays seemingly spontaneously and each small action–a baring of a bottom, a jigging of a bicycle–fixes the tone if not the precise associations (available only really to Kantor in a personal but probably many Poles of his generation in a general sense) of a memory in the watching audience. On the other hand, where the humour, dark as it is, and the iron control in Kantor's work come across as an 'otherworld' rather than an underworld of evil, Grotowski's *Akropolis*, from my viewings of it on YouTube was confirmation of the quality of Genet's 'rot that rots' that for a truth in my telling needed to be present in my play. For this, I used (my character of) Borowski's actions, language and memories, alongside his own savage *kynicicism*, as well as the brutality of Agnieska and Janina's murders.

Normally, I would approach writing more in line with conventional staging. And I did in the first draft because I was not yet clear enough about Kantor himself. That was another instance where visiting Krakow and walking a (guided) path through his familiar world to the museum of his works, the Cricoteria on the other side of the Vistula was my avenue into this part of my play. Again, this was sheer luck–the tours only happen once every six months and a Krakow contact had booked me in unasked. Walking in his steps brought me into a deeper appreciation of Kantor's work, style and, in particular, personality. So, the 'memory room' of the final draft of *Bloodlines* is to some extent imposed. It would have been great to have started with it; but that might have required a consciousness of intent that I simply didn't have at that murky, emergent point of the process. I feel one might need to be a Kantor to have pulled that off, whereas I'm aware that my own strengths are in dialogue, character and, I hope, mood/tone. So, the fact that the memory room sequences were intuitively written into the piece from the first draft but only clarified in their precise intent two drafts down the track, is perhaps evidence of an alignment between intuition and research that validates both elements of creative practice.

Poland itself was essential, distressing and grimly exciting. I do not see how I could have written this piece with integrity as a non-Pole and a non-Jew if I had not been to the locale of

my characters and attempted to come to terms with the resonance of its history. It is a vexed problem, particularly at the moment, as to who can write which stories, as mentioned, for example, in Chapter 7. On the one hand, it could be argued that being outside a trauma but open to it is a dual and creatively fruitful state of mind. On the other, it could be seen as an impertinent and invasive use of someone else's sorrow. Certainly, in my peer interviews Andrew Bovell, Tom Holloway, Elise Hearst, Hilary Bell and Mary Anne Butler all mention this current conundrum (Appendix A). My own subjective response is that I do not think it is impossible for an artist to 'write truly' the experience of a cultural group not his or her own. The job of a writer is to inhabit other consciousnesses. Bad writing occurs when this is done badly, but good writing can achieve it. One brief example. Englishman Jez Butterworth's recent play *The Ferryman,* set in the Ireland of The Troubles, is possibly a masterpiece (Butterworth 2017).

My one clear guide in this current project is that if I am to take on this history then it is my absolute obligation to do it with extreme care, and to check and re-check with trusted sources that I am on the right track. For example, Dr Rudzinski who has been so helpful to me in terms of research possibilities and contacts in Poland and is himself the son of a Polish (not Jewish) Auschwitz survivor, was kind enough to attend a reading of *Bloodlines* and I have taken his responses very seriously. And I have gone back to my original sources for interviews to re-check that material taken from their contributions is appropriate.

Poland was also confirmation of the implications of the silences in Australia, the narratives that have been shadowed, the truths left untold and the burden this fact places not just on the silenced but also on the silencing community, not to mention the entitlements left unaddressed that have become so glaring in current political praxis (Grant 2017, Pascoe 2014; Trezise 2019). This material is discussed more fully in the previous chapter. I am simply noting here that it is part of the mix and one that drew me from thought to practice to research to interview to thought again.

I returned from Poland to rewrite my play, so this entire period was a creative iteration. What I think I brought into this first re-write is what I have come to most value in the writing of trauma, namely a sense of tone. Not just the grimness underlying the quotidian that so struck me in Poland, and the ongoing avoidance of the degree to which the trauma of the 'other'–the Jewish population–so weirdly 'trumps' even the massive suffering of the Poles themselves,

but also the persistence with which not just officialdom but also much of the ordinary population in Poland has tried to deny this. There is also the sheer beauty of what is left of old urban Poland and thus the sense of national loss; and the remains that one can see in the primeval Białowieża Forest of an entire land-that-was of great and endless forest, the richness of which invaders have over and over plundered–all this was essential background to the stories of 'my' characters which are mostly based on the stories of my interviewees, though with the requested and permitted liberty to diverge from fact where required. Other (also somewhat fictionalised) characters simply migrated from research to play in a way that has not happened in my work prior to this (namely the Dowbors, Delbo, Borowski, Witkacy and Czesława).

Once I had finished the second draft I returned to my research with a stronger sense of its target. Also, I began reading in preparation for interviewing the Australian creative practitioners. We held a reading of the second draft of *Bloodlines* in August 2018, an experience which is always an uneasy mix of the emic and the etic. At this point, I took on board feedback from those present. Interestingly, I was challenged regarding my chronology, which had resonance with my own response to hearing the material, though when I was writing the play, I had thought my structure was by no means being rigidly temporal. Ultimately, however, my own creative necessity is that form can challenge narrative but not dispense with it, so *Bloodlines*, whilst ambiguous and temporally fluid, pulls back from classic postdramatism to offer a self-reflexive narrative, as do many postmodern pieces. It is not quite a dramaturgy of testimony as elucidated by Amanda Stuart Fisher, but it borrows from the tonal qualities of such works (Fisher 2011). In the meantime, however, I had to return to analysis and gathering as I set creative writing aside for conference presentations, interviews and their preparation and the writing of more chapters for the exegesis. At last, much later than I'd hoped, came my interviews with Australian creative practitioners.

It was interesting how often my interviews with Australian creative practitioners dove-tailed with the interview material from the survivors and descendants. Arnold Zable's elucidation of his life-long commitment to telling the stories of those whose lives have been disrupted by trauma alongside the sheer artistry of his best work is an obvious example. But the bulk of my interviews also took me back into the 'real traumatic' through the artistry of people who had thought deeply about these subjects. The work of Andrew Bovell, Tom Holloway and Mary Anne Butler–like that of Jez Butterworth–gives the lie, I would argue, to any assertion

that someone outside a particular traumatic event cannot render it precisely enough to grant an audience access and not at the same time alienate survivor group members, though Bovell mentioned his Indigenous colleague Rachel Maza's claim otherwise (Bovell 2018, Appendix A). Interview material suggests Butler's refugee community was more positively inclined to her rendering of refugee experience in her recent play, *The Sound of Waiting* [7] Anna Rosner Blay, who is a writer of considerable talent herself as well as the daughter of survivors (it was her parents who were part of Schindler's contingent) was a (trauma) interviewee, like Zable and Hearst, who as practitioner straddled both categories.

A postscript to the practitioner interviews: I had given myself two guides as to the selection of playwright interviewees. I wanted to foreground playwrights with a long career over different periods within the industry, though I did allow myself one exception (Elise Hearst would be more mid-career). The Australian theatre environment is a difficult one for writers seeking longevity. Perhaps because of the narrowness of the theatre community there is a perception (amongst playwrights certainly!) that there is a focus of interest in and opportunities for new voices at the expense of those who have had an extended career of effort and learning. With a couple of striking exceptions (Andrew Bovell would be one) in Australia we don't really have the class of playwright-as-public intellectual that exists, for example, in the United Kingdom. I wanted to make a small effort to redress that imbalance and I would suggest that the sheer intelligence of much of the interview material validates that choice. It does, however, take the edge off the 'newness' of my sample and in a rapidly diversifying Australian theatre writing environment some may challenge that focus.

I also decided–given the already over-large scope of my documentary sources–to restrict my choices to mainstream, Indigenous (where I failed though I have certainly addressed a fair sample of available work) and Polish-influenced writers. I am still not entirely sure of the validity of my choices. As mentioned above (p. 89), late in the research I became perhaps oversensitive about transgressing boundaries. In line with much of the academic and industry interrogation of this point, I became quite conflicted over what is permissible or even fair to co-opt to artistic or intellectual purpose. Now at the late stage of writing this exegesis, I suspect this might be why I did not more aggressively pursue other Indigenous playwrights to interview when I could not get traction with my primary choice (I was very interested in her

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLHfyhbOj5E.

work and it was a relinquishment not to have the conversation). From my other research, I anticipated huge sadness and was perhaps over-anxious not to offend, given that I may already have done so inadvertently when asking in the first place. At this time, I also refrained from asking a senior (mainstream emigrée Australian) playwright for an interview out of a similar agony of circumspection. I am normally quite careful, but I think this was taking it to extremes. By now, however, I was deep inside the material for the play and in terms of this particular project this may well be a minor piece of evidence of a spillage of the material at hand into the emotional vulnerability of the artist.

I should also mention at this point that I have placed the 'Notes on Sources' section of this exegesis after the play so that any explanation of specificities does not interrupt a reading of the play itself.

8.3 Outcomes

Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien have written:

> To paraphrase an example that has been used in a number of discussions about practice-led research in creative writing: if a playwright is writing a play about the Suffragettes, he or she might be reading about the history of this protest movement but that is an act of accessing the already existing knowledge that he or she needs to know in order to create the work. *Any original contribution to knowledge will be embedded in **how** this information is presented to the audience in the form of the play* (Webb & Brien, in Kroll & Harper 2012, emphasis added).

The above material is a seesaw between creative and analytical or simply studious, between distress and release, between confidence and anxiety. If Webb and Brien's comment is a guide, then the managing of this package towards an effective outcome is the challenge *and* the learning experience; and the documentation of it the new knowledge offered from the project. *Bloodlines* itself needs to be the container for ambivalence, silences, ambiguity, the rolling march of history, the distress and non-closure of extreme sadness, the echo-chamber of distressed memory, the specific stories that are emblematic of universal ones, as well as the articulation of the is-ness of all of this, through language and presence. If it achieves that then this conglomeration of contradictions of process and knowledge will provide a model for others to do the same with their own ragingly subjective responses to the traumas of (sometimes) themselves but (more often) of others.

BLOODLINES, A POLISH MEMORY

By

Verity Laughton

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

CHARLOTTE DELBO, a French partisan and prisoner at Auschwitz, later a writer (Young Female)
TADEUSZ BOROWSKI: a foreman/prisoner at Auschwitz. Polish socialist and later novelist (Young Man) (*TAD-E-OOSH*)
HELA, young Jewish Polish woman, early 20s
YETTA, middle-aged Jewish woman, a relation of Stefan and Fela
ABRAM, her teenage son
S.I. WITKIEWICZ aka WITKACY, a Polish playwright and painter, aged 50, (phonetic *VIKATZE*)
CZESŁAWA OKNIŃSKA, his lover, a Polish Jew aged, 19 (*Cheswava*)
ZOSIA, a Polish-Australian fiction, supposed niece to Janina and Agnieska (Gusia) Dowbor (all ages) (*ZOSHA*)
JANINA DOWBOR-MUŚNICKI-LEWANDOWSKA, a Polish pilot, aged 29 (*YANINA DUBOOR*)
AGNIESKA DOWBOR-MUŚNICKI, a Polish partisan, aged 19 (*ANYEEESKA*)
(*GOOSHA*)…. daughters of a (deceased) Polish general
MAMA, Zosia's mother (mid-older woman)
STEFAN JABŁONSKI, a blond, German-looking Polish Jew, the manager of a timber mill (30s) (phonetic *YABWONSKI*)
FELA, his wife (30s)
IZIA: a small Jewish girl, Stefan and Fela's younger daughter (4-7) (*EYEZIA*)
TOSIA ('SHI-SHI'), their oldest daughter (8-11)
FRANCOISE, French prisoner at Auschwitz, (young female)
JEANNE, same
POUPETTE, same, JEANNE'S sister
JOSEFA, (phonetic – *YUZEFFA*) a Café manager in Warsaw, a partisan (Polish) (middle-aged)
JANEK, a partisan in Warsaw, aged 16
JANKA, HELA'S older sister (20s)
POŁDEK, a Jewish musician and husband-to-be of HELA, accordion player (YM) (*POLDUK*), 20s
SGT OKNIŃSKI, a sergeant in JANINA'S unit (20s)
JANUSZ, a partisan, member of Agnieska's cell, the Wolves (any age) (*YANOOSH)*
GUARD 1, a senior prisoner from 'Canada' AT AUSCHWITZ
SS OFFICER AT AUSCHWITZ
DOCTOR AT AUSCHWITZ
GERMAN SOLDIER 1
GERMAN SOLDIER 2
RUSSIAN GUARDS x 2 at Palmiry Forest

POSSIBLE CASTING

10 ACTORS, 6 FEMALE, 4 MALE

CHARLOTTE/ Izia/ SS Female Officer Auschwitz
HELA/Mama
JANINA/Jeanne/Fela
ZOSIA/Josefa

AGENIESKA/Yetta/Poupette
CSEZLAWA/ShiShi/Janka/Francoise/German Soldier 2

BOROWSKI/Sgt Okninski/Poldek/German Soldier 1
WITKACY/Nazi doctor
STEFAN/Guard 1 Auschwitz/Januscz/Russian guard 2
JANEK/Abram/Russian guard 1

If one could go to an extra male cast member a soldier and a guard could be male.

PROLOGUE

NOWHERE; NO TIME

CHARLOTTE, *upstage centre, is dressed is tattered, ill-assorted clothes, probably a kerchief on her head*

CHARLOTTE walks slowly to centre stage, then stops

CHARLOTTE *addresses the audience, but incidentally also* ZOSIA, *downstage centre*

CHARLOTTE: May the blessing of light be upon you, the light without and the light within.
May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a warming fire that
gives strength and splendour to both stranger and friend.
And may the light shine out of the two bright eyes of you like candles
set in the windows of a house that welcomes the wanderer out of the storm.
And may the blessing of rain be upon you.
May it beat upon your spirit and wash it fair and clean,
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of heaven gleams,
and sometimes a star.
And may the blessing of the earth be upon you, soft under your feet
as you pass along its road, soft under you as you lie out on it
tired at the end of the day, and may it rest easy over you when
at last you lie out under it.
May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out
from under it quickly, up and off and on its way to Light.
And now may the Light bless you and bless you kindly.

CHARLOTTE *vanishes.*

ZOSIA *falls asleep downstage centre where she remains, perhaps as if one of the bodies for the next scene*

ACT 1: SCENE 1: THE RAMP, AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU: 1942

Sudden darkness, screech of train, cacophony. Late afternoon. Winter in Poland. It's cold and dark.

Very loud locomotive whistle

Immediately after, the sound of a semi-distant immense fire starting – that whoosh of ignition. An enormous tongue of flame in the distance that then fades into our background consciousness as focus shifts to the ramps where it is still dark and shadowy.

Then. We're in the middle of the unloading of a transport on the ramps in Birkenau. The jet of flame has died to smoke pervading the afternoon air. It could have been from earlier in the afternoon, not just a minute ago. Smoke hangs in the air when there's no wind.

Mid-stage: Two doors of the carriage – a cattle truck – are prised open from where they meet in the centre. The cattle trucks have six panels, with a double panel of the doors in the middle from where the occupants are disgorged. The cattle trucks did vary but the conditions in which people were entrained were uniformly savage. [see https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-railways-and-the-holocaust The cars were very crowded. People were on these trains for between two and four days, sometimes more. There were no windows. There was one bucket for excreta. There was no water or food beyond what people may have had with them when they boarded the train. Most also had belongings with them as they thought they were being transferred to another ghetto, so space was also taken up by that.

The doors open slowly at first then faster, with a bang. They slide open on the horizontal plane

It's dark, smoky, and noisy. A cacophony of sound.

Men in striped prison suits appear. They are the Guards

GUARD 1: (scream) *Raus! Raus!* Everybody get out! Quick!

The doors are now fully open.

GENERAL SHOUT: *Rauaaaaas!*

A deranged flotsam of people and goods appear from behind the doors of the train. There's a significant drop from the train to the ramp. People and goods tumble out from train to ramp. The old and infirm suffer. There are children, too, tossed down from one person to another, or simply falling.

GUARD 1: Faster! And the baggage!

SS OFFICER (female):(*to some of the guards*) Get the baggage!

A group of guards jump up to the trains and start tossing out items of baggage that the passengers haven't got out themselves

SS OFFICER: (to baggage handlers) You have fifteen minutes!

A rain of suitcases and boxes, coats etc comes down from the train.

Passengers are forced to pile up their own items as well

GUARD 1: Put it there! *Over* …there!

BOY (ABRAM): This is my mother's –

GUARD 1: Put it fucking *there*!

SS OFFICER: (smooth) It's labelled isn't it? You will get it later. Leave it there.

The guards rain down blows with sticks and truncheons on the flood of people

People mill, confused. In the distance, tall chimneys. A haze of smoke.

HELA: Smoke!

YETTA: Smells sickly sweet.

HELA: Disgusting!

BOROWSKI: Into lines! Five abreast! Men to the right! Women and children to the left! (beat) You – (picks out ABRAM) – go with the men.

ABRAM: But my mother (Yetta) –

BOROWSKI: Go with the fucking men!

YETTA: But he's only –!

BOROWSKI: Shut the fuck up old lady!

The SS OFFICER, *with dog, passes.* BOROWSKI *hits a stray prisoner with his truncheon, which distracts the* OFFICER. *Dog at his side snarls and barks*

ABRAM: Mamusia? (*MAMOOSHA*)

BOROWSKI: *Raus!*

He stares straight at YETTA

YETTA: (beat) Go with the men, Abram.

ABRAM: Mama?

YETTA: Abram? Go!

BOROWSKI *heaves the boy on his way with a belting, turns, catches the* YETTA'S *eye, nods at her just the once, belts another prisoner.*

ABRAM *is sent towards the line-up of men. He yearns backwards towards* YETTA *but incurs a blow and faces up and away. He's gone.*

Once ABRAM's gone the focus is on the WOMEN

BOROWSKI: With the women! You! Join the women!

YETTA *stumbles. Stops to catch her breath.*

BOROWSKI: (to GUARD 1) A silk shirt. A pair of shoes. That's what I'm here for.

B. GUARD 1: And you'll get them! Stay smart, my *vorabeiter*. Remember. No jewels, no money. Other people have their eyes on them! (to JEWS) Move! (to BOROWSKI) And don't try that again, Borowski, what you did with the boy.

BOROWSKI: He looked like my brother.

GUARD: So?

BOROWSKI: My brother's dead.

GUARD: So is mine! So listen to me or you will be too! Don't! (to people) Move along! Line up. Off you go! To the doctors! Over there! Quick!

SS OFFICER: (to GUARD 1 and BOROWSKI) Up! Into the railcars! Ten minutes! (to JEWS) You! Line up for the doctors! That way!

HELA *and her* SISTER, JANKA *are together at the head of the line that now reaches the* DOCTORS *and* OTHER CAMP FUNCTIONARIES. HELA is helping JANKA

HELA: My sister's not well.

DOCTOR: No? Then we will send her where she can be taken care of. And are you unwell?

HELA: No. (laugh, trying charm) Strong as a horse!

DOCTOR: To the right, *fraulein.*

HELA: But my sister?

DOCTOR: Your sister will go in the truck. See? Over there. She will be driven. And you must walk.

HELA: But she needs me!

JANKA: Shhh. Hela. The truck will be good.

HELA: But when will I see you? (to Doctor) When will I see her?

He shrugs, pleasant. You would simply not believe he was a psychopath

BACK AT THE RAMP

BOROWSKI: (to PRISONERS) Moooove!

GUARD 1: Up! He said ten minutes!

BOROWSKI *leaps into the cattle truck*

BOROWSKI: (to GUARD 1) Why am I *hating* them?!

GUARD 1: That's how it works! It's their fault! That's what happens! They're to blame! Great, eh? Throw!

(BOROWSKI *throws more baggage down*)

(to YETTA) Get a move on, you!

YETTA: I'm going.

BOROWSKI *appears at the doors of the train*

BOROWSKI Bodies. The train's full of bodies

GUARD 1: So? On to the next truck! Throw them down!

BOROWSKI and GUARD (1) *throw down a* BODY.

BOROWSKI: (back at door of carriage) There are babies. On the floor here.

SS OFFICER: Give them to the women!

GUARD 1: We have to/ clear the train!

SS OFFICER: /Clear the train!

BOROWSKI *disappears inside the train*

GUARD 1: (to YETTA) Wait!

BOROWSKI *reappears with the tiny corpses. He's not handling this very well. He jumps down to the platform with his burden.*

GUARD 1: Give them to her and clear the train!

This is a step too far even for the Vorabeiter.

Clear. The fucking. Train.

BOROWSKI *now approaches* YETTA. *Because he must.*

BOROWSKI: I – these are – Flesh. They're just – bits of flesh?

YETTA *draws back, horrified*

SS OFFCER: (threatens with pistol) What? You don't want to take them? (to BOROWSKI) Give them to the woman!

BOROWSKI: Take them! For god's sake *take* – (them)! (He's desperate)

BOROWSKI *stares at her. She stares back.*

YETTA: My poor boy.

And she takes the tiny things. She holds the bodies, but seems stunned

BOROWSKI *whirls and gets back on the train*

HELA *looks back, takes it in, gazes appalled*

GUARD: *(to YETTA) Raus*! Dump them with the other bodies. Over there! The truck there! And join the line!

Belts her. She moves.

(yelling, presumably to train driver) Clear!

LOUD NOISE FROM THE TRAIN, shunting backwards on the track

ACT 1: SCENE 3: A ROOM. IN AUSTRALIA 1952

Soft darkness, then…

MAMA *enters. Walks like a sleepwalker, as if like a shadow on a windowpane, the sound from the previous scene gradually dying away.*

ZOSIA: [Wakes from bad dream] Aaaahhhhhh!

MAMA *exits*

ZOSIA *looks around.*

Silence.

ZOSIA: [listens] Gone.

Is 1952. I wake each morning. Same small room. One window. Up high.

This is third time I have the nightmare. My Australian friends would say – 'What the – !' Gone. Gone now. Galloppy-gallop. But I think. This is enough. And I think. Whose nightmare is this anyway? Mine or hers?

I am little girl. Only nine. So before now. I try to not see. But not possible now. It is coming to get me. So. This is the beginning, do you see, of what do I owe to the mummy who birthed me? And how do I heal her pain?

She walks the room again

'I am so tired' she says. Yes? 'Grey skies. Grey streets'. Yes? Then. Nothing. She goes to sleep.

But now I want to find out about WHY! It is obsession! It is so strong. I am healthy young girl in sunny Australia with no daddy and sick mummy and I want to find out about …Grey skies. Grey streets.

Of course, you know. I am not the real. I am the fiction. We all know, don't we, you and me. All here – this here, around us – we are all in it together and it is all a fiction. But it is all real, too, though, yeah? Much too real. Including the Gorgon. What you want to call her? Kali? Or Gorgon? Ahhhh. The Gorgon eyes. To freeze you like a statue. The Gorgon breath. Snake hair. To poison you. She's around. My mummy knows her. My mummy has feel her…hot breath…at her shoulder

But is no worries, as they say in Australia – even when I get here they say this. When do I get here? 1947? When I am 4. So you see. I have remembered odd scenes from the ship. A man…giving toys? Too

much sun? But I don't really remember… Poland. But. My mummy has mentioned some aunts. So now I'm thinking. Who are my aunts? What has happened to my aunts?

September 19, 1939. You have on the one hand – from the West – Darkness itself – Mr Abomination, who hates everybody, it turns out, even his Germans by the end, but most of all he hates the Jew. He is the Zombie, animated Dead Man. And on the other – East – 'Koba'. Koba is his real name, his familiar name that his mummy calls him. Not good sound, is it? 'Koba'. I get the real shivers down my fictional spine. Koba was not The Darkness. Koba was… The Wolf. (*KOBBA)*

And Poland? What does this mean for Poland?

ACT 1: SCENE 3: IN A FOREST NEAR THE VILLAGE OF JEZIORY, IN THE POLESIE REGION: 18th SEPTEMBER 1939

A man and a woman. They may well be having a picnic

WITKACY: First time you saw me.

CZESŁAWA: Oh Staś. (*STUSH*)

WITKACY: Come on. First time –

CZESŁAWA: What did you think when you first saw *me*?

WITKACY You weren't famous, remember. I just thought you were fuckable but outrageously young.

CZESŁAWA: My mother says you are really coarse for a nobleman.

WITKACY: I'm not a – Your mother is a fool.

CZESŁAWA: She is my mother!

WITKACY: What did you think, sweet little delicious and adorable Creature?

CZESŁAWA: Oh La –

WITKACY: Respect your elders!

CZESLAWA: Old man.

WITKACY: Did you think I was handsome?

CZESŁAWA: I thought you were old.

WITKACY: But handsome.

CZESŁAWA: Oh shee. You *know* you're handsome. The handsomest man in Poland, isn't it?

WITKACY: You are a complete cheeky-chops.

CZESŁAWA: But adorable.

WITKACY: Oh, definitely adorable.

CZESŁAWA: Well, I'd heard so much about you. I was curious.

WITKACY: It was my father who was handsome. My god, what a striking-looking man. Authoritarian fuckwit.

CZESŁAWA: Your…drugs! And your lovers! And your painting. And…your fiancée long ago.

WITKACY: Careful.

CZESŁAWA: You asked me! (beat) And Australia! You had been to Australia – other end of the earth! – with Malinowski! (*MULINOVSKI)*

WITKACY: Farthest place I could get from Poland. After my fiancée. (beat) Malinowski. Another fuckwit.

CZESŁAWA: Not everyone you fight with is a fuckwit!

WITKACY: My darling, that is the definition of a fuckwit!

CZESŁAWA: You love Malinowski.

WITKACY: We are still in touch. It does not amount to love.

CZESŁAWA: Maybe I would have studied ethnography.

WITKACY: Like Malinowski? Jesus!

CZESŁAWA: Staś. Why did she?

WITKACY: My fiancée? Do the deed? Out on a mountain. Shot to the heart. Drama queen! Because I would not marry her because the child may not have been mine! No child with any of my other –

CZESŁAWA: – many! –

WITKACY: Is it my fault I am irresistible? Why is one form out of many forms particularly desirable? Why is one man an absolute bloody bundle of charisma whilst another is…boring? Well, I could say 'I don't know' but of course I have published a whole book on the subject. And if you can't see that I've been addressing the topic also in my paintings –

CZESŁAWA: (wails) I am not talking about your paintings, I am talking about your lovers!

WITKACY: My darling! No. More. Erotic. Atrocities! I promised! And I have kept my promise!

CZESŁAWA: Your fiancée. The first Jadwiga.

WITKACY: People keep throwing themselves at me. What can I do? Oh look. This tree is a highway for squirrels. That is a particularly attractive one. See? There!

CZESŁAWA: She was pregnant.

WITKACY: Shut the fuck up, sweet thing.

CZESŁAWA: And you got cross. You had a big fight. Isn't that why?

WITKACY: Darling, the reason we are here in this fucking forest and about to get a little fucking serious ourselves is that the fucking Russians have fucking invaded this fucking country three weeks after the fucking Germans and I've been in Russia, I've been in their 'Imperial' army, I've seen their fucking revolution and believe me if you think things are bad now, they're going to get a lot fucking worse! Jadwiga Janaczewska topping herself thirty years ago is fucking bye-the-bye! (*YADWIJA YANACHEVSKA*)

CZESŁAWA: And I'd read your plays.

WITKACY: Really? Aren't you a bit young for that?

CZESŁAWA: My brother is a fan of yours. He bought the lot.

WITKACY: Why have you never introduced me to your brother?

CZESŁAWA: He is a soldier. A sergeant now. Sergeant Mikhail Okniński. My mother is very proud. My brother is a most patriotic young man. (*OHKNYINSKI*)

WITKACY: With a very beautiful sister.

CZESŁAWA Of course.

They kiss.

WITKACY: Jadwiga was beautiful too. (*YADWIGA)*

CZESŁAWA: I know. I've seen your portrait of her.

WITKACY: Jadwiga was… Poland. Beautiful, veiled, self-absorbed, sentimental to the point of maudlin really, but with a certain nobility, a haunting nobility. She was a dream.

CZESŁAWA: Good-o.

WITKACY: You're not jealous!? She's dead!

CZESŁAWA: So will I be. Rather soon. Can we get on with it?

WITKACY: Bravo! Now. Jadwiga couldn't have said that.

CZESŁAWA: I should press my advantage while I can then, no?

WITKACY: Mind you, the first Jadwiga was not as beautiful as the second

Jadwiga.

CZESŁAWA: Your wife Jadwiga is one of the most beautiful people I have ever met.

WITKACY: And we love the second Jadwiga, don't we?

CZESŁAWA: We do. I would not have come back to you after the hairdresser if Jadwiga had not persuaded me.

WITKACY: Jadwiga is divine.

CZESŁAWA: Jadwiga is divine.

WITKACY: So. (beat) This, my utter darling, is for you. It should be enough. Not enough to kill a big handsome chap like me. I have more! Lucky duck! But this should do it for little you.

CZESŁAWA: Staś.

WITKACY: Mmmm.

CZESŁAWA: If you die now, you're out of the play.

WITKACY: No, I'm not. I thought you'd read my works of art. Don't the ghosts in my plays return? *Any bloody time they want*!?

CZESŁAWA: Oh. Good. Because.

WITKACY: I know. Who else to render a perspective on this benighted country?

He sets up their doses

CZESŁAWA: Staś.

WITKACY: Yes.

CZESŁAWA: Thank you for the ring.

WITKACY: My pleasure.

CSEZŁAWA: Staś.

WITKACY: Yes.

CSEZŁAWA: War.

WITKACY: Yes.

CZESŁAWA: Is bad.

WITKACY: Yes.

CZESŁAWA: But wars end. People survive them. Why should this war be any different? We might survive it.

WITKACY: Darling youthful very last love of mine, don't kill yourself, just because I am. But don't ask me to stay here. The smart ones will be the targets. Of both sides. Nasty-pasty Germans *and* nasty-pasty Russians. Because. Secret. I am a degenerate. A well-known degenerate! And I won a big prize only a year ago, remember? You were there. We played footsies under the celebratory table. Thus – I am something of a catch! And my books are done, and I don't care if I don't paint another fucking portrait as long as I – well, you get the picture –

CZESŁAWA: If that was supposed to be witty –

WITKACY: Czesława. You can take your chances if you want to, girl, but don't ask me to stay alive to experience the things that they *will do to me!*

Silence

So. Here's your Luminal. It takes half an hour. You might feel a bit sick. Try not to throw up or it might not work. And here's mine. I'm cutting my wrists, too, just to be sure. Want a knife?

CZESŁAWA: No. No, thank you, Staś. I'll try not to throw up.

WITKACY: Excellent child. Kiss?

They kiss

Drink it down.

They drink

And now. (Gets out knife) Don't watch!

ACT 1: SCENE 4: JANINA AND AGENISKA: 1ST SEPTEMBER 1939

IN A ROOM *in a manor house in Lusowa, near Poznan (POZNUNY)*

JANINA: Don't go to Warsaw!

AGNIESKA: Don't you go to…wherever it is!

JANINA: Nekla or… Wrzesnia. Or somewhere between. We evacuate east by train. Agnieska, I must. I have orders!

AGNIESKA: I won't stay – alone – all my family – *all* my family/ gone!

JANINA: /Your mother is here!

AGNIESKA: Yes! Run fast!

JANINA: She's ill!

AGNIESKA: Run even faster.

JANINA: Gusia!

AGNIESKA: Mama will decline in as lovely a drama as she can manage in these ugly times, and then my Uncle will make sure she goes to join Papa. Sorry, your mother will have to rot alone. My mother will claim the general!

Silence

JANINA: You are so fierce.

AGNIESKA: I am my father's daughter. (beat) Janina, swear to me –

A volley of shots

JANINA: Tea?

AGNIESKA: Thanks. With sugar, please.

Janina pours tea

Another volley

AGNIESKA: Another round to welcome the victors?

JANINA shrugs. Another volley. A cry of acclamation outside. JANINA *looks out of the window*

JANINA: There are rows of buxom *volksdeutsche* lining the streets. They are

giving out flowers.

AGNIESKA: Well, our absence has probably been noted then. Just as well we're leaving.

JANINA: You don't have to!

AGNIESKA: I do! Swear to me. 'I, Janina Dowbor –'

JANINA: Oh, for god's sake, Gusia! An oath is easy to break.

AGNIESKA: Not between us.

JANINA: We don't know that yet. They hung the doctor, the chemist, the teacher and seven other men in the town square yesterday.

AGNIESKA: We will fight for Poland. For papa. And for each other. We will.

JANINA: I'll write to you.

AGNIESKA: No point. I won't be here.

JANINA: If it gets to the post office here in Lusowa, perhaps for me they may make sure it gets to you.

AGNIESKA: The Hero of the Uprising's daughter working at the post office! Lord, they wet themselves when you walked through the door! They will certainly make sure! Except that there won't be a forwarding address.

JANINA: Sad old hero.

AGNIESKA: I do not forgive him, Janina. Papa spoils Geildymin and then snips him off when he acts like a spoiled brat! At least Papa died before Olgierd did the deed. The heir and the spare and he ditched the heir because he thought he had the spare to carry on the family name! Whoops! Silly old hero! (*OLGEE-ERD*)

JANINA: Gusia.

AGNIESKA: Janina?

JANINA: I have trained. And I will be with trained military companions. And I will have a uniform. And I will have a gun.

AGNIESKA: Cake? Might be the last cake for a long time. Are you scared?

JANINA: *Me?* (beat) Never. No. I'm not scared. (She is)

AGNIESKA: We're abandoned! Poland is once more abandoned.

JANINA: I will have some last cake. Here. Half in half.

AGNIESKA: I don't want any cake!

JANINA: Liar!

(AGNIESKA *grins. Eats the cake*)

AGNIESKA: 'I, Agnieska Dowbor, who would do anything for sugar!'

JANINA: Yes. Our father's daughter. (beat) And they are taking the businesses of the Jews. Just – 'Hand over the keys to the shop.'

AGNIESKA: Oh, the Jews! There's a crumb. Corner of your mouth.

JANINA: The Jews are also Polish.

AGNIESKA: They are Jews! (beat) Darling, darling, swear to me –

JANINA: We have…five minutes, Agnieska. Six? Before my sergeant gets here. I have said I will fight. They have said they will find me a uniform. So. Don't waste 'now' on 'swear to me'! One or two sugars?

AGNIESKA: Two, of course! (beat) Say it after me.

JANINA: You are so fierce.

AGNIESKA: 'I, Janina Dowbor…'

JANINA: In 1930, when I was 20 –

AGNIESKA: One year older than I am now.

JANINA: Yes. And you look so young to me! (beat) In 1930, that beautiful year, I stood… *At last* I stood on the edge of the open body of a plane. I just stood. I held the edge of the door. I had the parachute on my back. Not heavy. A familiar weight. I'd practised. We'd all practised. Me and the men.

AGNIESKA: You are so fierce.

JANINA: The wind's not really there, Gusia, that's what's so strange. Just the feeling of the speed of the aircraft itself. It's best to jump when there's very little upper air wind. We won't have that luxury, of course, when the real thing comes, but that's how we've trained. But it's cold. You register the cold, up so high.

AGNIESKA: Your face, after!

JANINA: Mmm. Exciting!

AGNIESKA: That morning, before I went to school, you told me you'd sing on the way down.

JANINA: *Did* I?

AGNIESKA: Yes! And I thought – yes! – the Poznan Nightingale falling through the air singing like a – not like a little brown nightingale, but like an angel in the great sky, like a warrior!

JANINA: Gusia, please don't die just to be like me!

AGNIESKA: Why can you say 'Don't die!' to me? And I can't say 'Don't die' to you!?

JANINA: I will be flying a plane!

AGNIESKA: Not all the time. You will be with your unit. You will stand out like dog's –

JANINA: A general's daughter does not say the word 'balls'!

AGNIESKA: A woman! With all those men! (beat) If you are captured, Janina?

JANINA: There are conventions for the treatment of prisoners of war.

AGNIESKA: From the *Russians*?

JANINA: The Germans are our enemy, not the Russians.

AGNIESKA: The Russians are always our enemy.

JANINA: The Germans have invaded. The Russians are our allies.

AGNIESKA: But the Russians are mobilizing. Everyone says.

JANINA: We have orders not to engage the Russians.

AGNIESKA: Holy mother of god!

JANINA: Wash your mouth! They are orders! Gusia, they *hang* the female partisans!

AGNIESKA: And where is Mietek?

JANINA: My husband, Gusia, Lieutenant-Colonel Lewandowski, Gusia – my Mietek, yes – is with his unit. As I would wish him to be! Here. The last of the pot? (tea)

AGNIESKA: Yours. I have water. And the cake crumbs. (beat) *Did* you sing on the way down? That day?

JANINA: No. First it was – can I do it? Can I jump? The general's daughter? Will she jump?

AGNIESKA: Of course she jumped! The general's daughter!

JANINA: The general's daughter. Absolutely!

AGNIESKA: My beautiful bird.

JANINA: You're in the plane. And then you're not! You're going so fast. Your heart is thumping. And you're thinking. The cord. When? The body. What position? The sky. I am in the skyyyyyyy! And I *am* a bird –

AGNIESKA: What bird?

JANINA: An eagle. I am an eagle – floating – on enormous wings – over Poland.

AGNIESKA: And then?

JANINA: Then I get to 3,000 feet and I know what to do. Of course. And I pull the cord, and I am – suspended over – the little town, the snaking roads, the chapel on the hill, the market square, the fields, the orchards, and the forest looming outside of …all of that – all spread out beneath me. Beautiful – beautiful! – Poland. And I steer as I've been taught, towards the waiting field. And I land. And I am the first woman to parachute in all of Poland! And then – five years later – I am a pilot! I think I am the first for that, too. Whose heart are you breaking if you leave?

AGNIESKA: Not. 'If'! 'When'! (beat) No one important. They are all such boys.

JANINA: Then you should not be so nice to them!

AGNIESKA: Oh, but I'm so good at it! (shrug) Find me a grown-up man, brave, and clever, and kind! I don't think they exist. Who else will join your unit?

JANINA: One other officer. Plus about 80 men. Gusia, there are partisans in Poznan. Gusia? This is Papa's house. You are the last of us.

AGNIEESKA: I am the half-sister.

JANINA: That's enough! You are utterly beloved! And he would want you to –

AGNIESKA: The house is the best house in Lusowa. It will be requisitioned by the Germans. You know that. But – the Germans are a civilized race. They will observe the honour of an old, brave enemy.

JANINA: What? Is 'civilized'? About what happened in the town square!?

AGNIESKA: He was a great warrior. They will honour that.

Shouts from outside

JANINA: That will be my sergeant. (beat) My little one, my almost child.

(*She hands* AGNIESKA *an envelope*)

AGNIESKA: What?

JANINA: Addresses. For Warsaw. [*VARSAVAH*]

They hug. Then step one step back, and salute each other

AGNIESKA: For the general!

JANINA: For the general!

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 1: THE MEMORY ROOM

MAMA: I am always so tired. I start to work. Then I fall asleep.

ZOSIA: You can't sleep.

MAMA: I can't sleep. So, I am always tired.

ZOSIA: Grey skies. Grey streets.

Silence

Mama? Which skies? Which streets?

MAMA: No more. That's enough. I want to sleep

ACT 1: SCENE 5; A ROOM IN THE OTWOCK GHETTO

ABRAM *gallops into the space, a high-spirited Pretend Horse, with* IZIA *mounted in piggyback on his back*

ABRAM: (sings) Happy birthday to you

YETTA, FELA, SHISHI *join in*

Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday, dear Izia
Happy birthday to you!

FELA: Down she comes now Abram.

IZIA *slides down to stand in front of* YETTA

YETTA: Happy birthday, Izia!

YETTA *hands her an apple*

IZIA: Auntie Yetta! All for me?

YETTA: All for you, sweetheart. Four years old. Very big girl now.

IZIA: Very.

General cheers and woots

Enter STEFAN

STEFAN: And…birthday girl. Some bluebells for your hair.

He threads bluebells in her hair

IZIA From the forest?

STEFAN: From the forest. And… (hands to FELA) … mushrooms. For our dinner! I thought they'd all be gone.

IZIA: But it's my birthday, Tatus.

STEFAN: Exactly. It's your birthday, Izia. So, of course there are some mushrooms for us in the forest!

IZIA: (breathes) Forest.

STEFAN: Yes. Forest. (beat) Now. Mamusia and Shishi and Auntie Yetta will cook the mushrooms and you will listen to Tatus, all right?

The women, with ABRAM*, move away*

IZIA: Did you see squirrels in the forest, Tatus?

STEFAN: I did! Two little ones with bushy tails, and a big, fat one! He was a cheeky boy! I gave him a little bit of corn.

She laughs

(beat) Now. Izia.

He gets her to sit down, 'pay attention'

IZIA: Tatus.

STEFAN: Izia, you're a big girl now. You are grown up. Four years old. No more baby time. That's gone, yes?

IZIA: Yes.

STEFAN: A big girl. Strong and brave.

IZIA: Strong and brave.

STEFAN: And you will remember what Tatus is telling you this day? Always?

IZIA: I will remember this day always.

STEFAN: Good. Now. Tomorrow you and Shishi will leave us. Yes. You will go to the big city. You will not live in a ghetto there. You will live in a nice apartment in the city. In Warsaw.

IZIA: But I don't want to –!

STEFAN: It is no longer safe here, Izia! They are looking particularly for children. You must go.

IZIA: Must go.

STEFAN: You will stay with some kind people. They have the same name as us. Jablońska. But they are Polish. Not Jews. So you must pretend to be like them. Polish. Not Jew. (*YABOINSKA*). If they make your hair blond, well, you just think, 'Now I look like Tatus for a little while instead of Mamusia'.

IZIA: Polish. Not Jew.

STEFAN: Mmmm. And you must not talk about Mamusia and me. You must call the kind Jablonskas your aunt and uncle. Shishi will help. And you must remember – when someone talks to you – anyone – no matter

how big, no matter if you are afraid – you look at them – *straight* in the eyes! How?

IZIA: Straight in the eyes!

STEFAN: And if they talk to you, you answer them, in a big voice. Standing straight. And you talk back. And if you do those two things, even if you *are* scared, they will never *know* that you that you are scared. They just won't know. And you do not tell them Mamusia's name. Or mine. You just say whatever the kind Jablońskas in Warsaw say to say. And even if you have to move somewhere else after the Jablońskias, by yourself –

IZIA: By my*self*?!

STEFAN: Or with Shishi! You are not to be afraid.

IZIA: Not afraid?

STEFAN: No. Never. But. If you ever *are* afraid. You come to the forest. Or to a park if there is no forest. And you tell the squirrels. And whatever you tell the squirrels, they will tell me.

IZIA: Tell the squirrels.

STEFAN: Yes. You tell the squirrels anything you are scared of and they will find me and they will tell me. (beat) And I will fix it. (beat) And you are to help Shishi. And she will help you.

IZIA: Help Shishi. Yes. (beat) Tatus?

STEFAN: Yes, darling.

IZIA: How will we…Go?

STEFAN: There is a tunnel by the sewer out of the ghetto to the station-master's house. I will take you there. I will give the stationmaster some money. He will have a ticket and some papers for you. Shishi will hold them. And he will put you on the train. And the kind Jablonskas will meet you at the other end.

The sun goes down. The room is dark

STEFAN'S VOICE: Bedtime baby. Come.

IZIA: Mushrooms!

STEFAN: Yes. Then bed. Come.

Their shadowy forms

Train whistle. Gets louder and louder. Chugging of train ready to leave the station.

Train whistle. Train chugging away.

ACT 1: SCENE 6, THE RAMP, AUSCHWTZ-BIRKENAU: 1942

Sudden darkness, screech of train, cacophony. The train is pulling away

WE ARE WITH THE 'HEALTHY' LINE UP AFTER THE RAMP UNLOADING. THIS INCLUDES HELA.

GUARD 1: March! Line up! Five abreast! *Raus!*

HELA: (tottering) Ah!

There is a YOUNG WOMAN *next to her. It is* CSEZŁAWA, who helps her regain her balance

Dogs barking

Those dogs look as if they would – !

Dog snarls very close

CSEZŁAWA: I think they would indeed! Ah! (She's hit)

BOROWSKI: I said! Move! And….

The new prisoners are lined up in a column five abreast

Marrrrrch!

The line of women staggers on

HELA: Red buildings. Rows and rows of them. That one ahead.

CSEZŁAWA: Yes!

HELA: At least my sister went in the truck.

CSEZŁAWA: Yes?

SS OFFICER: (hits with rifle butt) Silence!

HELA: She's all I've got!

CSEZŁAWA: Shh….

SS *moves on*.

There. Done.

HELA: Thanks.

CSEZŁAWA: That's all right.

HELA: I'm so thirsty!

CSEZŁAWA: Mmm. Me, too.

HELA: (looks at her) Ah. You are not Jewish!

CSEZŁAWA: No. I'm not. I was in a hospital, because – well. Doesn't matter. Germans come. Someone tells them about my…past connections…Not me. I'm…no threat! But. Him. They kill a lot of the very sick patients, but…In the end, not me. Because I am strong again by this time so they put me on the transport. I can work? You look strong too. Maybe we'll live?

BOROWSKI: *Raus! Raus! Raus!*

HELA: Maybe. (beat) "Work makes you free". [On the gate].

CSEZŁAWA: Or not.

Enter WITKACY, *who for now is who is invisible to the rest of the characters*, *including* CSEZŁAWA, *but most engaged with the audience*

WITKACY: Or not.

SS OFFICER: Halt! (lashes out) Now…You…Polish…sluts! We will have order here! You are in Auschwitz-Birkenau Frauen Konzentration Lager now (the women's barracks). This is not a brothel!

WITKACY: And they stop. And they are counted. These strong young women. And my darling.

GUARD 1: (holds a basket) *Hier drin!* In here!

SS WOMAN: Put your jewellery!

GUARD 1: *Hier!*

CSEZŁAWA: My mother's brooch!?

HELA: Do it. Quick!

CSEZŁAWA *drops THE BROOCH in. It hurts.*

WITKACY And the ring. You can see them. Three dogs. Four guards, one German, an SS. Give them the ring, pretty darling. It is only a band of gold.

HELA: What are you doing?

CSEZŁAWA: Shhh!

WITKACY: Csezława! She is so fiery and so sweet. She is like the Nun in my play. You have, naturally, read my play. It is called *The Madman and the Nun*. Rarely performed but often read. I am the Madman, also naturally. And, frankly, any one of my lovers could be the Nun. But I like to think. Csezława.

So. She hides the ring – in the lining of the hem of her dress. But. Mistake?

SS OFFICER: You!

Several guards [not BOROWSKI] get stuck into CSEZŁAWA. She cries out.

Well. A beating is a beating and it's useful to have one beating because then all the rest of them are shocked and then they do as they are told more quickly. So, my pretty darling, now –

CSEZŁAWA *collapses*

– falls and…yes…. She dies, yes…Csezława….

She dies

HELA: Oh. Oh my.

WITKACY: – sooner rather than later. Or later, rather than sooner, if she really did drink the Luminal.

WITKACY takes CSEZŁAWA by the hand. She rises. They look at each other. He nods his head gently towards the exit. Or perhaps he kisses his finger and leaves the kiss in the air. She might yearn towards him, but – pulls back. She exits. He looks after her

GUARD 1 *strikes* HELA. *She cries out.* WITKACY *returns to his self-appointed task*

So. Hela, with the other women, even with all the blows and the sight of men in striped uniforms who shuffle past with vacant gaze and bowed head who are like – just like – living corpses – and with the sweet darling lying dead on the ground in front of her – all Hela can think of is her craving thirst. She has been on that train after all for two days and has had nothing at all – no, nothing – to drink in all that time.

HELA: My feet are frozen. /They are numb.

WITKACY: /They are numb. The ragged column files into the red brick building up ahead. They go down a corridor. There are more men in striped uniforms milling around. But they are not the dead men walking. They have a slightly cushier job that might keep them alive for another month. There are also the /shiny-booted officers

HELA: /shiny-booted officers

WITKACY: /with the /death's head insignia

HELA: /death's head insignia

WTKACY: proudly on their peaked caps. The officer tells the women –

SS WOMAN: / 'Undress!' '*Schnell!* Quickly!'

WITKACY: / 'Undress!' '*Schnell!* Quickly!' So, they do, naked in front of these stranger men who look at their ghetto-wasted bodies coolly. They leave their clothes in a pile. The men in stripes – *pasiaki* – move toward the clothes, gather them up. Hela sees the *Vorabeiter* Borowski lifting –

BOROWSKI: (whisper) /A silk shirt!

WITKACY: /a silk shirt.

BOROWSKI: For Maria! If I can get it to her somehow.

WITKACY: His girl, also a Polish political prisoner, is in another part of the camp. And it's true. Such things are survival in Auschwitz. He'll find his pair of boots, too, later.

The women are shaved, underarm and pubic hair, roughly. Hela, too, beautiful Hela, newly married Hela, the soft one, the younger daughter. They are rubbed – hard – with disinfectant, which stings. Then they are shuffled into another room where they wait. There are metal pipes on the wall. Someone gasps. Is it true after all? The rumours they have heard that everyone continues to disbelieve? But then… Cold as ice, from the pipes….

HELA: (Laughing hysterically and trying to drink it) /Water!

WITKACY: /Water!

ACT 1: SCENE 7.

CHARLOTTE *starts walking downstage centre, similar to her first entrance. As the following* INTERLUDES *occur, she simply walks through them. She is making her way through all these snapshot scenes to her bunk at Auschwitz-Birkenau*

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 2: A DANCE HALL IN WARSAW

AGNIESKA *is dressed in a nice frock, with her lovely blonde hair a feature. A German soldier walks up to her and bows. She inclines her head.*

GERMAN SOLDIER 1: To dance, *fraulein*?

AGNIESKA: *Ja.* Why not?

They step into the dance. They may possibly dance into and out of the Memory Room

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 3: MAMA WALKS THE MEMORY ROOM

MAMA *is pacing her small room*

MAMA: I seem to see her – in that strange air that sits in the lungs like hot loose ash. I lose her, then, there is a flicker in the silent trees ahead and I think –

ZOSIA: Think? Mama?

MAMA: That it would take just that… one stretch…but…it never does and…and she never does….look back.

ZOSIA: Mama? My aunt? Is this one of my aunts?

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 4: SNAP-SHOT TRAUMA MEMORY: THE RAMPS

BOROWSKI: I – these are – I –

Passing WOMEN *are horrified, draw back*

BOROWSKI: Take them! You've got to –!

YETTA *stops. Sees him. And she takes the tiny things.* BOROWSKI *stares at her. She looks back*

YETTA: My poor boy.

HELA *gazes, appalled, then moves into the next scene whilst YETTA and the rest vanish.*

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 5: IZIA AND SHISHI ON THE TRAIN

SHISHI *holds* IZIA's *hand as they sit, warily, on the rocking train.*

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 6: JANINA TRAVELS TO WRZESNIA

JANINA, *in uniform, sits on train, soldiers all around her. They travel into the night*

ACT 1: SCENE 7 (cont.): AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU – THE FEMALE BUNK BARRACKS

CHARLOTTE *is on the top tier of a bunk in Auschwitz. There are three women on the same bunk. Two on the bunk below. They are emaciated, ghastly, as is she. But they are alive. They are not dressed in piastiki, but in a strange amalgamation of ill-fitting clothes*

At some point in this scene WITKACY enters. He just watches, serious, and almost loving, until the moment when ZOSIA enters at the end.

CHARLOTTE: You have nowhere to sleep, Polish?

HELA: No.

CHARLOTTE: You can lie here tonight. Tomorrow, you find another space. You have a name, Polish?

HELA: Hela.

CHARLOTTE: You find space with your own people tomorrow, Hela, all right?

HELA: My sister, Janka. She might be here. I think.

CHARLOTTE: She might. Or might have been. It's a big place. Lie there. Next to Jeanne.

JEANNE: Not next to me. On the other side of my sister. Poupette needs warmth. You lie there, on her left. I can do her right.

HELA *lies next to* POUPETTE

FRANCOISE: My feet hurt.

CHARLOTTE: Also mine, Francoise. Enough our feet. For now. We will go…

FRANCOISE: Ahhh!

CHARLOTTE: …To the theatre!

POUPETTE: But maybe not the theatre tonight, Charlotte. Tonight? Just a story?

CHARLOTTE: The theatre is too hard, Poupette?

POUPETTE: Tonight, the theatre is too hard. Too thrilling. Too…

CHARLOTTE: (beat) Once upon a time.

POUPETTE: Ahh.

CHARLOTTE: Once up a time there was a woman. She was very young. And she was very beautiful. But not more beautiful than you, Poupette.

JEANNE: Except that she still had her teeth, I hope.

CHARLOTTE: Well, yes, she did have teeth.

FRANCOISE: And hair.

CHARLOTTE: That is true. No one had shaved her head. Her hair was long and golden. She was a real princess!

FRANCOISE: Oh good!

JEANNE: And what had happened to the princess?

CHARLOTTE: Wait. I have not told this one before. I am needing –

A volley of shots in the distance

CHARLOTTE: Ah. (beat) God bless.

ALL: God bless.

JEANNE: Who? Do you think?

CHARLOTE: One of the other barracks. Over near Canada.

HELA: Canada?

CHARLOTTE: Where they store what they steal from us. Where the *Vorabeiters* sleep. Canada. The richest country in the world. Don't tell me you are slow, Polish. I will be very disappointed!

HELA: I am not slow. But I cannot laugh!

CHARLOTTE: No. Someone just died. I'm glad you can't laugh.

JEANNE: Who?

CHARLOTTE: We will find out in the morning. No doubt they will still be on the ground. But now. We must live the story.

POUPETTE: Yes. The story.

CHARLOTTE: Very well. I do not remember the first part of it. But…

FRANCOISE: Tell.

CHARLOTTE: The princess has lost her brothers. They have been taken away. She knows not where. There is a powerful king who loves her. But she has many enemies who do not want the king to love her.

POUPETTE: Many… enemies. [She is fading]

CHARLOTTE: The woman learns that the enemies have somehow killed her brothers. The brothers have been buried. They are just skeletons now. But they are unquiet in their graves because of the great injustice. The princess weeps. She gathers nettles in the graveyard to knit coats that may cover the bones of her brave, dead brothers. But she does not talk. Ever. I don't remember why but she cannot speak unless her brothers live again. So she cannot explain to the king who loves her what her sadness is. She cannot explain the extreme injustice that her brothers – I think there are maybe seven of them, I will ask my memory before I tell this story again – she cannot speak about why it is wrong that her brothers have been killed. She isspelled into silence by her grief.

HELA: Ah.

Enter WITKACY

CHARLOTTE: You have brothers?

HELA: Had. One.

CHARLOTTE: So. She gathers nettles. Good sister. The nettles prick her fingers but she gathers them, gathers them. And from the nettles she knits coats to cover the bones of her brothers. The king who loves her does not understand her. He wants to, but …it is too hard. He is just an ordinary king, and this is beyond the understanding of an ordinary …anything. And she is opposed by a monstrous evil. It might be her stepmother. It might be a savage and angry man. And because of this evil, her babies, hers and the king's, die.

FRANCOISE: They do not!

CHARLOTTE: Francoise. This is the story! I do not make it up. I recall it!

JEANNE: Go on.

CHARLOTTE: Her babies die. And the ordinary king cannot make any more excuses for her to her enemies. So, first she is banished. And then she is condemned to death for her strange behaviour of her babies dying and her knitting coats of nettles for her dead brothers, and for her silence.

HELA: She could not speak?

CHARLOTTE: No, Polish. She could not speak. She could not explain the monstrosity.

JEANNE: Ah.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. This happens. So, at the burning –

JEANNE: She is to be burned?

CHARLOTTE: Oh yes. There is a fire. There are sticks. And everywhere – there are the broken wings of birds.

FRANCOISE: Of course.

CHARLOTTE: At the burning she throws the cloaks made of nettles over the broken wings of the birds. And they come to life. They are her brothers! And they take her away. And the children that were dead. Live again. And the brothers. Live again. And the ordinary king who loved her is no longer a king and he is brought to her by her brothers. And he, and they, and their children and her brothers live together in another place where no evil can reach them.

JEANNE: Poupette!? Did you like that? (beat) Poupette?

CHARLOTTE: Ah no.

HELA: She was so still. But until – just then – I could feel her breath.

JEANNE: No warning? No rattle? Just. Not?

CHARLOTTE: We must put her by the door, Jeanne. We will take her out to the heap in the morning.

JEANNE: No. On the floor. There. I will lie with her. Keep her warm.

HELA: *Cries.*

CHARLOTTE: Ah, Polish. You still have tears! Lie there. We will attend to the kamarade. You. If you can, sleep.

WITKACY *takes* POUPETTE *by the hand. She rises and exits*

Enter ZOSIA

She might be dressed in the same frock AGNIESKA *wore in Interlude 2. She is a young woman now.*

ZOSIA: (SINGS) Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep,
And can't tell where to find them;
Leave them alone, and they will come home,
Bringing their tails behind them.

(To WITKACY) I am interested, you see. In the remembering. My problem is not – that I was there. My problem is – sort of – that I was not. But that I need to know about it! And no one will tell me! So. Who is Bo-Peep? What are her sheep? And where's 'home' in this remembering? And, what if 'home' is – Auschwitz*?*

INTERVAL

ACT 2: SCENE 1: THE MEMORY ROOM: TIME, FORM AND MEMORY

ZOSIA Hello, Mr Witkacy.

WITKACY: Good evening, Ghost. If it is evening.

ZOSIA: I am not a ghost.

WITKACY: Or is it night?

ZOSIA: It is night. Can't you see?

WITKACY: I am never sure of the details. Only the people. I see them.

ZOSIA: But you have learned this night before little break when people get wine and have a wee and little chat between themselves – you will have learned my mummy's home. The thing that calls her.

WITKACY: How come you can talk to me? If you are not a ghost.

ZOSIA: I am definitely not a ghost. But I am – a sort of in-between? So, we can chat. Lucky you. Not so lonely, always watching, watching.

WITKACY: If you are not a ghost, then…there is a little mystery. When I see you before you I think you look like my Czesława, you know, not quite nineteen, but now you look …

ZOSIA: My age? For someone like me the age is elastic. I change. I am the Fluid Chronology. Like you with the Fluid Death. Most people are not to be ghosts, you understand. Is just a usefulness used by playwrights, as you would know. Most people who are not fictions are either alive or they are dead. You are the exception. For now. For the context and the witnessing. For me, my chronology right now is that when I find out about my aunts' deaths, I am thirty-three.

WIKACY: You have aunts?

ZOSIA: No. Not 'really'. I am not the real, am I? In the real there was no niece to Janina and Agnieszka. One brother dead – bang! (shoots self in head) Shamed for his 'honour' – fuckwit – and the other brother – who knows? Somewhere in Paris with syphilis or cirrhosis of liver. Disowned by the general, that's for sure. So. My aunts. The line is finish with them. The line of their father, the general.

WITKACY: Thirty-three is the Jesus age.

ZOSIA: And I am a Polish fiction so of course I am Polish Catholic, even in Australia! So yes, the Jesus age. Ring bells! My mummy drops three hints. I overhear her talking with another survivor one night of too much wine. I put three and thirty together.

WITKACY: I was telling you about my play.

ZOSIA: You were not.

WITKACY: I am now.

ZOSIA: Clearly.

WITKACY: It is the one about the Madman and the Nun.

ZOSIA: Cliché to factor of whatthefuck.

WITKACY: Oh, it is a mathematician now, is it? As I was saying, this play is very strange, and very fine. Everything has to do with entropy! We descend from order to disorder!

ZOSIA: Cliché to factor of whatthefuck squared.

WITKACY: Nothing is worse, Fiction, than an inferior intelligence calling attention to itself by very minor shows of wit.

ZOSIA *shrugs*

What I intend to convey in my play, such a radical artist I am – is my theory of…'pure form'. This is not a good translation, but it is the one that is used in the as yet unwritten cultural history books so we will go with it. Question: What is 'pure form'? Answer: It is the clearest, cleanest, most unequivocal creative expression of the 'thing that we are'. My friend-not-friend Mr Malinowski calls it 'moments when you merge with objective reality – pure nirvana' – but he is referring to moments of ethnographic being-ness with the persons in the Australian bush, which frankly I was better at than he was – as in, the tribal persons always preferred me to him!

So. Question: When can an artist produce his purest creation? Answer: When he himself *is* pure creation! That is to say, when he has become degenerate enough from his excellently bad habits – of which I have to say that cocaine was way the best – to kill his old self! That is to say, when he is mad! Thus, my hero. Is a madman. Pure form.

ZOSIA: Your point, Ghost?

WITKACY: My point is, Fiction, that I am thinking, Fiction, that perhaps the reason I have achieved the state of being a Ghost is because I have, through my excesses, achieved Pure Form. About which I am an expert and I refer you to my book about it. I am not just the playwright and the artist, I am also the philosopher. And according to my philosophy, basically, if a human being can achieve Pure Form, that human being can do anything. Be anything.

ZOSIA: And I am thinking, Ghost, that this perhaps is just perhaps let's change the subject, get focus back to Witkacy where it belongs?

WITKACY: I am not a narcissist!

KOSIA: And I am not a Polish-Australian Fiction, aged thirty-three!!

WITKACY: You were saying about your 'fluid chronology', Miss Shit-Face-Not-Nineteen?

ZOSIA: Thank you, rude fucking ex-playwright, currently Ghost. I have an offer for you on Philosophy myself. Not so smarty-pants and I don't need whole tiresome fucking complicated book but nice short version easier to get a grip on. Humans beings – you, me, Koba – Wolf; Insane Sane Man in Nasty-Pasty Germany – Zombie; we are all animals – and we *human animals* feel alive – experience 'being alive' – inside 'Time'. You know. It is past, it is present, it is future.

But no, it is NOT! I am Queen of Time, after all, Fluid Chronology, that's me. So I know this. 'Time' is just trick of 'being in a body'. Past and Future, okay, are just – moment and then – moment and then – moment. That just happened. Or is just about to happen. But what is in between them? The 'Now'. Is it a… 'moment'? Is it a Minute? Or is it a Second? Or…Less than that? Even less? Meaning…. This 'Now', this 'Present' squeezes into – Nothing! Because, each moment…past and future press – into each other – and where they press – is nothing! Just knowing.

So. When the past invades. Is not just 'memory'. Is real. My mummy's suffering. My mummy who has been changed into enigma trapped inside enigma. Is always real. But when the future calls. Is also real. My mummy's dream of me, and warm baths, and good food and love and peace. Is also real. And no wolf and no zombie can take that away.

ACT 2: SCENE 2: WARSAW

WITKACY:

Warsaw now. Kazimierzkowska Street.

AGNIESKA *enters café. JOSEFA, the Manager is there, as is a pair of customers*

JOSEFA: Yes?

AGNIESKA: I was given this address?

JOSEFA: Yes?

AGNIESKA: Bogusław said you would be expecting me. (BOGOOSWUF)

JOSEFA: 'The new waitress'.

AGNIESKA: That's it. 'The new waitress.'

JOSEFA: Bogusław mentioned an architect.

AGNIESKA: Yes. I have the plans to his house. He is hoping to renovate.

JOSEFA: Is he, indeed? Your name?

AGNIESKA: Jolanta Kaczanowski. I have papers. (YOLANTA KATCHANOVSKI)

JOSEFA: I need you to give me the plans to Bogusław's house, Jolanta.

AGNIESKA: He said they were assurance of my employment.

JOSEFA: They are for sure. I would be grateful to have a quick look at them.

JOSEFA *waits.* AGNIESKA *hands over the 'plans'.* JOSEFA *skim reads*

The house is in Poznan?

AGNIESKA: Yes. A year ago.

JOSEFA: Farewell (to guests). Thank you.

AGNIESKA: He says, please burn the plans. Intellectual property. He would not want them getting into other hands.

Two customers exit

JOSEFA: Any problems from Poznan?

AGNIESKA: That's why I'm here. One time when I was in the company of a German officer I ran into a person from Poznan. Naturally I didn't recognise him, but the German was…I don't know – it might have been nothing – but… Bogusław felt it was better for me to move on.

JOSEFA: Bogusław was with the Wolves.

AGNIESKA: Me also. With the Wolves. A small but fierce group, people said.

JOSEFA: Right. Well. No heroics, please. There's an SS Headquarters just down the street. Stay alive if possible. (beat) We will expect you at 7.30 tomorrow, Jolanta. For now, there will be no need to seek out liaison with Germans. I expect it will arise naturally –

AGNIESKA: They do like blond hair.

JOSEFA: They certainly do. So, we'll judge that as it comes. For now, serve them civilly but not too eagerly. Some of our other guests will tend to sit towards the back. They will ask to do so, and you should attempt to make it possible or call me if it is not. There may be other occasional errands, even short trips. I'm sure you'll manage.

AGNIESKA: I have experience running errands. Mostly to and from the hospital.

JOSEFA: Excellent. It is helpful if you are already known at the hospital. (Looks around – still no one). Anything I should know?

AGNIESKA: I've been in Warsaw for a year now.

JOSEFA: And?

AGNIESKA: My sister is in Kozielsk prison.

JOSEFA: The Russians.

AGNIESKA: Yes.

ANOTHER CUSTOMER *enters the café*

JOSEFA: (formal again) Goodbye for now, Jolanta. I am happy to meet you. And Jolanta, I had a great respect for the general.

AGNIESKA *turns to leave*

ACT 1: SCENE 3: A CONCERT IN A GHETTO

Split Scene

HELA *and* JANKA *are sorting some clothes*

HELA: A concert!?

JANKA: Yes, my darling, a concert! All the young men who will be eyeing you off! Miss Pretty Nineteen! And look –

HELA: What's that?

JANKA: You may borrow.

HELA: No!

JANKA: My crocodile skin shoes!

HELA: *How*…do you do it? (as in have crocodile skin shoes here)

JANKA: I simply…do!

STEFAN *and* FELA *are in bed*

STEFAN: *A concert?*

FELA: *Absolutely. Why not? We are still human even in a ghetto. You don't have to go back tonight. So. We will go to a concert!*

STEFAN: *Where?*

FELA: *The coffee house, 'Polonia'.*

STEFAN: *The' Polonia'!? The Polonia is the best restaurant in Warsaw!*

FELA: *Well,* ***this*** *Polonia is the best uh…*

JANKA: /In the coffee house, you know 'Polonia'.

HELA: In the basement of our building? (beat) Oh no. No, no. These (shoes) are a bit tight, Janka.

JANKA: Fat feet, Hela? The concert is in the basement of *your* Building.

HELA: My feet are delightful! The problem is the shoes! (to JANKA) I miss you. Now Mother's been sent away.

JANKA: Hush. Not thinking of Mama. We got one postcard.

HELA: I always thought –

JANKA: Don't think!

HELA: Did you think – Janka, when Papa and Julek enlisted in the Polish Army, and then…

JANKA: 'And then' isn't useful, Hela.

HELA: Did you feel that Mama would have rathered either of us –

JANKA: Instead of Julek? Hela. Please. Not today!

HELA: You are silencing me!

JANKA: And what do you think you are doing to me?! Now. Give me back those shoes. What a shame. Anyway, my other news. My new husband, my Salek, has now been transferred to work in a glass factory near Krakow, so you will have me back with you soon enough. Stand.

HELA *stands.* JANKA *measures a blouse against her back*

HELA: I shouldn't be happy, should I?

JANKA: No, you shouldn't. But you are so there it is. At least if we get caught in an *Aktion* we may go together (beat) Now. If I let out this seam to accommodate your still-excellent chest, then apart from the shoes, you will be properly dressed!

STEFAN: No concert for you, sweetheart. You must keep your nose clean even of that. I have papers. As soon as I've arranged the bribes for guards and transport, you will get out of here.

FELA: You have waited till now to tell me?!

STEFAN: First things first, my darling.

FELA: I have a kenncarte, Stefan. I can work here.

STEFAN: Fela, the Germans are moving more out and then more in from elsewhere all the time. And then they move them out, too. At some point they will liquidate the ghetto and you must not be here then. (beat) You will be able to live-in at the hospital. And the hospital is the centre of the Resistance communication network. I know you will make yourself indispensable.

FELA: Stefan, I want to be with you!

STEFAN: And Fela I must seem a single man. Yes? So 'Polish'. My blond

hair? In charge of the mill? Real money? We can't complicate the narrative or I'll lose the mill. And then where would we or our babies be, or the others who depend on me to pay off their protectors?

FELA: *I have not seen the children for…*

STEFAN: *And you have thus not drawn attention to them with a yearning visiting female who is almost certainly their mother! Fela, you can do more for the girls as a bottle-blond helping the partisans from a position of – well, nowhere's safe, of course.*

FELA: *They can't stay at the Jablonskis, any longer. That's clear.*

STEFAN: *No. They can't. I am arranging for them to go to the nuns in Kazimierzowska Street.*

FELA: *My babies, Stefan!*

STEFAN: *My babies, too, Fela. And your brother. And my nieces. And the neighbour child. We need two of us, out there, finding resources, in case one of us is lost.*

HELA: No babies, Janka?

JANKA: I will not have a baby in the ghetto!

HELA: (realisation) You haven't!?

JANKA: Why are you surprised!!!? You are such a child!

HELA: It must have cost….

JANKA: Yes! It did! In money and in tears! I will *survive*!

HELA: You don't look well.

JANKA: I'm fine. Just tired. Who isn't? Now. Hela. I heard on the grapevine. One of the musicians. With a …squeezebox?

HELA: Oh. The accordion player? The one with blue eyes.

JANKA: Yes. That's the one.

HELA: I don't know him.

JANKA: Just his blue eyes.

HELA: Oh shut up!

JANKA: His name is Połdek. The whole family are musicians. He's nice.

HELA: Is he. Fancy. Enough. Please?

JANKA: Of course. But…Poldek will be playing at the concert, Hela. I thought you might like to know.

STEFAN: Sleep now. I have till morning. Our babies are still alive. We are still. Alive.

FELA: Good night, Stefan.

STEFAN: Good night, my love. (beat) Good night.

Music. A small smoky room. A man – POŁDEK *– playing a piano accordion. Everyone joins in, singing popular Polish tunes from before the war. 1 minute. Clapping, feverish faux-joy*

POLDEK: That's it! Any requests! Come on! Now is your chance! Soon it's home to our feather beds! You? The quiet lady down the back?

HELA: I….

JANKA: Go on, Hela! For heaven's sake! (calls) Her name is Hela, Połdek!

POLDEK: [coming over to their table] Yes? Hela?

JANKA: Go *on*!

HELA: I can manage!

JANKA: Yi-yi-yi.

HELA: Yes. Poldek.

POLDEK: Mmmm?

HELA: Would you please play….

POLDEK: Please play…yes?

HELA: Would you please play… 'Nobody is Longing for Me?'

General shout of laughter

POLDEK: Not just a pretty face!

HELA: By no means.

POLDEK: (beat) It would be my joy to play for you. Hela.

He plays and sings

ACT 1: INTERLUDE 7: THE MEMORY ROOM

MAMA: I am always so tired. I start to work. Then I fall asleep.

ZOSIA: You can't sleep.

MAMA: I can't sleep. So, I am always tired. Grey/skies

ZOSIA: /skies.

MAMA: Grey /streets.

ZOSIA: /streets. Warsaw?

(*silence*)

Warsaw.

MAMA: Warsaw. I seem to see her – in that strange air that sits in the lungs like hot loose ash. I lose her, then, there is a flicker in the silent streets ahead and I think –

ZOSIA: Think? Mama?

MAMA: That it would take just that… one stretch…but…it never does and…and she never does….

ZOSIA: Never does…?

MAMA: Look back?

ZOSIA: Mama?

MAMA: After the war they sent us out into the countryside. There was still fighting going on. The Russians were pushing the Germans back. We were sent to the villages. Old cottages. Cowsheds. It was so cold! Everything was frozen. I watched from my window as men were slaughtered. Like a…movie? No one buried them. The ground was too hard. We walked past their bodies still leaning at angles from their carts, their trucks. We walked past them each Sunday on our way to church.

Silence

MAMA: Poland. Is a cemetery. I will never go back.

ACT 1: SCENE 4: KATYN FOREST

JANINA *is on a truck with other soldiers, particularly her sergeant*

SGT OKNIŃSKI. Reserve Lieutenant?

JANINA: Yes, Sergeant Okniński?

OKNIŃSKI: They call these trucks Black Ravens. Why do they do that, do you think?

JANINA: If you can't work it out, I'm not going to tell you. Oh! (cry of pain)

They go over a bump and are thrown around

My arm was broken. It hasn't mended well.

OKNIŃSKI: The trucks. Took us to the carriages last time. And then to the prison.

JANINA: So they did.

OKNIŃSKI: It's nearly light.

JANINA: It is.

OKNIŃSKI: Sunday morning.

JANINA: Is it?

OKNIŃSKA: Pack. Body search. And into vans. Then a train. You with the other officers. Me, for some reason, with you.

JANINA: You are nearly an officer? From Kozelsk station. Yes.

OKNIŃSKI: And then we travel West. Somewhere near Smolensk –

JANINA: Gnyezdovof railway station. Were you asleep? (NYEZDOWOV)

OKNIŃSKI: Gnyezdovof. So…

JANINA: What time is it, do you think?

OKNIŃSKI: Maybe 5.30?

JANINA: Maybe 5.30.

OKNIŃSKI : And now we are back mina truck and heading into a forest predawn. So dark.

JANINA: Sergeant Okniński, you always did have a genius for stating the

obvious. I thought they might have tortured you out of it.

OKNIŃSKI: No, lieutenant. Just into pain. Oceans and oceans of pain. From which my body will never recover. You, too?

JANINA: Well, there's the arm. But I did better than I thought I would. I told them that I was born in 1914 and that my father was some man's bastard – we didn't know who – and his name was Marian. And I stuck to it. The lie went on to my records so if this is it… how they will trace me I do not know. I was surprised I even remembered the lie consistently. But…. For the general! (*MAARIAN)*

OKNIŃSKI: For the what?

JANINA: Doesn't matter.

OKNIŃSKI: They said. 'Do not engage with the Russians. Do not fight them. They will be on our side.'

JANINA: I know. They were wrong. What a shame.

OKNIŃSKI: If we went past the Gnyezdovof then this will be the Katyn Forest.

JANINA: It is good to see you again, Sergeant. If this is the end, I so wish we were in Poland, and not some Russian forest. We should be in Poland. It should be Polish soil. Which already embraces my brother. And my father. I am glad he died before they could make an example of him and hang him by his fine old neck. My sister is still alive.

OKNIŃSKII: How did you learn this?

JANINA: How did you learn your sister was gone? The message gets through. Or not. This one did.

The truck stops with a lurch

RUSSIAN GUARD 1: Out!

A great wide space is full of trees

They stumble out and down from the truck

JANINA: The air! To be once more in a forest! Okniński, it's nearly spring!

OKNIŃSKI: Late April.

JANINA: Listen! A bird!

Birdsong

RUSSIAN GUARD 1: Move! Line up!

JANINA: Is it? Late April?

OKNIŃSKI: I have been keeping track.

RUSSIAN GUARD 1 *belts them*

RUSSIAN GUARD: I said! Line up! Single file! Quick!

JANINA: You are a miracle Sergeant. I forgive your banality. Do you know the actual date?

OKNIŃSKI. It's the 22nd. It's April 22nd, lieutenant.

JANINA *begins to laugh/cry*

Lieutenant?

RUSSIN GUARD 1: Over there! Quickly! Move!

RUSSIAN GUARD 1 *shakes first* JANINA *and then* OKNIŃSKI *down*

GUARD: Rings!

JANINA: Mieczysław. Mietek…

She hands over her ring

RUSSIAN GUARD 2: Roubles, belts!

JANINA *and* OKNIŃSKI *hand over either or both of these items*

JANINA: How will I keep my trousers up Sergeant? Though they were too big anyway.

OKNIŃSKI: It won't matter soon. Where?

RUSSIAN GUARD 1. The hut near that ditch.

JANINA: That ditch has been fresh dug.

RUSSIAN GUARD 1: Move! Single file, I said! Come on, officer! You first!

OKNIŃSKI: Lieutenant!

JANAINA: Yes?

OKNIŃSKI: Why did you laugh? The date?

JANINA: The 22nd of April, Sergeant. Is my birthday! Congratulate me. I am 32.

RUSSIAN GUARD 1: Bend. Down. In.

We see JANINA *go inside a small doorway. Then somehow the whole thing reverses and we follow her into an enclosed space with sandbags lining the wall*

JANINA: Sandbags? Oh. Of course. No sound.

There is a man behind her

RUSSIAN GUARD 2: A woman?

She registers the gun at her neck

JANINA: Yes.

RUSSIAN GUARD 2: Kneel.

JANINA: It will be like this?

RUSSIAN GUARD 2: Die, woman.

JANINA: (shouts) For the –!

A shot rings out. Muffled. Her body is lifted out by unseen hands. The unseen hands throw her body on to a waiting pallet. But she herself is carried as if she is flying. She lifts right up, still flying. A thousand nightingales fly with her

ACT 2: SCENE 5: AUCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

IN *the bunk room. CHARLOTTE is lying on the bunk, exhausted*

Enter HELA

She stands by the bunk. CHARLOTTE wearily raises her head

CHARLOTTE: Polish.

HELA: Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: What are you doing here, Polish? It's been a while.

HELA: My friend died today.

CHARLOTTE: How?

HELA: The dogs.

CHARLOTTE: Not a good death.

HELA: No.

CHARLOTTE: But then we all end up in the fires, one way or another. Are you hoping for one of the less-bad deaths?

HELA: Charlotte, I don't want to die! Why not?

CHARLOTTE: Me neither. Why not?

CHARLOTTE: You need a place on the bunk? Francoise is to the hospital. Typhus. I give her till midnight.

HELA: Not a good death.

CHARLOTTE: No. I hope not to see her body at roll call tomorrow morning. I will look the other way. Her child is with her mother back in France. If I can I will tell them of her one day.

JEANNE *approaches*

JEANNE: (seeing HELA) It is 'Polish'!

HELA: It is. *Bonsoir*, Jeanne.

JEANNE: *Bonsoir*, Polish. I saw your sister yesterday.

HELA: Janka!? You saw my Janka!? She is here? But she went on the truck with all the –

JEANNE: *Did* she?

HELA: *Yes!*

JEANNE: Then you are the lucky one who got a miracle because I saw her! I spoke to her!!

CHARLOTTE: Oh my! Quick! Rub my hand! The luck!

JEANNE: I spoke to her. I told her you were here. I told her you were still quite strong. She is in the team working for Madritsch the Austrian. They go in to make uniforms at his factory in Krakow each day. Extra food. No beatings. Another miracle! (*MAADRITCH*)

HELA: Alive! No beatings! My Janka! And I thought she was – (dead!)

She is overcome

CHARLOTTE: Up you come, Polish. Yes! Mind my left side. Not good right now. Polish, this is wonderful news.

HELA: Yes! Oh! Yes! (beat) Oh! What have you done?!

CHARLOTTE: I fell. Stupid. Then – as we are not 'no beatings' here! – the *kapo* beat me for it. Stupid. But Polish, do you understand it? Working for Madritsch – your sister might survive!

HELA: I know! It's …. (beat) Her husband didn't.

CHARLOTTE: Ah. No. (beat) Neither did mine.

HELA: You were married, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: Little Polish. I was lucky in a way. In France, they shoot the resistance fighters, the men, so they shot Georges, but me, they sent me far away. Here. To your country. But for the resistance in your country, they also shoot the men, but they hang the women. But I am not Polish. So I am still alive to say his name. 'Georges'.

JEANNE: And your husband, Polish, still lives. And there is a chance still that you will join him in Hungary. So stay alive!

CHARLOTTE: Yes! All chances! Hold them tight! And now. Are you ready? We will go. To the theatre. And because Polish's husband is a musician who is still alive and who's music has been heard by Mr Schindler who has asked that Hela joins her man which gives Hela a chance to live, maybe…. Tonight. We will not go to the theatre. Tonight. We will go…to the opera!

JEANNE: Opera! You will *sing* to us, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: No. I have not remembered the music yet. Music is harder for me. But I will try. For later. In the meantime, I will tell you the story. The opera is by Mr Glück. And yes, he is a German, but he moved to Paris for the best years of his life. So, he is forgiven. The opera is called *Orphée et Eurydice*. And I have seen it, with Georges, at the Paris Opera!

HELA: The Paris Opera!

JEANNE: If I live.

CHARLOTTE: Yes?

JEANNE: I will go to the Paris Opera.

CHARLOTTE: (hugs her) (beat) Very well. It is long, long ago. Orphée is the most beautiful musician, Polish. He plays the harp, however, not the piano accordion!

HELA: Poldek's brother plays the harp. But he is not as beautiful as Poldek!

CHARLOTTE: Of course not! But Orphée, also unlike Poldek, has lost his beautiful wife, Eurydice. She has died. Orphée prays to the gods, 'Return her to me!' We know this prayer, yes? We all do, so it is very sad, but we know it. This is the purpose of art. That we know the sadness in a deep, good way.

JEANNE: 'Return her to me!' Poupette.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, darling. Shhh. Now. Is too hard.

JEANNE: It will always be too hard.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. I think so. (beat) So. Orphée prays. And he decides to go to Hades, where Eurydice is now a shade.

HELA: Ah. A shade.

CHARLOTTE: Not like the Musselmen here. Those who are dead before they die. No. This is a beautiful shade. And the god of Love, Amor, tells Orphée that Jupiter, the king of the gods, is sorry for him and will let him go to fetch Eurydice from the Land of Shades. And that – if he can calm the spirits of the dead there with his beautiful playing – he can take Eurydice back to life. But.

JEANNE: There is always a but.

CHARLOTTE: There is always a but.

HELA: Tell us the but.

CHARLOTTE: But. He must not look at Eurydice as she travels back with him to the upper worlds.

So. Orphée travels down, down, down the winding paths to the Land of Shades. It is dark. The air is thin. Forms flicker. It is hard to see. Is it cold? Probably. There is like a fog drifting over and through everything. And he plays his harp. So beautifully. No bird ever made sweeter song. And the dead release Eurydice. And Orphée takes her hand. He leads her up, up, up through the grassy meadows towards the light. But he does not look at her. She says, 'Why do you not look at me, Orphée? It must be that you do not truly love me!' She sits on a rock. She sings. What does she sing? She sings, 'Please look at me. Please *see* me!' This is what we all ask, is that not so? 'Please *see* me!" And Orphée is overcome. And he looks at her so lovingly.

And she dies again. Of course.

JEANNE: But no!

CHARLOTTE: But yes. She's dead. The beautiful Orphée is a fool, unlike Poldek. He does not use his careful discipline. He does not wait for the right moment. He does not say, 'There is a moment to see. And a moment not to see, and a human must judge that.' He does not drag his darling willy-nilly up the road to light.

But. And we have to hope that there is always *this* 'but', too. They are the lucky ones. Like Poldek playing bravely at the parties of the Beast, which is how he comes to the attention of Mr Schindler! Like me not being Polish. Like Polish's sister pulled off a truck for why we do not know. Amor comes to them. She says. 'Exception for you because…because ...'There is no reason really why luck visits one of us and not another. There is no reason. We must accept there is no reason. You are the exception, Orphée, with your beautiful Eurydice. And Orphée and Eurydice are both alive again. Thanks Amor! Thanks Jupiter! Just like that.

HELA: I wish. I could hear that song.

JEANNE *weeps*

CHARLOTTE: I am trying to remember it. At roll call. I will try again.

HELA: Is that how you stay…up….at roll call?

CHARLOTTE: By no means. Roll call is still roll call. Like all of us, I stand there as the hours pass in the cold and fear and dark waiting for the sleek, upholstered Germans to turn up after their breakfast of eggs and sausage with their whips and their boots and their dogs and… their

…power…over us, such small examples of once-was-human now, such scraps. I shuffle for warmth in and out of the centre of the group, unseen, I hope, because I know what happens if my shuffling is seen! I lean against my comrades to give them my warmth, and to take theirs. I feel the wind. The pain. It does not change one jot of it! It is still. Real! But. Each time I recall. Something. Each time I claw back some tiny scrap of …the world's store of…that other real that is made from the unreal…by other humans who were not beasts…. from all that I have been the lucky one to actually read or see, then I say to myself, 'I am still Charlotte! I am still me!"

ACT 2: SCENE 6: THE CAFÉ

AGNIESKA *is by the counter, alone. She is crying*.

JOSEFA: Bad news?

AGNIESKA *nods, just the once*

JOSEFA: Official?

AGNIESKA: No. But –

JOSEFA: I am sorry.

AGNIESKA: My –

JOSEFA: Don't tell me!

AGNIESKA: Sorry.

JANEK *enters the café*

Ah. Our little hustler. What will he have for us today?

JANEK: Hi.

JOSEFA: What have you got, Janek?

JANEK: A brooch. But I want a real cake for it.

JOSEFA: Someone's birthday?

JANEK: Maybe. The bread order – ?

JOSEFA: The bread went yesterday.

JANEK: Yeah, I know. Already done. Up and over! But is it possible to get more for Friday?

JOSEFA: Who would collect?

JANEK: Me. And some other boys.

JOSEFA: Which other boys?

JANEK: They're okay.

JOSEFA: (beat) I'll try.

JANEK: So? Will this get me a cake?

JOSEFA: Let's see.

JANEK *hands over the brooch*

JOSEFA: Okay. Jolanta, will you fetch –

AGNIESKA: – The cake. We do still have cakes. Expensive. But we have them. Amazing.

JANEK: Full size. With berries. It's a good brooch.

JOSEFA: Yes. You're right. It is. Jolanta? Second oven.

Enter STEFAN *with the two little girls,* IZIA *and* TOSIA

(to JANEK) Wait for Jolanta at the side door by the kitchen. If anyone else comes in you'll have to postpone your birthday for another day.

Goes to STEFAN

You bring the children here?

STEFAN: I have not seen my children for –!

JOSEFA: Stefan.

STEFAN: It's Shishi's first communion. I attended at the convent. It is not our religion. But it was beautiful. A little fairy, my darling girl. And my Squirrel. Never before has she been to a café. I promised her whatever she wants to eat.

Silence

My choice.

Silence

If this isn't safe, nowhere is!

JOSEFA: Nowhere is!

STEFAN: They are closing in. Now. While I still can.

SHISHI: Tatus? Should we go?

STEFAN: No, darling, we should not. (To JOSEFA) It has been a very merry dance but if the end is coming, it is coming! And if it *is* coming, then I want to see my babies one more time before I die.

Silence

JOSEFA: (beat) What would you like to eat, pretty ladies?

SHISHI: I would like, please…Tomato soup with rice? And my sister also.

IZIA: But Shishi…

SHISHI: Soup! You are too skinny!

JOSEFA: (calls) Two soups, Jolanta!

AGNIESKA: (off) Two soups….

IZIA: And white bread!

SHISHI: Izia!

IZIA: Please. Madam? Please may I have white bread?

JOSEFA: And two rolls of white bread!

AGNIESKA: (off) And white bread….

STEFAN: How odd. I'm not hungry.

JOSEFA: (to the girls) We shall find a table, shall we? Maybe…over here?

Takes them away from the window

AGNIESKA *returns with a wrapped cake, plus a tray with two bowls of soups and two rolls of bread. She puts the tray down on a surface near the side door, gives the cake to JANEK*

JANEK: Thank you, 'Jolanta'.

AGNIESKA: Shhh! Cheeky.

JANEK: Who's that? (Stefan)

AGNIESKA: Don't know. A Partisan. Very effective. He's nice. No. That's not it. He's beautiful. A beautiful man. He comes here quite often. I didn't know he had children. Aren't they sweet?

JANEK: (shrugs)

AGNIESKA: What I always wonder is …How?

JANEK: How what?

AGNIESKA: *You* come and go.

JANEK: From the ghetto? Yes. You want anything? What do you have to

trade?

AGNIESKA: I don't want anything. I just – How do you do it?

JANEK: Simple at first. We are on the Polish side of the wall between the rest of us and the ghetto. My mother bribes the Polish policemen. My Jewish – friend's – father – bribes the Jewish policeman on the other side. My cousin puts up the ladder and over the wall I go!

AGNIESKA: And if there's a German?

JANEK: So far, so good.

AGNIESKA: Oh, come on!

JANEK: There are boys at all street corners on the lookout. *Kale! Kale!*

AGNIESKA: But so *much* stuff comes and goes!

JANEK: We are more organised now. Ropes and hooks and…All the packing is done at the market at Mirkowski Square, where there is packing and unpacking anyway. And then – well, no need for you to know! 'Jolanta'! (*MEERKOVSKI)*

AGNIESKA: You mean if I'm arrested?

JANEK: They are changing the entrance to the ghetto. It will be harder, for sure.

AGNIESKA: How old are you?

JANEK: Sixteen.

AGNIESKA: How old is your friend?

JANEK: I have a family of friends. (beat) She's fourteen.

AGNIESKA: Why? You're Polish. You can work for the Resistance if you want to! You don't have to help the Jews.

JANEK: Are you a bit stupid or something? I love them. Grandfather is – a great man. And Nacha…

AGNIESKA: Mmmm?

JANEK: Miss Jolanta? Don't you? Love someone? That you could not bear to lose?

Sound of heavy footsteps from booted feet

JANEK: Mary and Joseph! I'm gone!

JANEK *leaves quickly via the side door.*

Enter TWO GERMAN TRENCH-COATED SOLDIERS

AGNIESKA *gasps, makes to go. Stops, staring away from the* SOLDIERS

SOLDIER 2: Stefan Jablonski! You! Yes! You are…Stefan Jablonski! Yes?

STEFAN: You…want to speak to (me)?

SOLDIER 2: If I want to speak to you then I will speak to you and I am speaking to you, aren't I?! (BEAT) Jew.

AGNIESKA *turns back. Stares at STEFAN.*

STEFAN *stands. Moves towards the* SOLDIERS *and puts a distance between himself and the table at which his girls are sitting*

STEFAN: I am Polish, sir. I have my papers, here. Sir.

AGNIESKA *quickly picks up the two bowls of soup, takes them straight to the girls, puts them down, spilling some soup on* SHISHI's *blouse.*

AGNIESKA: Oh. So sorry. How clumsy of me! Let me….

She leans down as if to rub the blouse clean

AGNIESKA: (whisper) Run, children, run! Out there! Where the boy went! Run!

SHISHI *grabs* IZIA'S *hand – IZIA grabs a bread roll – and they exit out of the side door.*

AGNIESKA *picks up the bowls, turns her back, faces the other way. JOSEFA signals her to stay still*

STEFAN t*akes his coat from the hook at the door, moving slowly, trying to gain the girls time*

SOLDIER 2: You won't need your coat where you're going!

STEFAN: But I would like –

SOLDIER 2 *shoves him*

SOLDIER 2: Moses…you must die!

STEFAN *clutches his coat to him.*

AGNIESKA *stares at the floor*

STEFAN *and* GERMAN SOLDIERS *go*

The door closes behind them, AGNIESKA *turns around to face* JOSEFA.

Long moment.

Then… the DOOR opens and GERMAN SOLDIER 1 *steps back inside. Looks at* AGNIESKA

SOLDIER 1: You. Blondie. We've met before, haven't we? Yes. I thought so. Come. Here.

He steps towards her

ACT 2: SCENE 7

FELA *is scrubbing a floor. A knock on the door. She sits back on her heels.* A MAN *comes in.*

JANUSCZ: Fela?

FELA: Nearly done.

JANUSCZ: I looked for you at the hospital.

FELA: I was in the kitchen, making noodles. I am efficient, as you know. The chaplain's wife came in and saw me working. 'You are a Jew! A scabby Jew! No one could make noodles as fast as that who is not a Jew!' She went to get matron. I left straight away.

JANUSCZ: She was probably right. About the noodles.

FELA: She probably was. Mind you, I am fairly sure Matron knew. But I expect she couldn't be seen to know.

JANUSCZ: True.

FELA: There. Done. I wonder if Jews also scrub floors faster than Poles? Don't answer! Now, I need you to take this – (envelope in her bodice) – to Lezno. Lonia and Grazyna are both there, and will know who to give it to. It should cover both them and Abram – (*LESHNO(F))* (*LONYA*) (*GRASHINNA*)

JANUSCZ: Your nephew.

FELA: Stefan arranged for him smuggled out of Auschwitz before Stefan –

JANUSCZ: Out of Auschwitz!? That was well done.

FELA: Yes. It was. But. Everyone else died. So. The boy feels shamed.

JANUSCZ: No shame. It's all luck.

FELA: Perhaps. Anyway. This should cover them all for another month –

JANUSCZ: I think – if something happens –

FELA: Yes?

JANUSCZ: The people sheltering Lonia will probably hang on to her until the War has ended.

FELA: The Germans did not make it all the way to Moscow.

JANUSCZ: It is a satisfactorily messy and unpleasant retreat.

FELA: Rats cornered fight meaner.

JANUSCZ: That is true, too.

FELA: And my girls. The nuns have moved them to a children's Home for the Blind. Perhaps now Izia's seven she can manage the deception. At least there will be fewer people watching her. No SS Headquarters on the other side of the street!

JANUSCZ: Where do I take their board then?

FELA: The usual channels. (Sudden alarm) We have not lost the usual channels!?

JANUSCZ: The wife has always been…anxious.

FELA: She was keen for the money!

JANUSCZ: Not as keen as him. I think it better not.

FELA: You have an alternative?

JANUSCZ: A doctor.

FELA: He'll be searched!

JANUSCZ: Not everywhere.

FELA: (beat) A doctor does not need the money.

JANUSCZ: I think. It's not clear but I think, he's supporting some orphans himself.

FELA: "A good Pole."

JANUSCZ: I am Polish, Fela. I am Gentile. I am 'goy'!

FELA: Do not ask me to say sorry! Forgive the bad and praise the good, that's what we're supposed to do, isn't it?! Forgive, forgive, forgive! I do not forgive!

JANUSCZ: Yet I must now forgive you if you want to save your children and the others in your care. And if I am caught helping you, I must die.

FELA: (beat) I am so tired. I am so alone. These grey streets.

JANUSCZ: I trust the doctor.

FELA: Very well. And Januscz?

JANUSCZ: Yes?

FELA: Bring me good news about my children!

ACT 2: SCENE 8: JANEK: THE LIQUIDATION OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

JANEK: We have smuggled Nacha, her brother Nathan and their father out of the ghetto a month before. They are living, hidden in three different destinations on the Aryan side with sympathetic people. Whom we pay, my mother and I. But who do risk their own and their families' lives. My mother says we cannot manage to care for more than those three. So Grandfather, Grandmother, Jacob and the rest of the family stay in the ghetto.

Wladek says, "Janek, there is bad news. They are liquidating the ghetto. Yesterday everyone was deported from Krochmalna Street and the surrounding houses…People were running back and forth under constant fire. I sat in the ruins of Mirkowski Square and I saw it all'. (*KROCKMALNA)*

So Władek and I go up to the first floor of 7 Mirkowski Square on the Aryan side and get up to the second floor by means of the rubble. Over the other side, the sight is terrifying. Corpses lie in clumps on the streets. I try to stretch, but it is hard to see from that far away. I am thinking of Grandfather, Grandmother, Jacob, Jacob's aunt and uncle, and his cousin, their daughter, who is eight months pregnant, and her husband who is so besotted with her. (*VWADEK*)

I tell Wladek that I absolutely have to get into the ghetto because we can still save some of those who might have concealed themselves in the hiding places on the first floor…We negotiate with the Ukrainian guard, saying we want to remove some things that we will share with him, and that we will also give him some money and the signet ring on my finger on our return. He agrees. And –

My God! My God! The sight is appalling. We go by scattered packs, we go by corpses and I rush into *that* courtyard I had been into hundreds of times before…Two children from the first floor lie dead against the wall. The neighbour-lady lies, shot dead upon the stairs. I run at full speed into Nacha's grandparents' flat on the second floor. I cannot see Grandmother. Grandfather is lying on the bed. He has been shot dead. One of his legs hangs helpless from the bed…I see his fine old face and long white beard…I scream and run around the flat like one possessed. Then I take the portrait of me that Grandfather – who loved me, a Christian boy, not a Jew, who he hoped would marry his granddaughter – that he keeps on the wall above his bed. Nothing else. I have it still. See, here it is.

ACT 2, INTERLUDE 8: MAMA IN THE FOREST

MAMA: We used to go to the forest. I loved the forest! We collected blueberries, you know and, in Poland the forest was *beautiful*! You know? You can't see forests here like that!

ZOSIA: Not here?

MAMA: Over there you could live in it in summer and survive. Mushrooms and...everything! Nuts…everything was growing there. And the moss, you know you lie down on it like on a….it was /*beautiful!*

ZOSIA: /- beautiful – and? Mama?

MAMA: The smell of the pine… sharp and …sticky and…and another thing. I remember, every flower smelled nicely, had a perfume. Here, you don't have that. Very few flowers that you can get here have a perfume. But. In Poland every flower used to …we used to collect the flowers in the forest and bring them home and when you put them in water… the whole room!... was smelling. Yes.

(Beat)

ZOSIA: Mama. I am big enough now. High school now. Questions. I must to know the rest of this!

MAMA: You 'must'? You '*must*!! How dare you tell me anything you must! You…. sunny Australian! You girl who is never to be hungry!

ZOSIA: Mama, I am to be glad I have lived in sunny Australia. I am glad to never to be hungry. Thank you. Thank you, Mama for bringing me here, though not easy, ey, for either of us for long time. But I was born in Warsaw Mama. I have to read the dates. And the dates have been to telling me that I must to have been conceived during the Warsaw Uprising.

(Beat)

Mama? Was I?

MAMA *wails – enormous grief – a huge cry.* ZOSIA *holds her*

ACT 3: SCENE 9: AGNIESKA'S DEATH

A forest at Palmiry, Poland

GERMAN GUARD 1: Over there.

AGNIESKA: Where?

GERMAN GUARD 1: Next to the ditch. Wait for the others.

AGNIESKA: Others? Are there more trucks?

A MAN, JANUCSZ *is shoved over. He ends up sprawled alongside* AGNIESKA

GERMAN GUARD 2 *remains, the other leaves presumably to fetch more prisoners.*

AGNIESKA: Janucsz? Is it Janucsz?

GUARD 2: Shut up partisan!

AGNIESKA: (crawls over, lies alongside the newcomer, whispers) Janucsz? Is it you?

JANUCSZ: Who?

AGNIESKA: It is Agnieska, Janucsz. Have they taken your eyes?

JANUCSZ; They have taken my eyes.

AGNIESKA: You could run so far and fast.

JANUCSZ: Not far and fast enough.

AGNIESKA: No. None of us could. I think we were naïve.

JANUCSZ: Not all of us will die.

AGNIESKA: Perhaps not all.

JANUCSZ: My family's dead.

AGNIESKA: Yes.

JANUCSZ: I think of the streets of Krakow when I was young. Of Wawel on the hill and the cathedral tower stretching over us all. Of the processions. Of early morning mass and my mother singing beside me. The whole church could hear her voice. That deep contralto. I think of running along the track by the Vistula. I think of fishing for gudgeons in the Vistula with my friends. (WISWA)

AGNIESKA: Yes?

JANUCSZ: That's what I was doing the morning the Germans marched into Warsaw. Same river. Different cities. Same fish. I was watching the young boys haul gudgeons out of the river, just like I used to do. You?

AGNIESKA: I think of the gardens sometimes. I had a year at the Horticultural College in Poznan. I learned a little, not much. Always so distracted with the thought of war coming, coming, and then finally there. My father always said it was inevitable. I would have liked to make a beautiful Polish garden.

JANUCSZ: I can remember walking down Ulicia Pawia St – the Peacock Street – no peacock's there! Only a prison. (*OOLITZIA*) (*PAVIA*)

AGNIESKA: I think of Poznan. And the house on the hill.

JANUCSZ: I think of the Gorgon strolling through Poland.

There is a movement behind a tree

JANUCSZ: I am sure there is someone in the shadows over there.

AGNIESKA: My poor friend. There's no one. We seem to have been stranded from the rest of the truck. I think we are waiting for the next lot. There were three transports from the Pawiak. (*PAVIAK*)

JANUSZ: This is Palmiry? We have been trucked to Palmiry? (*PALMIRA*)

AGNIESKA: This is the forest at Palmiry. We are here at last. I think we were always going to be.

JANUSCZ: Chopin was born near Palmiry.

A shout in the distance. Vehicle sounds

JANUSCZ: Agnieska. Put your hand in my left pocket.

AGNIEKSA: Do you *have* a pocket?

JANUSCZ: I have two. The left one. Along the seam.

AGNIESKA: (feels in JANUSCZ' pocket) (disbelief) Januscz? No!

JANUSCZ: It really is.

AGNIESKA: A *sugar* lump?

JANUSCZ: They were drinking tea. In my last interrogation. I fell against the table. Knocked a few off. No one watches a blind man because they think he cannot see. I got two. I've had mine. That's for you.

AGNIESKA: Is there someone after all who watches over me?

The FORM stirs in the shadows. She puts sugar lump in mouth

Ahhhhh!

GUARD 2 *kicks her.*

GUARD: Shut the fuck up, Poland!

AGNIESKA: My blessing on you, Januscz.

GUARD *kicks her again*

Enter GUARD 1 with more prisoners

The GUARDS confer

JANUSCZ: Who?

AGNIESKA: That's all of us now. All of the Wolves.

JANUSCZ: *Armia Krajowa*. 'The Home Army'. Before I thought of the word 'army'. Now I think of the word 'home'. (*KRAYOVVA*)

AGNIESKA: It's been two months. It is not realistic to expect silence from all for two months.

A rustle in the shadows

JANUCSZ: I think we will be dead soon. I think the old ones have come to show the way.

AGNIESKA: At least they won't hang me. There are no branches low enough in this place.

JANUCSZ: No?

AGNIESKA: Fancy. Another small mercy. (beat) A firing squad?

JANUCZ: Gusia, Gusia, nothing so fine. It will be a shot in the back of the neck. To finish us off. Like dogs with no teeth.

AGNIESKA: I remember my father. And his uniform and medals. He seemed to me the glory of Poland!

GUARD 2: Up! By the ditch! Form a line!

GUARD 2 *heaves* JANUSZ *to his feet*. JANUSCZ *gropes in the air with his hands, roughly* in AGNIESKA's *direction.*

JANUSCZ: Gusia?! Good –!

GUARD 1 *shoots* JANUCSZ.

You! Here!

GUARD 2 *hustles her over close to the ditch*

AGNIESKA: (shuts her eyes) (whispers) For. The. General.

GUARD 1 *shoots. She dies*

From the shadowy trees the dignified, be-medalled form of the OLD GENERAL *walks forward, bends down, scoops her in his arms and walks off with her body.*

ACT 2: SCENE 10: THE MEMORY ROOM

ZOSIA: During the Warsaw Uprising my mama, still alive, but alone, without her father and brother– already dead – both shot – or mother – lost, in the first hours, never found again – is hiding in the destroyed city. There are many of them. Well. Not so many. A city of three million people reduced to…one thousand in very end. Most of population has been killed by the Germans and, after 63 days and with the Russians refusing to move across the Vistula to help our Home Army, the Germans have reasserted control. But there are survivors packed in small spaces like frightened worms.

My mama has been living underground. They all have. In the cellars of ruined houses, bombed offices, shops, halls, churches, what once was Warsaw. They connect through tunnels, through the sewers. Each day. Bombardments from the sky. Snipers in the upper stories of the buildings that remain. Tanks. Flames. Blockades of upended concrete pavement. And people stumbling through earthy passages. Moving, moving from where once was safe to where might be safe to where is no safety at all. Hot breath. Stiff bones. No food. Stinking water. It is summer. But the nights are cold.

WITKACY: And what happens next, my darling?

ZOSIA: I am not your darling.

WITKACY: What happens next, Fiction?

ZOSIA: The Germans take back the city. They search out those who remain. Grenades flush some out. Kill many. Some still hide. But most are found. My mama is found I don't know how. I don't know what happens when she is found. But after this – when? – she is sent to a village far away. To the cold of winter, where there is fighting between the retreating Germans and the Russians who replace them.

You are a man, Mr Witkacy. You inherit the tradition – the Polish national heroes of Mickiewicz or Wyspiański – your Pan Tadeusz, your Konrad, your Gustav. You can be the doomed hero of martyrdom, the great artist who is also the great warrior. It's different for girls. They cannot be the heroes. My aunts are the closest a girl can get to heroic Poland – they flew, they fought, they died for Poland. Hence they are my aunts.

I am conceived during the Warsaw Uprising. I like to think it was a secret coupling with a brave young partisan, but my mama is good Catholic goodie-girl even now, so you can imagine how she is conduct herself as an innocent. So. Me? I think I am more likely a German rape.

Someone has been watching them

BOROWSKI: Hello. *Vorabeiter* Borowski at your service. Have you been wondering what I've been up to? I survive Auschwitz. So does Maria, my darling girl. We are 'lucky'. We are taken to Auschwitz three weeks after they stop sending Aryans to the gas. But we both have the tattoo. The number. Mine is 119 198. After the war, more chaos. We live through chaos. Maria has gone to Sweden where many of those whose health needs restoring go. I pester her, I badger her, I yearn with all my considerable linguistic flair – 'Come back to me! Come live with me! We will be part of the new socialist Poland! What has happened to us has been an interruption', I say. '*Now* we will live our lives!'

I become a literary sensation. Well, read the stories. I *am* a literary sensation. I am co-opted by our new Communist government to be their lapdog. Ah, this is familiar territory. I spy for them. I do. Live or die in this new Poland, I am going to live! Maria, my beloved, falls pregnant. I choose this moment to have an affair with a soft, pretty girl of about nineteen. She reminds me of the Maria I used to know. Fierce, and innocent.

I have not forgotten the babies. I have never forgotten the babies. They visit me nightly for a long time, and now when I least suspect it. Out of the blue – wooh! – babies!

Maria goes into labour. I am with my sweetheart. Maria has the baby, a daughter. I go in to see them. I hold my daughter, so small, just a bundle of… flesh. I go home. I put my head in an oven. I gas myself to death.

He nods to WITKACY *and* ZOSIA. *Exits*

WITKACY: Drama is not – the Story. It is the all-put-together of what is on the stage.

ZOSIA: But I am still to like the story because I am fallible frightened human. It heals me. I like it that Janek and Nacha hide in underground bunker – one hundred and five days! – even after the Uprising–

WITKACY: But they might not have!

ZOSIA: – and that one day the war ends, they marry and like my mama, they go to live in Australia. I like it that Fela finds her Izia and her Shishi, and the boy Abram, after war and that they, though not he, also go to my new country.

WITKACY: And that too, maybe not! And Stefan dies. He is shot by the Germans!

ZOSIA: And I like it that the transport does take Hela to join Poldek in Hungary and that Hela finds her sister Janka once more; and she and Poldek live to Australia at last because his music charmed a

Beast and a fallible man showed him mercy.

WITKACY: But they might not have, dumb-cluck, and then how would you tell that story!?

ZOSIA: I have not to been educated by European in-house amazing tutors because the Polish schools is not good enough for amazing little me! I go to Australian schools where I do not speak the language and my educated mummy works all day every day every week every month in milk bar to make living and the schoolchildren call me wog!

WITKACY: You are not an intellectual, that's for sure.

ZOSIA: How does an intellectual solve this problem then, Mr. Failed Playwright, drug-addict, now ghost! How does an intellectual tell something that is too big for story?!

WITKACY: I do not fail long-term! I turn out to be very number one! Mickiewicz, Wyspiański, and *me*! Pure form! Get the perspective of the century!

ZOSIA No! *You* get perspective of eternity! And that is this! There is *no such thing* as 'pure' anything, you stupid intellectual! You need a fiction to put you right! 'Pure' is your Mr Zombie – 'These are the pure people and these are the not. So you can do *anything* to them!' It is Koba. 'This is the pure history, and this is the not! So doesn't matter how many you kill when you are making this history!' 'Pure'. Pah! No such thing. Is only poor creatures trying to make sense of things – by a *story*! I am thinking it's about time all the Madmen have the humility to be *Ordinary*!

WITKACY: (beat) Don't cry, my darling. Please don't cry.

ZOSIA: Mr Witkacy. This is what Poland has done to me. I am a branch from a broken tree. I am a heart that has been ruptured. I cannot heal my mama. What's done is done. But now I have – a little, just scrap but I have it – of her story. And that of my aunts. And they will to keep me safe, keep me company. I think. All we can do. Is finish this life. And do no harm. And when we can. Like Orphée. We hold the beautiful Eurydice in our hearts. But we try not to look back.

ACT 2: SCENE 11: THE CAMP

ROLL CALL

A PHALANX of women stand, swaying in the dark and bitter cold,

Some men, BOROWSKI among them? Carry bodies to a heap. FRANCOISE's *body rolls out from a stretcher. It has focus for a minute, but then we no longer see it.*

The women continue to stand, the ***kapos*** *shout, the guards patrol, they stand there and stand there,* CHARLOTTE *bit by bit shuffles/is shuffled to the front.*

She stands, cold, feet frozen, swaying with frailty

There is the faintest sound of music.

She becomes alert.

Then we hear the sound of ***Gluck's Eurydice's lament*** *float over the scene.*

Nothing else changes

THE END

NOTE ON SOURCES.

Primary sources for this exegesis and play were eight interviews with Creative Practitioners [Appendix A] and eight interviews with Trauma Survivors and their descendants [Appendix B]. Both sets of material fed into firstly the exegesis, and secondly, the play.

Most interviews with survivors took place face to face, the bulk of them in Melbourne over several visits. One occurred in Sydney. An informal interview occurred on the Sunshine Coast. (That one is not listed here but it was important in that it gave me Zosia's Mama's specific history). Most of the interviews with Creative Practitioners happened by phone or Skype, though three (with Andrew Bovell, Thérèse Radic and Leslie Jacobson) were face-to-face, and one (with Hilary Bell) was in answer to a series of emailed questions. Most of the interviews were quite long. I promised people about an hour but quite often did not keep my promise, especially when people seemed keen to talk. Transcripts of the interviews were sent to all interviewees. Most people chose to respond with small changes or clarifications, but a few did not. All survivors were informed of precisely what parts of their story ended up in the play. Given that if this play is ever produced there is likely to need to be a process of ongoing cultural consultation, it is worth noting that all of the survivors were keen to contribute their story to a creative product.

The two Appendices are too long for inclusion in this document, covering 87 and 120 pages respectively. They are available for perusal from Flinders University or from the author [laug0004@flinders.edu.au].

It is pertinent, however, to detail how this material has fed into Exegesis and Play

1. **APPENDIX A: The Creative Practitioners**

These seven playwrights and one novelist/storyteller were interviewed over a period of some months in 2018. The writers were Hilary Bell; Andrew Bovell; Mary Anne Butler; (Polish-Australian descendant) Elise Hearst; (US playwright and educator) Leslie Jacobson; Tom Holloway; Thérèse Radic (primarily for her adaptation of Arnold Zable's *Scheherazade* but also offering a view from another generation); and Arnold Zable himself, more a novelist and memoirist than a playwright but perhaps the major advocate of post-traumatic migrant

experience in Australia, and a marvelous writer. Elise Hearst and Tom Holloway are the representative mid-generation writers. Butler, Bell, Bovell and Zable are very established writers. Hearst and Zable are from the Polish diaspora. I had hoped to interview a First Nations writer but had difficulty of access to my writer of choice.

The interviews with Creative Practitioners arrived organically towards the latter part of the research period, dovetailing with the re-drafting of the play and feeding directly into my evolving understanding of practice as research. It became yet another creative serendipity that re-affirmed my sense of the fundamental requirement to accept the logic of illogic when engaged in the development of a creative work. The fact that so many of my interviewees both stressed and savoured the intuitive as core process also affirmed for me that my own intermittent discomfort between making and analysing was a reflection of the operation of creativity in this area of intellectual endeavour. Put bluntly, my instincts aligned with those of my peers.

The interviews were highly individual, as one might expect. There were, however, common threads and in my notes that follow I have focused on these threads. I asked the writers about their understanding of what 'theatre' meant to them, and what provoked and satisfied them about the art form itself. I checked as to their use of and comfort with an interview process during research, what was urgent to each to be written about in Australia/the world right now. I also wanted to know *how* they wrote – to find out (without prompting) the role of the intuitive in their practice, where they sat within the evolution of a particular piece during the rehearsal process. I was particularly interested in their thoughts about accessing and/or presenting the traumatic in their work and what they saw as their responsibilities to sources, audiences and fellow practitioners in that arena.

The writers were endlessly quotable, but I'll resist that here and offer a synthesis instead. Overall, they stressed the viscerality of theatre as art form, the closeness of the contract between artist, material and audience, the spontaneity and impact of that present-time, present-place exchange. A surprising number paid notional form to an interview process but, except where they were engaged in a piece with an avowed documentary intention, preferred in this, as in other spheres, to follow an intuitive process whereby they gathered what they needed when they needed and absorbed that material into their more general making. This perhaps paralleled the decision I came to when researching and writing *Bloodlines* of wanting

to understand from the inside out the psychic intensity of the suffering allied to a shared social trauma. But also of being aware that I might need some distance from a responsibility of journalistic facticity to sources if I was to feel myself able to tell the larger story of a society of individuals in a way that allowed that larger story its own heft and shape and power.

Art-makers in Australia are at a moment where the old certainties around access to stories are changing. Each of the writers expressed a new awareness of the necessity to respond to the diversity of Australian stories in a way that did not disempower those at the stories' core. This was particularly so in relation to First Nations peoples' work, as is discussed in the exegesis. Most resisted the notion of 'evil' as an inevitability in some humans, despite a clear recognition of the evil that some humans do or have done. And all without exception emphasised the amorphous, intuitive nature of the actual making. All conveyed a sense that this had its own laws and its own necessities and no writer, however aware and canny about his or her own process wanted to pick it apart too far. Mary Anne Butler was particularly precise and informative about her process. Arnold Zable, unsurprisingly, offered the most exact and perceptive understanding of the task of delineating the traumatic and the responsibility to the individuals at the core of his work. Andrew Bovell demonstrated a depth of understanding of the writer's place in society that confirms his place as one of Australia's public intellectuals. Thérèse Radic brought a heart-breaking intimation of the difficulties of being a female writer in 50s and 60s Australia along with a hard-won pragmatism. Tom Holloway's sheer intelligence made his articulation of his process particularly apposite. Leslie Jacobson offered a social critic's insight to the development of work. Hilary Bell's fine passion for theatre itself was striking. Elise Hearst was perhaps the most sheerly intuitive of all the writers but also the best example of the instinctive tact involved in representing the personal horrific in the way her work offers a generalised response to the specificities of her family's difficult history.

All were impressive in their different ways. The majority of writers preferred to go into a rehearsal process with a script as watertight as possible. This surprised me as I am of the generation where writers were pushed to surrender control of their material to a team of collaborators. Most (though not all, and they are all 'good' writers in their very different ways) saw it as their job–often with dramaturgical input and hopefully access to a workshop process–to solve structural problems before rather than during rehearsal, even whilst being

open to helpful contributions from the floor if and when they occurred. I found this quite affirming in its pragmatic acceptance of a professional responsibility to one's craft.

2. **APPENDIX B: Survivors and Descendants**.

In the case of the Survivor and Descendants interviews I have attempted to give a notion of how the particular histories fed into the material of *Bloodlines*, hence these notes address the individual interviews rather than a synthesis of understandings. I've used first names only except where people have published their stories themselves

2.1 Anna Rosner Blay

Anna Rosner Blay is a writer and publisher, the mother of two sons, based in Melbourne. She is the daughter of Hela, the Polish-Jewish character who in the play ends up in Auschwitz alongside Charlotte Delbo. (In fact, though Hela and Charlotte were both at Auschwitz, as far as I know, they never met). Hela's sister Janka was also at Auschwitz but was not on the same transport as Hela, unlike in the depiction in the play. The sisters in fact spent the majority of their time at the Płaszów Camp but were transported to Auschwitz in October 1944. Janka worked in the clothing factory of Madritsh the Austrian when they were confined at Płaszów, not Auschwitz. Also unlike in the play, Janka was not selected for the crematorium, but her first husband did die whilst she was in Plaszów. Both women survived because of Hela's marriage to Poldek Rosner, who was helped by Oskar Schindler who had been at parties of the camp commandant, Amon Goeth at Płaszów, where Poldek and his brother were among those providing the music. Both Hela and Janka survived and emigrated to Australia with their husbands, Janka having married again after her first husband was killed. Hela battled with anxiety and PTSD all her life. Anna was a very solicitous daughter.

In the play, Hela meets Csezława shortly before her death. This incident is an amalgamation. Hela did not in fact see a young woman get beaten to death for not surrendering her jewellery. I gleaned that incident from other sources. The victim in the play, Csezława, in real life did survive her suicide attempt with Witkacy but was not imprisoned by the Nazis. She lived to a reasonably old age in Poland, always associated with her past relationship with Witkacy. Other hospital inmates however did at times end up in concentration camps.

2.2 Carl B.

I did not ask Carl his profession. He was clearly a very successful man in a high-end apartment in inner Melbourne. He was married to a fellow child of Holocaust survivors, Miriam. They had two children.

As mentioned in the exegesis, I did not use any of Carl's testimony directly in the play, but I was very stuck by the vehemence of his hatred for the Poles and Poland and by the sadness of his history as a sort of confessor to his mother. He was a strong personality who had obviously carved out a very good life for himself and his family but, in the context of speaking with me at least, he was locked in a struggle with his family's and in particular his mother's past. I took his fury with the Poles into the writing. This was an exaggerated form of a reaction I had seen elsewhere, and it needed to be acknowledged. There were other viewpoints, too, of course, and much suffering everywhere. For example, I do not include it among the interviews as it was not a formal one, but I also (at her own request) talked to the daughter of a Polish Gentile survivor of the Warsaw Uprising and the complexities of her mother's life and suffering were as strong as any others. And, with her daughter's permission, I used the mother's memory of being in Warsaw at that time (along with those of Andrew Kostanski's father, Jan Kostanski) and her exile after to inform those moments in the play. I saw one of my tasks in writing the play being to bring out the universality of the suffering whilst not resiling from the particularities of the groups and individuals involved.

2.3 Jana G.

Jana was a trained naturopath but worked as the Cairns director of Oz Harvest, married with two children.

Jana was the niece of Kay R, the woman who was so very helpful in putting me in touch with people. This was a phone interview, not face to face, but she was young and strong, so I felt this would be okay (she lives in Townsville, which is a long way from Adelaide). The main takeout from the interview for me was the notion of resilience, that something *can* emerge a fair way down the track after all this sadness; and the companion notion of the impact of the trauma down the generations, as well a record of silence on the part of her grandparents. Her grandparents–Kay R's mother and father–could have been characters in a play, too. He in

particular was a committed Communist Jew and she was a woman who hated her own eyes–which in photographs are very beautiful–because their largeness and darkness was an indication of her Jewishness, about which she was unaware until the war started and suddenly she was actively and dangerously different from her former peers. In the end I decided not this play. But it was hard to say no.

2.4 Judy Kolt

Judy was a Holocaust survivor, a fiercely intelligent 89-year-old Melbourne-based widow and mother of four, one deceased, of cot death, which was clearly still an aching loss all these years later. She was something else. She'd taken up painting to distract herself in the years after her baby died and the entire house was covered with her paintings (they were quite good). After overcoming an initial reluctance, she had been back to Poland three times with members of her family, all high achievers. She had come to terms with Poland and the Poles but was still wary, understandably. There was an unexpected edge of anger, at variance with her warmth and idealism and sweetness. It surfaced only at moments, but perhaps it was evidence of the steel that had allowed her to survive so emotionally intact.

I have used more of Judy's story in the play than of any other person I spoke to. It is, however, also lightly fictionalized. I have used her childhood name, Izia. She asked me specifically not to mention some details of the life and death of her sister, Tosia, who I call Shishi in the play, despite the fact that she is clear about them in her book, so I haven't. The scene in the play where her father Stefan is taken prisoner by two German soldiers is also told in Judy's book. It was a little different in reality, but the broad outlines are substantially the same.

Agnieska Dowbor was not, of course, the waitress in the café at the time. In real life, this event happened in 1943, a full year after Agnieska was taken prisoner and shot in 1942. But whoever *was* that waitress might have been another version of Agnieska. I have no record either that Agnieska might have been mildly anti-Semitic, but she was certainly extremely pretty and a target for German soldiers. The situation of her having to move on from one part of Warsaw because someone from Poznan saw her with a German soldier whom she must have been seeing for information, is based on documentation about the Dowbors. Incidentally –to move to the other Dowbor sister (Janina) for a moment–most of the deaths at Katyn

where Janina died, were by a shot to the back of the head in the forest, much the same as the way Agnieska's death at Palmiry is depicted late in the play. I wanted, however, to have a difference in the sisters' deaths, and at Katyn some at least of the officers were killed in a sandbagged hut. So I used that scenario in the play for Janina's end.

To return to Judy's story. Judy's family were not in the ghetto in Warsaw (except extremely briefly) but in the Otwock Ghetto, which I have mentioned but blurred slightly in the play. And it is also pertinent that most people transported from the Warsaw ghetto were in fact sent to the extermination camp, Treblinka, not Auschwitz. But for the sake of the shorthand of the theatre where you don't have time to explain such nuance, I have retained Auschwitz as the metonym. Judy and Tosia were, however, sent to Warsaw to the Polish Jablonskas, and then on to the nuns and elsewhere. After Stefan's death, Fela kept the whole network of people who they were supporting going until the end of the war. She must have been an extraordinary person. There wasn't space in the play to really do justice to this, given that she was a minor character.

2.5 Andrew Kostanski

Andrew Kostanski's father, Janek's, story is an amazing made-for-the-movies one of the Romeo and Juliet of the Warsaw Ghetto. Given my focus, I had to wind that aspect back a fair bit and mostly concentrate on what it illuminated about the Jewish-Polish connections. I also used it to give a focus for the Warsaw Uprising, which is an essential moment in history that needed to register in the play. It was also good to have access to a record of an unequivocally positive Polish/Jewish moment during that dark history.

Andrew had an aura of the same entrepreneurial fearlessness that must have characterised his father. Interestingly, it was his older brother (by six years) who was born in 1948, very soon after the war, where Andrew was born in 1954 and emigrated to Australia in 1958 as a four-year-old, who had absorbed a nervous response to inherited trauma.

2.6 Kay R

Kay R was a Melbourne woman, one of two sisters, with a brother as well, who had made her career as a high-end textile consultant. She was clearly very successful and intelligent. She

had no children. After her widowhood, she had remarried. She had loved living in Poland as a girl and had only reconciled herself to Australia in her early 20s. Late in life she has become, to her surprise, somewhat obsessed with the subject of the Holocaust, feeling a compulsion to understand such an astonishing and evil event.

Kay was the person central to the bulk of the interviews happening at all. In my experience there is always someone who opens the first door for you and that person will often also be the one who facilitates other connections. Kay certainly was this person for me. It was good to talk to her, too, in part because of her cool intelligence. She was very wrapped up in the story of her origins but not in a sentimental or emotional way, she was simply responding to the urgency many people feel as they get older to become clear about what they are made of and where they have come from. This process/moment must be in greater relief for people with a history such as hers. I didn't end up using as much of her story as I'd first thought I would. Her mother's story, which she made available to me after the interview, has many incidents that *could* have translated into the dramatic action, but I had so much direct testimony that in the end I decided to go with the energy of that. Kay's interview was probably most helpful as an antidote to the complications of Jewish reactions to Poland, and for a sense of life starting again in a new place without the emigrants in any way relinquishing the pride in and importance of the old life.

2.7 **Sarah Saaroni**

Sarah was a hugely impressive 90-year-old woman. She broke my heart a bit with her (seeming but not actual, I suspect) simplicity and her tenacity. I didn't use much of her story directly because her first book had been optioned for a film and I didn't want to get in the way of that. I can understand why there has been film interest in her story. It has a hero's journey arc of a young woman forced from her parents (who died in one of the camps) who stayed one step ahead of Nazi and Polish pursuers, in Poland and then in Germany, with some astonishingly lucky escapes, to end up emigrating to Israel with her one surviving brother. But it was such a strong story that it overtook the combination of narratives of a range of experiences. In the end I simply used her recollections of the forest in Poland and gave them to the 'Mama' character as they were the most poetic of all the many mentions of the forest. Her memory of the loss of her father's shop finds an echo in Janina's comment about the Nazi's taking over the Jewish shops. But aspects of her character and experiences

do resonate with various moments in the play, in a sort of thickening of mood and action. And the harshness and unrelenting work of her first years in Australia are also echoed by the experiences of other Polish emigrants.

Sarah was a widow, with two children, living in Melbourne. She'd had a hard life but had found great satisfaction in her practice of sculpture. Again, her house was filled with her art works and they were impressive and evocative.

2.8 Alfred and Valerie M

Alfred was a *volkesdeutsch* German army soldier during the 1942 invasion of Russia, drafted into the Army as a boy of 16. Val, his second wife, was caught in the camps in the Ukraine. I did not use their material in the play as the interview occurred prior to starting the project (Alfred was sick and has since died, Val is very old). But the background was useful, as it was a point of view that I did not get in a personal sense from anywhere else (the opposing side in the War). Also, this was a very hard interview in which I was not alert to Val's needs. I'd gone to speak to Alfred only, and had prepared for that. But Val had decided that would be the day she would finally be open about her experiences to her family, who were sitting in. She was very urgent and more or less tried to take over the interview. I would have rather prepared for and interviewed each separately, though her stepdaughter has assured me that there were no adverse ramifications, the reverse, rather. But it was nevertheless a lesson for me in interview practice that allowed insight into the ethics protocols I would put into place for the project as a whole.

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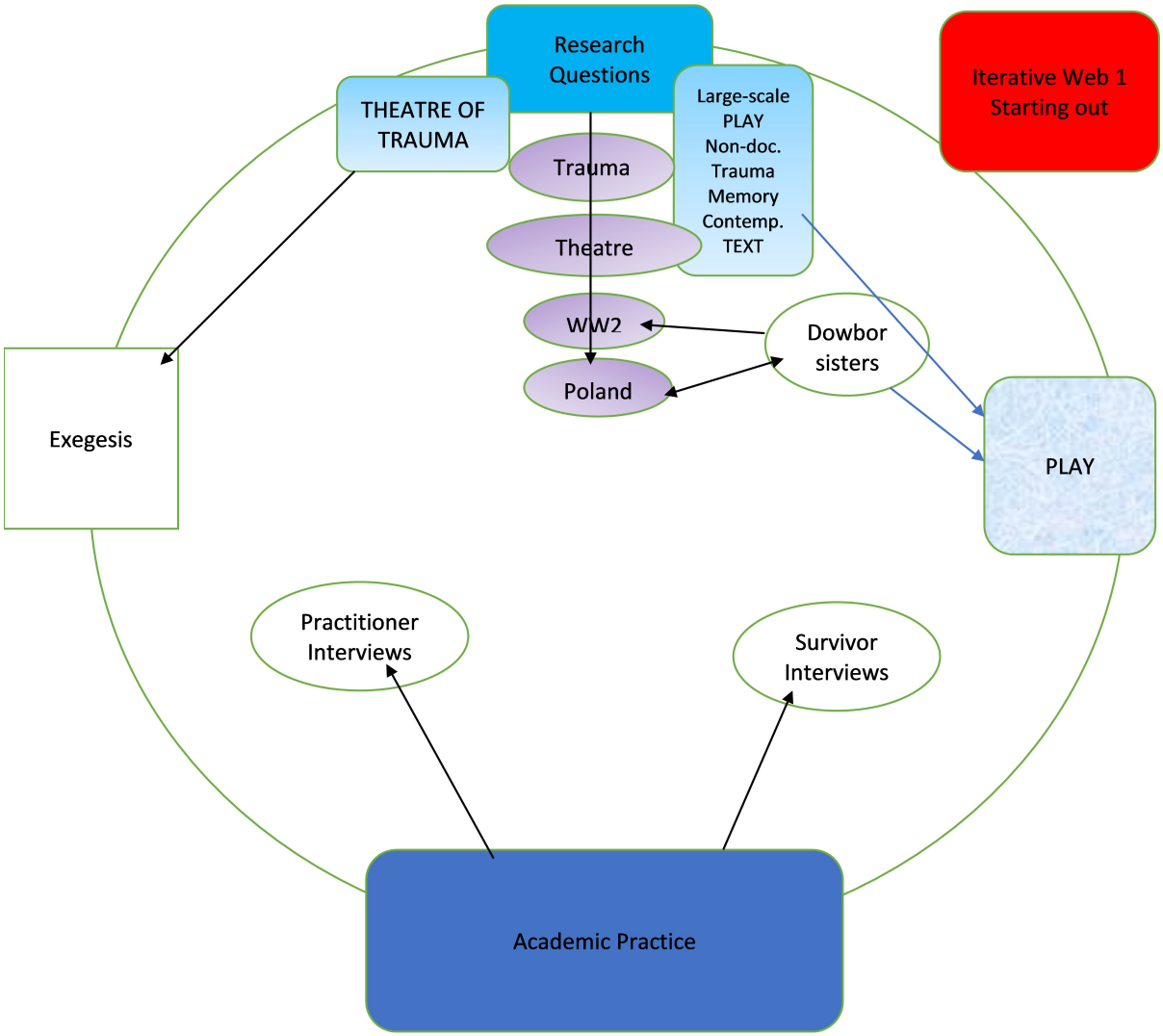
Taken from Smith, H and Roger Dean, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, p. 20 [Image slightly modified]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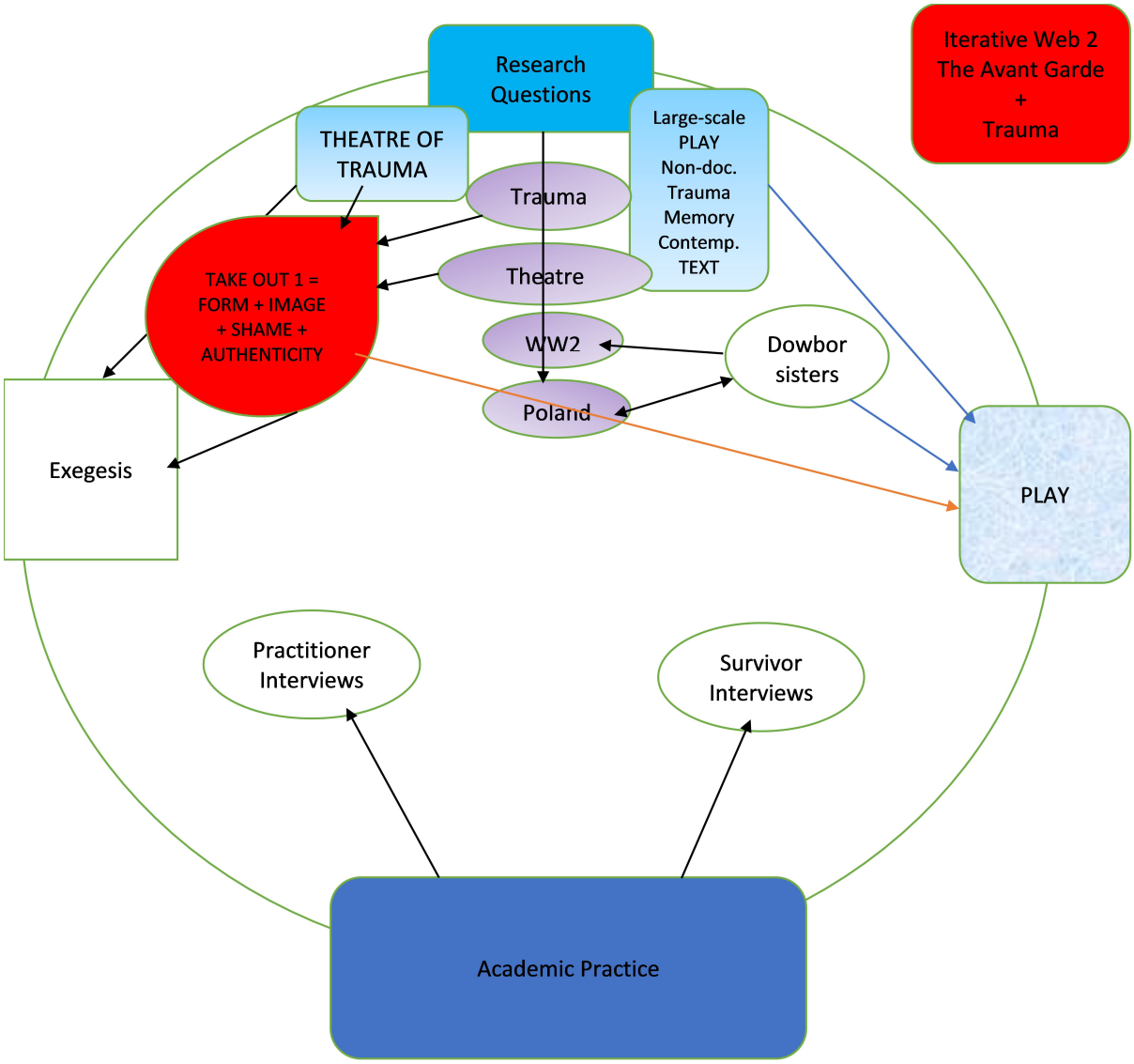
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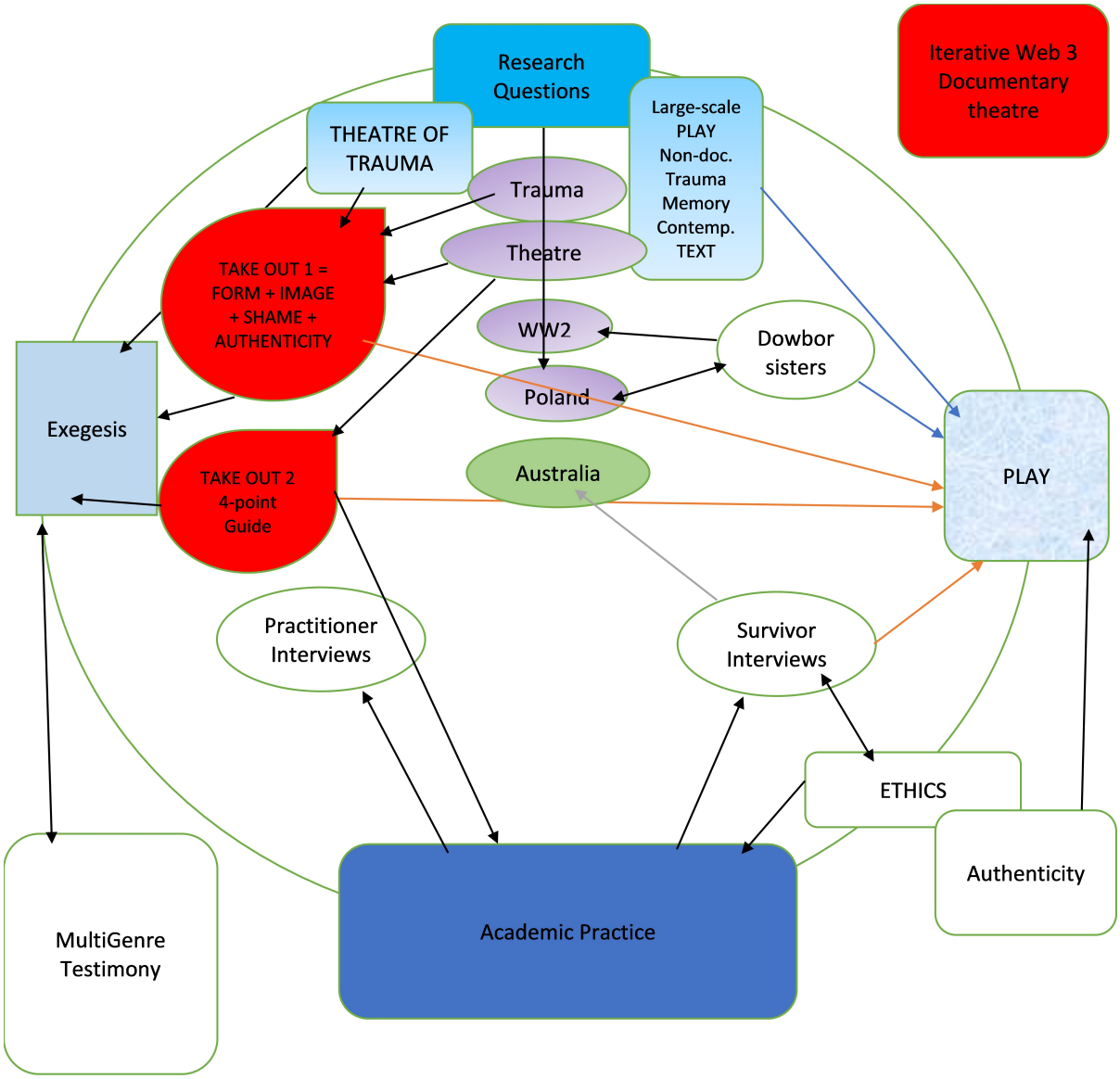
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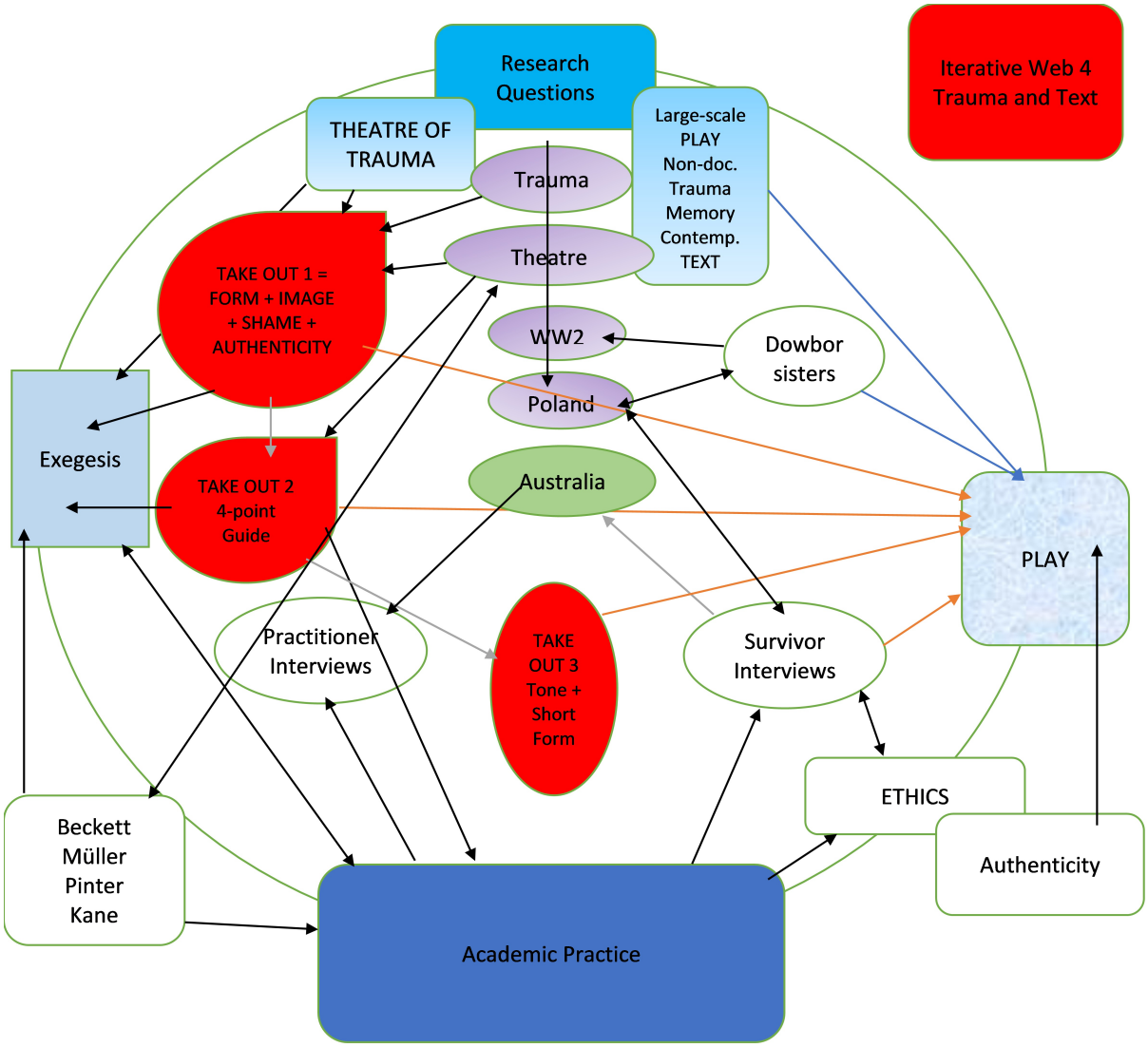
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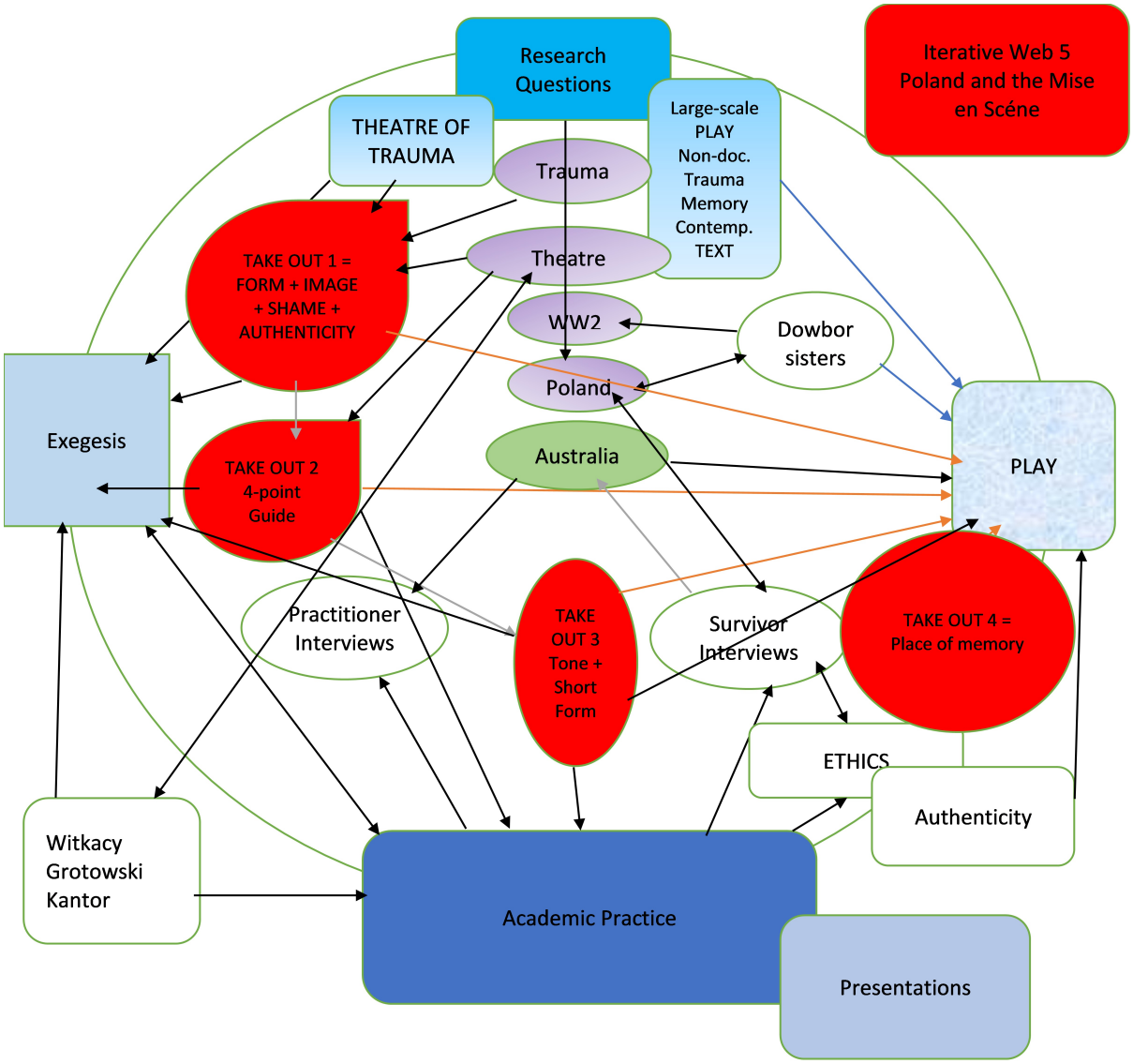
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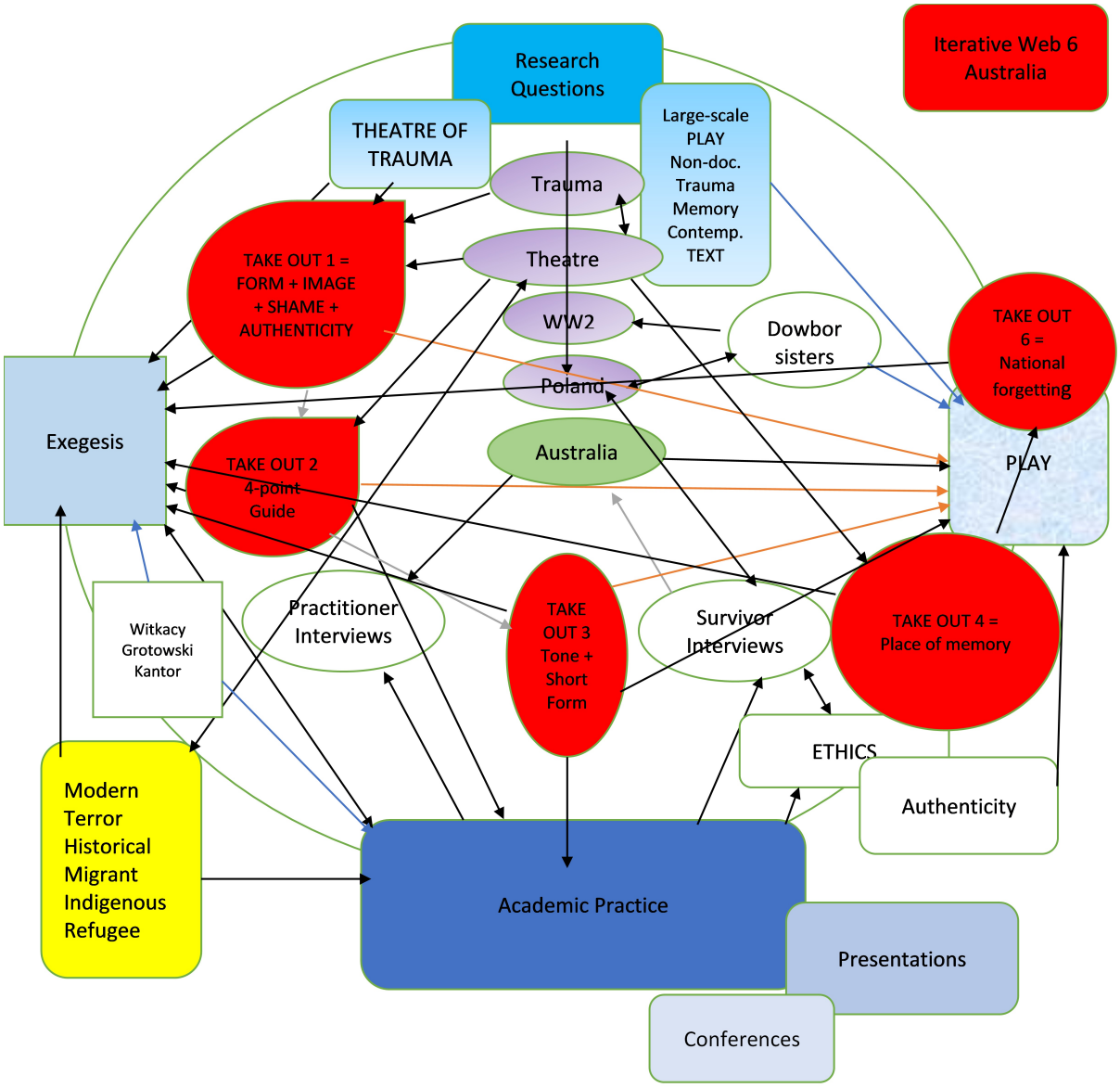
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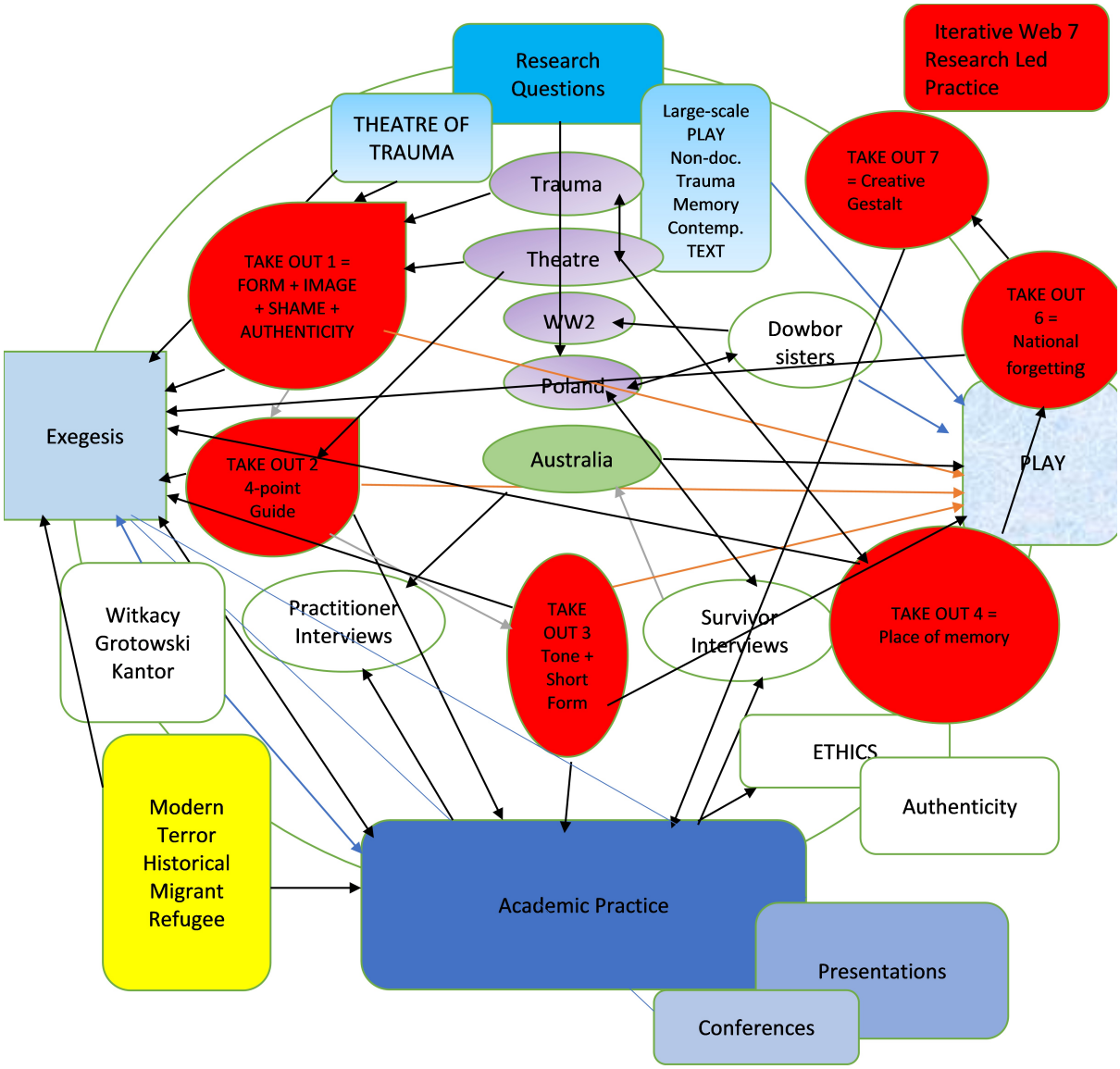
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APPENDIX D: ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

7359 ETHICS Annual Report Approval Notice (16 August 2019)

This message was sent with High importance.

HE

Human Research Ethics <human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au>
Fri 8/16/2019 12:28 PM

- laug0004@uni.flinders.edu.au;
- Julian Meyrick <julian.meyrick@flinders.edu.au>

+2 others

Dear Verity,

The Executive Officer of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) at Flinders University reviewed the annual report that was submitted for project 7359 and it has been approved. Your annual report approval notice can be found below.

ANNUAL REPORT (No.3) APPROVAL

Project No.:	**7359**	Ethics Approval Expiry Date:	**28 February 2020**

Project Title:	Depicting the Gorgon: Blood, Politics and Trauma: the Contemporary and Historical Playwriting of Extreme Events
Principal Researcher:	Ms Verity Laughton
Email:	laug0004@uni.flinders.edu.au
Address:	School of Humanities & Creative Arts

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. **Provision of Relevant Permissions and Approvals**

Please ensure that any relevant *permissions* (e.g., from recruitment sites, organisations, data custodians etc) and *other Committee approvals* that may have been requested on your approval / final approval notice are submitted to the Committee. Provision of these documents is a requirement of the ethics approval granted by the SBREC and it is the responsibility of the applicant to submit them as requested. You only need to submit relevant permissions and approvals if it was requested in your approval / final approval notice.

2. Annual Progress / Final Reports

The Annual Progress Report for the above project was received on 4 August 2019. The next report is due on**24 August 2020**. Please be reminded that in order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the*National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007-Updated 2018)* an annual progress report must be submitted each year, on 24 August (approval anniversary date), for the duration of the ethics approval. If the project is completed before that date a Final Report should be submitted as soon as possible. A Final Report is also required if you should abandon or withdraw the project.

Student Projects

The SBREC recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, reviewed and approved. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend some changes that may include the collection of additional participant data.

To submit a report, please complete the report template available from the Managing Your Ethics ApprovalSBREC web page. *Please retain this notice for reference when completing annual progress or final reports. When completing annual progress or final reports;* and email a copy to the Executive Officer or mail to the address listed at the bottom of this email.

Please note that ethics approval for this project expires on **28 February 2020**.

3. Modifications to Project

Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

- change of project title;
- change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, principal researcher or supervisor change);
- changes to research objectives;
- changes to research protocol;
- changes to participant recruitment methods;
- changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
- changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
- changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes / additions to information and/or documentation to be provided to potential participants;
- changes to research tools (e.g., questionnaire, interview questions, focus group questions);
- extensions of time.

To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please submit a Modification Request Form to the Executive Officer (available from the Managing Your

Ethics Approval web page). Download the form from the website every time a new modification request is submitted to ensure that the most recent form is used. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

Change of Contact Details

Please ensure that you notify the Committee if either your mailing or email address changes to ensure that correspondence relating to this project can be sent to you. A modification request is not required to change your contact details.

4. Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 08 8201-3116 orhuman.researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

Should you have any queries about the reporting process please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Rae

Andrea Mather and Rae Tyler (Mon, Wed and Fri morning)
Human Research Ethics Officers (Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee)
Research Development and Support

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