Located Stories: Theatre Makes Place with the Body

Angela Campbell

B.A., Diploma of Arts (Drama), Master of Arts (Creative Writing)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University, Perth, 2008.
I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

________________________

Angela Campbell
Consult the genius of the place in all;
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall;
Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;
Calls in the country, catches opening glades,
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,
Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines;
Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs.

(Alexander Pope)
Abstract

The journey into theatre-made places offered here is both analytical and creative. It is comprised of case studies analysing three theatre productions that occurred in Perth between 2004 and 2006 and two of my own creative works, forming the Prologue and Conclusion to the thesis. Throughout, I am informed by Edward Casey’s philosophy of place as I work to develop both a poetics and a dramaturgy of place in theatre. I draw upon of a range of thinkers in order to interrogate the limits of theatrical representation and to suggest that an active engagement in the process of place-making in theatre offers a touchstone and paradigm that can release both thought and the body from totalizing and foreclosing cultural imperatives. This dramaturgical and poetical journey into place works, I hope, toward creating an open and dynamic field from which to experience the ‘here and now’ of being in place in theatre, and in the world.

I argue that the notion of place as embodied meaning frames the body and the mind in contexts that are personal, emotional, historical, ethical, and political; that to be in place, to be aware that one’s body is a particular place, suggests that the body and mind are listening to each other. This conscious connection, I believe, offers a radical challenge to the bifurcation of body and mind that runs as a consistent theme throughout the history of Western thought. More particularly, I aim to demonstrate that a voyage into place, in theatre, conveys the body and mind together in ways that allow us to “resume the direction, and regain the depth, of our individual and collective life once again – and know it for the first time” (Casey, 1993: 314).

Contents
Contents

List of Figures vii

Acknowledgements viii

Prologue: The More I Study Nature: Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity 1

Introduction: Theatre makes place with the body 17

1. Triple capture of place 41

2. Yandy: Walking the lie of a mining boom 68

3. The Odyssey: On ‘home’ as the beginning of a journey 112

4. The Drover’s Wives: Lace passes into nothingness 147

5. Bridging Essay: The place in between 185

Conclusion: Orchids and Insects 202

Afterword 264

Bibliography 269
List of Figures

Black Solander (detail), Gregory Pryor, courtesy of the artist and Lister Gallery 1

Black Solander (detail), Gregory Pryor courtesy of the artist and Lister Gallery 7

Black Solander (detail), Gregory Pryor courtesy of the artist and Lister Gallery 16

Yandy, Black Swan Theatre Company
Isaac Maza Long, Doris Eaton, Rosie Lawford Wolf, photo Jon Green 68

Yandy, Black Swan Theatre Company
Isaac Drandich and cast, photo Jon Green 77

Yandy, Black Swan Theatre Company
Isaac Drandich, Heath Bergerson, David Ngoombujarra, photo Jon Green 89

Yandy, Black Swan Theatre Company
Ningali Lawford Wolf, Melodie Reynolds, Dennis Simmons, photo Jon Green 105

The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Suzannah McDonald, Stephen Phillips, photo Jeff Busby 112

The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Kris McQuaide, Stephen Phillips and cast, photo Jeff Busby 117

The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Stephen Phillips, photo Jeff Busby 122

The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Rita Kalnejais, Belinda McClory, Margaret Mills, photo Jeff Busby 129

The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Belinda McClory, Stephen Phillips, photo Jeff Busby 132

The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Kris McQuaide, Stephen Phillips 139

The Drover’s Wives, Steamworks Arts/PIAF
Claudia Alessi, Felicity Bott, Shannon Bott, Jane Diamond, Danielle Micich, Photo Ashley de Prazer 147

The Drover’s Wives, Steamworks Arts/PIAF. Cast as above, photo Ashley de Prazer 157
The Drover’s Wives, *Steamworks Arts/PIAF. Cast as above, photo*  
*Ashley de Prazer*  

The Drover’s Wives, *Steamworks Arts/PIAF. Cast as above, photo*  
*Ashley de Prazer*  

Angelus Novus (1920), *Paul Klee*  

*Georgiana Molloy 1805-1843* (Reproduced by permission of  

Mrs VMR Bunbury, ‘Marybrook’. Unknown Artists, 1828)
Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks to the creative personnel involved in all the productions and especially to those who gave generously of their time and energy to contribute to my research. I extend my thanks to Doris Eaton, Stephen Stuart, Jolly Read, Michael Kantor, Tom Wright, Sally Richardson and Zoe Atkinson who all agreed to be interviewed by me. I also extend my thanks to the staff of Black Swan Theatre Company, Malthouse Theatre and Steamworks Arts Production.

I would particularly like to thank those people who have shared their thoughts, skills, passion, experience and knowledge with me on this journey into place; Paul Monaghan, Gregory Pryor, Dr Ian Wilson, Louise Gough, Holly Storey, Jennifer Bowen, Paul Jackson, Dr John Hall, Bagryana Popov, Joely Sobott, Howard Pederson, Margaret Mills, Stephen Armstrong, Prof. Ian Buchanan and Dr Jeff Malpas. I also have appreciated the timely support and enthusiasm of the staff at Murdoch University.

As I am about to leave them, I would like to thank all my Fremantle friends who have welcomed me and my family into their lives, and I think, into their hearts. They certainly hold a place in my own heart.

I could not have made it through without the humour and keen wit of my friend and fellow PhD traveller, Josephine Wilson, and her husband Chris Hill. I have particularly appreciated our stays at Lancelin. (So long, and thanks for all the fish.) Also thanks to my mother for her regular phone calls and to my sister, Janet, who has read some of my chapters with a sharp solicitor’s eye and advised me on how to organise my notes.

My supervisor Dr Helena Grehan has been a pillar of professionalism and has also become a very good friend. She has accompanied me with humour, insight and generosity on every step of my journey, even when I have insisted on taking her up hill and down dale, two steps forward and one step back. I am very grateful to her for her help, in all things.

Last of all I would like to thank my husband, Tom Gutteridge, who is my partner in the greatest adventure of all. His unforgiving director’s eye has been fabulously useful in helping to clarify the flow of my arguments in all the parts of the thesis, particularly in rehearsing my piece on Georgiana, and in writing *Orchids and Insects*.

And to my darling boys, Alec and Hugo, who were small boys when all this began, and who are now much bigger boys; thank you for always being ‘here and now’ with me, in place.
Prologue

Gregory Pryor, *Black Solander* (detail) 1, courtesy of the artist and Lister Gallery
The More I Study Nature: Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity

As the twenty-first century unfolds amid growing concerns about climate change and related ecological disaster it becomes increasingly urgent that we uncover the deep logic (or illogic) of the ways that we inhabit and exploit the places in which we live. In The More I Study Nature: Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity I ask my reader (or audience) to consider the codes of knowledge and behaviour that we have inherited and that continue to propel our lives. These codes map, shape, calibrate and compute. They are often hidden, sometimes secret, but always present. There are wet codes and dry codes; they are algorithmic and linguistic, mathematical, biological, moral, legal, social and economic. These codes not only describe and control, they can also provide a key to the internal logic of how things work in the world that we inhabit.1

I wish to engender a greater awareness of both the existence and mutability of these embedded, abstract imperatives, in the hope that this will, in the face of “present global crises such as warming and species decline”, enable us to “challenge the logics which determine the course of events.”2 Such a challenge requires us to decipher the codes by which we live so that we might consider our choices. To this end, I ask you, my reader, (or audience) to contemplate a way of being in the world that gives value both to an embodied experience of the environment we find ourselves in, and a conceptual understanding of the effect our presence has on that environment. This process of contemplation could also be described as a poetics of place. And a poetics of place, I suggest, can be explored via the code of performance.

1 This articulation and application of the idea of ‘Code’ is formulated in response to a call for papers for the 21st Annual Conference for the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts, held in November, 2007 in Portland, Maine, USA.
2 These quotations refer to the call for papers for Performance Paradigm, Issue 4 (2008) in which this Prologue is published as a paper.
The performative lecture that follows is offered as an Exhibit both of Natural Science and of Moral Sensibility. It is a monologue that shifts between enactment and commentary as it investigates fragments of a story from Australia’s colonial archives, in this case, those relating to the botanical discovery of Western Australia. This form is inspired (ironically and self-reflexively) by nineteenth century displays of performative science and is designed not only to encourage an affect-full, passionate involvement in the making of place, but also to facilitate a process of observation and critical analysis of the ways in which place is made and the consequences that might ensue.

The performance maps the rhizomatic incursion of the code of Modernity across a colonial landscape through the figure of a woman, Georgiana Molloy. This biographical process taps the symbolic power of performance via a wide range of cultural inscriptions; personal letters, poetry, historical archives, contemporary music and artwork, movement, and costume, to explore how codes, secret or otherwise, drive our lived, bodily experience of the places we inhabit. In doing so, it attempts to untangle some of the interlocking contingencies that underpin the kind of Australia we who live here are currently experiencing and actively producing.

These emplaced cultural inscriptions combine, in performance, to activate notions of embodied encounter and in doing so, highlight the creative potential of performance to re-imagine and re-model the complex systems that govern our relationships with nature and our ways of seeing and living in the world. The use of both enactment and commentary within the dramaturgical structure of the work allows the force of affect (and percept) to be explicitly underlined by more conceptual and abstract notions of meaning-making. This interplay between the two modes operates within the

---

3 A rhizome is not easily containable; it is by its very nature nomadic as it runs opportunistically in any direction it can find a footing. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome spreading across culture is constitutionally different from the root, radical or tree; it “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (1987: 7).
understanding that while philosophy thinks abstractly, through concepts and making distinctions, art thinks through feelings and emotions, accessed by the body.\textsuperscript{4} This thesis argues that these two ways of making meaning can come together in performance, within an emergent poetics of place.

My version of Georgiana Molloy’s colonial story provides an example of embodied thinking or contemplation through action. I believe that such an embodied poetics demonstrates what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have described as the tendency of the English (or the English brand of philosophy to be more precise) to pitch a tent and inhabit a concept. The concept under consideration in Georgiana’s personal history is the idea of a colonial Empire, and in this performance, it is the active inhabitation of a poetics of place. This approach marks and examines the dynamic relationship between ways of knowing and ways of being in the world. Deleuze and Guattari write that

\begin{quote}
the English are precisely those nomads who treat the plane of immanence as a movable and moving ground, a field of radical experience, an archipelagian world where they are happy to pitch their tents from island to island and over the sea … We cannot even say that they have concepts like the French and Germans; but they acquire them, they only believe in what is acquired – not because everything comes from the senses but because a concept is acquired by inhabiting, by pitching one’s tent, by contracting a habit. They develop an extraordinary conception of habit: habits are taken on by contemplating and by contracting that which is contemplated. Habit is creative. The plant contemplates water, earth, nitrogen, carbon, chlorides, and sulphates, and it contracts them in order to acquire its own concept and fill itself with it (enjoyment*), [*original English]. The concept is a habit acquired by contemplating the elements from which we come … We are all contemplations, and therefore habits. \textit{I} is a habit. (1994: 105 original italics)
\end{quote}

The poetics of place in performance that I explore, similarly, pitches a tent in the middle of a concept or situation, inhabits it bodily and then proceeds by drawing on resources at

\textsuperscript{4} Writing of the action of affect and percept and their connection to the body, Deleuze and Guattari note that what is called ‘perception’ is no longer a state of affairs but a state of the body as induced by another body, and ‘affection’ is the passage of this state to another state as increase or decrease of potential-power through the action of other bodies. (1994: 154)
hand and contemplating what best can be done. It acquires new ground through force of habit, contemplation and enjoyment of contingent circumstance.

In this performance I demonstrate how Georgiana, the historical woman, acquires new ‘habits’ and a new ‘I’ in the ‘field of radical experience’ that is her colonial encounter within Empire. I suggest that as she observes the soil, the water, the flowers and seeds and the powers of “fresh fructification” held within them she is herself, contracted into the peculiar habits of her new environment and in the process, transformed from a mere colonial export into a becoming-flower, a mutant indigene.  

A deadly paradox is also apparent in the parallel evolution that is Georgiana’s becoming. I suggest that habits contracted in hybrid colonial environments which work to invigorate the dynamics of Empire at the same time cascade destruction upon the host environment. Georgiana’s passion for flowers and her role in their categorisation within the Linnaean taxonomy helps spread the code of Modernity across an Indigenous landscape, over-running and devastating a culture that has for aeons inhabited the land upon which she (literally and metaphorically) pitches her tent. I recommend that in an emergent and sustainable poetics of place, such destructive energy must be contemplated rationally, passionately and contracted peacefully.

Georgiana Molloy’s fertile and/or virulent ‘becoming’ within the story of Australia’s colonial history provides an opportunity, in twenty-first century Australia, to contemplate the elements from which we come. This performative lecture teases out some of the conflicting forces that reside in Georgiana’s story, and as a prologue to my thesis, proposes and demonstrates a poetics of making place which contemplates place through performance. Such a process attains new ground by demonstrating the creative and active acquisition of habit through bodily inhabitation and thoughtful

---

5 Molloy, Georgiana. 1805-1843. Letter to Dr Mangles, Jan 25, 1838. Diaries, 1 January 1830-9.
contemplation of an emerging concept. The place created in this twenty-first century
poetics of performance, is both a place to be and a place of which to be mindful.

Stories such as Georgiana Molloy’s presented here can never tell the whole truth about a
place, or about people who inhabit it, but rather create partial versions of virtual truths.
A mindfulness of place must also take into account untold stories that might yet unfold.
In this colonial history there is much left unsaid and undocumented. In particular,
further research needs to be undertaken to uncover the mysteries that surround the
behaviour of John Molloy, Georgiana’s husband, in order to explain the blood of the
first people of the land that, some say, is still on his hands. But that is another story.6

6 I have taken up the challenge of writing this ‘other story’ in Orchids and Insects, the text for
performance that concludes this thesis. In this play, I chronicle an account of colonial violence that
underlines the ruthlessness of ‘habits’ of colonisation that occurred in Western Australia. This ‘other
story’ is taken from a book published by W.B. Kimberly in 1897 that tells of
a punitive expedition that went out in 1841 in which one of the most bloodthirsty deeds ever
committed by Englishmen is reported to have taken place. No records exist of this affair, and the
narrative depends on the evanescent memories of pioneers, and the statements of several surviving
natives of that period, particularly Weelah, of the Vasse tribe. (1897: 115 – 116)
The More I Study Nature

Gregory Pryor, *Black Solander* (detail) 2, courtesy of the artist and Lister Gallery

7 The material in the performative section of this chapter relating to Georgiana Molloy is taken from a range of sources, including Georgiana Molloy’s own letters and diaries which are held and readily accessible in microfilm at the Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia (479A/1-2), the books by William Lines and Alexandra Hasluck listed in the bibliography, from the archives of the Western Australian Historical Society and from other unpublished and primary research. Georgiana’s monologue is taken verbatim from these letters and diaries but is edited by me and not necessarily presented chronologically. Similarly the poem she recites at the beginning of the monologue is edited from ‘A Voyager’s Dream of Land’, by William Cowper. This poem is published in the front of ‘Marshall’s Ladies Fashionable Repository for 1829’, a book that is also Georgiana’s personal diary, and which contains along with the blank pages that became her diary, songs and poems, advertising material, shipping news and public notices. I have also given her quotations from Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault that are noted in the text.
A lecture theatre or presentation space.

There is a chair set on one side of the space and a projection screen to the rear.

A slide show of images of W. A. plants by artist Gregory Pryor begins to scroll.


A Museum Guide enters.

She carries a folded, round, white lace tablecloth in one hand and the similarly round, collapsed skeleton frame of a white crinoline in the other.

She places the table cloth over the back of the chair and crinoline frame on the floor beside the chair.

She then collects a small wooden box and a roll of white paper masking tape. She kneels on the floor on the other side of the space from the chair, placing the box beside her. She takes the role of masking tape and tapes out lines of a 12 square grid on the floor. When she has finished this task she goes to the centre of the space and compares the white grid with the white crinoline frame.

She addresses the audience.

The poet Mallarme says

Every man has a secret in him, many die without finding it and will never find it because they are dead, it no longer exists, nor do they. I am dead and risen again with the jewelled key of my last spiritual casket. It is up to me now to open it in the absence of any borrowed impression, and its mystery will emanate in a sky of great beauty.

Mallarme’s secret is a code.

She returns to the grid, kneels in front of it and opens the box. The box is sectioned to contain 12 different bottles of seed. She begins to empty each bottle into one of the 12 white squares. As she does this she speaks.

The code describes reality, it also makes it. It is not the animating principle, but it animates. It is the machine that connects desire and an outcome that is always contingent, never inevitable. If we can understand our code, we have performed the right political act.8

She stands and crosses to the crinoline frame. She steps inside it, pulls it up and ties it around her waist.

8 In his masterclass ‘Understanding Deleuze’ held at Edith Cowan University in October, 2005, Dr Ian Buchanan commented that if we can understand our abstract machine, we have done the right political act. I have adapted Deleuze’s complex notion of the abstract machine to the more straight forward function of a code.
This paper uses techniques of performance to trace the rhizomatic incursion of the code ‘Modernity’ across an alien landscape. It is embodied within the figure of a woman, Georgiana Molloy, and is revealed in observation of her far flung, colonial odyssey.

Georgiana Molloy leaves England in 1829 and arrives on the West coast of Australia in 1830, one of the first settlers of the new Swan River Colony. She is 24, pregnant and ready to colonize.

*In her crinoline frame, she walks over to the seeds, kneels before the grid and carefully continues her distribution of seed across the 12 squares.*

In time, she plants out a flower garden with seeds she has brought with her on the ship. Under the encouragement of the distant and mysterious botanist, Dr Mangles, she begins to collect native seeds and specimens. She dries, presses and labels them and sends them back to Mangles at Kew Botanical Gardens. As they are placed within the Linnaean system and held within the confines of her own proto-Darwinian culture, their life in an Indigenous environment is uprooted, deterritorialized and for the most part, discarded.

*She finishes the task and shuts the lid of the box. She speaks to the audience.*

Over the next twelve years, Georgiana Molloy gives birth to seven children. She dies at 37 and is buried under the soil of her new country. Her five surviving daughters thrive in the new colony. But this is not only a story of one person’s appropriation of country and another’s dispossession. Traces of Georgiana’s passing (her letters to Dr Mangles at Kew Gardens sent along with the specimens of indigenous flora) document an entirely more subtle transformation. Imperceptibly, like grass growing (perhaps), the virgin bush works its own way upon this woman. On close inspection, her encounter with the natural world offers a strangely paradoxical example of what I call a *hopeful-becoming*.

*She goes to projection screen and inspects the images. Her body shape inclines toward the shapes of the plants. She turns back to address the audience.*

Inspired by Georgiana’s floral passion and by popular ethnographic and anthropological displays of the 19th century, I present Georgiana Molloy as an exhibit; a curiosity both of natural science and of moral sensibility.

This exhibit also draws on the inscriptions of others. I would particularly like to acknowledge the images of West Australian flora by artist, Gregory Pryor, music by American composer, Steve Reich, a poem by 19th Century, Romantic poet, William Cowper, and of course the writings of Georgiana herself.

Before we meet Georgiana I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous people upon whose land she settled and of my own country. I live at the mouth of the Swan River in Western Australia, in Fremantle, the port where Georgiana first disembarked. The local people of the Swan River Valley are the Nyungar. Nyungar country stretches right across the South West corner of Australia from Jurien Bay in the north, to Esperance in the south. Georgiana settled on Nyungar
country. The Nyungar were here when she first set up camp in Fremantle and then travelled down South and built a settlement at Augusta. They were here when she later took up pastoral leases and built a homestead on the Vasse River. Some say the Nyungar have been living in what is now known as a biodiversity hot spot, for well over 60,000 years.

*Picks up box and walks briskly around (circumnavigates) the performance space…*

The Swan River Settlement was projected from the Colonial Office in London in 1828. In March, 1830, before many dwellings were erected or land surveyed, fifty ships with 2,000 emigrants, bringing property amounting to £1,000,000, arrived in the newly seeded colony on the West Coast of Australia.

*Stands on chair.*

Among those tempted to cross 12,000 miles of ocean was Georgiana, the young bride of Captain John Molloy, otherwise known as ‘handsome Jack’, an officer who fought Napoleon and was wounded at the battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar. It is of their experience that the following letters tell.

*Georgiana holds the box under her arm and looks out at the flailing sea. She is buffeted by the ocean’s swell.*

The hollow dash of waves! The ceaseless roar!
Silence, ye bellows! Vex my soul no more.
Shroud my green land no more, thou blinding spray!
Give way! —the booming surge, the tempest’s roar,
The sea-birds wail, shall vex my soul no more!
Her very heart athirst —
To gaze at Nature in her green array,
Upon the ship’s tall side she stands, possess’d
With visions prompted by intense desire;
Fair fields appear below, such as she left.

*Georgiana gets off chair and surveys the new country.*

Far distant, such as she would die to find
-She seeks them headlong …

*She sits on the chair. She has the box on her lap and contemplates the scene.*

My dear Mary

I can give you no idea of the open state of regardless wickedness that reigns here. Molloy ordered an observance of the Sabbath from the first of our arrival. Prayers are read and a sermon or Homily, but even that is thought tedious. These last two Sundays he had read one of Binder’s Village Sermons, but all is heard as if not heard; and the soldiers’ wives who are compelled to attend or to go without their rations, very often quit the service in the middle of it to hold their inebrious orgies.
She places the box on the ground beside her. She spreads out the lace tablecloth at her feet.

This is certainly a very beautiful place; but were it not for domestic charms, the eye of the emigrant would soon weary of the unbounded limits of thickly clothed, dark green forests.

I am sitting on the verandah surrounded by my little flower garden of British and Australian flowers pouring forth their odour.

Gets up, goes to centre of table cloth.

A variety of beautiful little birds most brilliant in plumage sport around me. There is a small bird called the Australian robin, with the breast of a very bright scarlet; (puts hand up as though bird is perching on it) also a little bird of a complete blue colour resembling cobalt, with short green wings.

She puts her other hand up to observe the small bird more closely. Her body now is held in a gesture that prefigures Georgiana’s movements later in the piece when she (becomes) takes on the shape of the projected flower images.

She observes the birds on her hands and then looks about her.

The honey eaters are so minutely beautiful I cannot describe them.

She addresses the audience.


Michel Foucault says:

To observe then, is to be content with seeing – with seeing few things systematically, with seeing what, in the rather confused wealth of representation, can be analyzed, recognized by all, and thus given a name that everyone will be able to understand. 9

Tip toes around the edge of the cloth looking at the tiny flowers.

A remarkable feature in the botany of S.W. Australia, is the numerous kinds of leaves with the identical flower. I know one purple pea flower with three different kinds of leaves, one of which is a creeper, and called … the blue vine; the other an erect shrub with no smell and leaves like … holly; the third is also erect, with leaves like … the privet, and in shady places the blossoms emit a scent about three in the afternoon like allspice or cloves.

…but I fear this last page may be somewhat tedious, as you are not likely to behold all these … aborigines.

Are you observing? Are you deciphering the code?

Because on the other hand, Gilles Deleuze says “something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter”.

She picks up box and goes over to the grid.

Unlike mere observation, the encounter challenges and disrupts our habitual way of seeing, it transforms us.

So, I invite you not only to observe but also via the Code of Performance, to experience and hopefully, to encounter Georgiana Molloy and her transforming Code of … Modernity.

She looks at the box as if it is a new discovery.

My Dear Dr Mangles – Much to my surprise in December last, I received a particularly choice box of seeds, and your polite note requesting a return of the native seeds of Augusta.

She kneels at the grid and with a tiny wooden scoop carefully begins to put a selection of a few seeds into small plastic bags.

We have already collected some seeds as your box arrived just at the proper season. I am not even acquainted with the names of the native plants. I will, however, enclose a leaf and description of the flower in each paper.

In truth, my dear Sir, I have no hesitation in declaring that, were I to accompany the box of seeds to England, knowing as I do their situation, time of flowering, soil and degree of moisture required and powers of fresh fructification they each possess, I should have a very extensive conservatory of no plants but from Augusta.

I do not say this vauntingly, but to inspire you with that ardour and interest with which the collection leaves me.

She stops what she is doing, closes the lid of the box and picks it up. She puts it down stage centre. She retrieves the table cloth that is still lying on the floor. As she speaks, she folds the cloth carefully, never taking her eyes from the small box.

Forgive me Dear Sir … using towards a stranger, the freedom and minute detail that friendship warrants and desires …

Under the afflicting decree … recently been overwhelmed … loss of our darling infant … drowning!!

… been playing with him and … frolicsome mood just after breakfast, … preparing to bake and churn… left dear little Johnny … seen him with Mary, and near his Papa,… had his bell on (a little bell he wore around his waist … straying

... not finding him, ‘Have you been to the Well?’ ... ‘Do not frighten yourself, he never goes there’!!

... going to the Well. The fatal truth ...“here’s the Boy” ... his flaxen curls all dripping, his little countenance so ... we knew not what to do.

... that lively, healthy child ...all mirth and joyousness ... beautiful and lovely even in death.

*Puts folded cloth on top of box. It is now as if it is the coffin of her baby.*

I now enclose your box and letter. So many of its contents were collected under the extremes of joy and acute sorrow. It has beguiled many a moment, and I hope you will receive most success and satisfaction in sowing your seed. Any particular seed you desire and those I have imperfectly been able to transmit, I shall feel happy against another season to repair.

P. S. If the box you send me is large enough, a watering pot would be of the greatest use to us as ours are worn and destroyed after eight years service. With every kind wish, I remain very sincerely yours. Georgiana Molloy.

*Georgiana goes back to the grid. She inspects the grouping of seeds, touching each section.*

Dear Dr Mangles. Words fail me when I attempt to return you my many many grateful thanks and acknowledgements for ‘your box’s’ useful, beautiful and handsome contents.

I shall with unfeigned pleasure attempt to gratify you in writing the Floral Calendar, I will glean all I can, and pray my health may be so recruited as to permit of my making those much enjoyed Floral excursions.

*Finally she runs her hand through the seeds, wantonly mixing them across the squares of the grid.*

Such flowers of imagination; I am now in raptures when I think on them. When I sally forth on foot or Horseback, I feel quite elastic in mind and step; I feel I am quite at my own work, the real cause that enticed me out to Swan River.

*Using the scoop, she begins packaging the seeds up into the little plastic bags again. She works quickly and with concentrated intensity.*

I have been four times out in search of Nyutsia and send you the small, small harvest. The seed is really very difficult to obtain if not there the day it ripens. The quantity speaks for itself. I have twice sent a native, once a white man and native, gone four times out myself, twice with a servant and twice with Molloy, and yet as you see the Result!

My two remaining children have really been of great utility, their eyes being so much nearer the ground, they have been able to detect many minute specimens
and seeds I could not observe. For in our impervious bush it is really difficult to find what you are in quest of.

I have not sent you every flower we have worth sending, and many I fear you will consider worthless, but having obeyed the ‘Golden Rule’ I have ventured to introduce some literal weeds. Often in hearing of foreign countries, I have wished to be acquainted with their most common plants, having more curiosity to see its weeds than the finer production.

In this most uncultivated land and temperate climate, insects and reptiles have unrestrained license, and the seeds of each plant afford sustenance to some of the animal creation. Consequently, the seed vessels of each are generally inhabited by some worm or grub. This is particularly the case with those contained in a silique. I had several large quantities of number 67, 71, 73, 85, to gather and open before I could meet with the small packages I send to you. I have minutely examined every seed and know they are sound and fresh, as they have all been gathered from 15 December 1837 to the present day.

Georgiana stops her activity and stands to survey the grid now covered in a confusion of seed. She walks right around it and then moves toward the screen projected with images of flowers.

I came on an open plain of many acres in extent with scarcely a tree on it, and those that grew, were large and fine. I discovered a plant I had been almost panting for.

She moves in front of the projection screen, she observes the images closely. She puts her hands toward them and imitates the shapes of the tree and its flowers. She turns toward the audience still in the shape of the tree. She observes her body.

I beheld a tree of great beauty, dark green and prickly. Its flowers gave character not only to the tree itself, but to the surrounding locality. They are of the purest white and fall in long trusses from the stem. Some of its pendulous blooms are from three to five fingers in length.

These wave in the breeze like snow wreaths and are of such a downy white appearance. They emit a most delicious perfume resembling the bitter almond;

…like all mortal delicacies, how quick these flowers fall from the stalk!

Her movements slow to a stop. Her arms are outstretched in the flower shape. It is though she is in suspended animation, dried and pressed as a specimen.

In all my illness and real suffering, I did not forget you. As Spring approached I lamented not being able to gather the flowers as they came out. Once Molloy in kangaroo hunting brought me a bouquet of beautiful scarlet flowers also dried and which please God I ever get about again I shall mark and send.

I was surprised during my illness to receive a nosegay from a native who was aware of my floral passion. These [too] are under preparation for you.
I finally conclude and as always, remain most sincerely yours, Georgiana Molloy.

*Her arms drop to her sides.*

Deleuze might say: this woman is a becoming-flower.

*She goes to the grid and picks up a package of seeds. She holds them up and shows them to the audience.*

A code.

*She indicates the projected images.*

Another code.

*She indicates the music and her costume.*

Another code.

*Hands out seed bags to audience.*

All codes of performance.

*Goes back to the performance space.*

The poet Mallarme says

Every man has a secret in him, many die without finding it.

*Undoes the crinoline and lets it fall.*

Georgiana Molloy’s floral passion provides a jewelled key to the spiritual casket that Mallarme imagines. The encoded secrets of her life are revealed in her bodily, lived encounters with her new environment, encounters that rupture her, crack her like an egg, like a seed perhaps, out of which new and unexpected intensities of life emerge. She may well be considered a flower, she might perhaps be judged a weed, but even now, the mysteries of her life of encounter continue to emanate into the world.

*Indicates the performance space.*

All of us, in which ever corner of burgeoning modernity we inhabit may ask ourselves; weeds or flowers, are we content merely to observe, to ‘see what can be analysed, recognised by all, and thus given a name that everyone will be able to understand.’ Or are we like Georgiana, willing not only to observe, but also to risk ourselves in encounter, to be guided by our passions and live our lives as a hopeful-becoming.

Gregory Pryor, *Black Solander* (detail) 3, courtesy of the artist and Lister Gallery
Introduction

Theatre Makes Place with the Body

When I consider the brief span of my life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after … the small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there, now rather than then. (Pascal in Bauman, 2004: 71-72)
When Pascal talks about here rather than there, now rather than then, I believe he is talking about place. His fright and amazement I take to be an expression of awe and wonder at actually being in place, a particular place marked by his physical presence in a moment of time, a place that his body brings into being. It could be said that this body, inserted into time and space, creates place. Spurred by Pascal’s amazement at the infinite immensity of eternity and the universe and his fright at the fragile, responsible position he occupies within it, I aim to build a proposition about body, place and theatre and position it in the here and now. This proposition is that theatre makes place with the body. Built into my proposition is a suggestion that we can only hope to know ourselves as human beings in place, and conversely, that the places we create and inhabit know us. The relationship between body, place and theatre provides the inspirational frame for this analysis, one that I also pose as a question: if theatre makes place with the body, what kind of place are contemporary theatre makers making of Australia?

Philosopher of place Edward Casey proposes that “to be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place” (1993: xv). He applies what he terms (after Gaston Bachelard) topoanalysis to study the intimate, embodied detail and the wider implications of our being in the world, or as he puts it, our being-in-place (1993: xv, 311-312). He uses the terms implacement and displacement (1993: 3 – 39) to describe the process of being at home (as it were) in our bodies and in our lives, or not.11 Casey points out that “entire cultures can become profoundly averse to the places they inhabit, feeling atopic and displaced within their own implacement” (1993: 34).

11 Throughout the thesis, I follow Casey’s own spelling of the word implacement, rather than emplacement.
The idea of place, as I use it here, works as a conceptual tool through which situations in the world or on stage might be understood and created. This understanding of place and of being-in-place is not predicated upon places which are better or worse than the other, more or less worthy, inferior or superior, though value judgements are often implicit. I am certainly interested in the qualities of place per se, but am more interested in exploring how places in the world, in the imagination and in theatre act upon people and how people act upon them. I am interested in what places are doing. The emphasis in this sense is functional and rests on the fundamental role being-in-place plays in our experience of being-human.

I trace the different ways that place can be experienced in people’s lives and the various methods by which it is constructed on stage. I suggest that theatre brings people (and their bodies) together in the moment of performance. This occurs, not only in the imaginary places of the text and mise en scene, but also through the geographical, architectural and social encounter of the event as it ‘takes place’. I map this capture of body, place and theatre focussing on how various ways of being in place and out of place, are explored, challenged or confirmed in a selection of new works.

The first of my case studies is Yandy, directed by Rachel Maza and written by Jolly Read. This play tells the story of the first Indigenous industrial action in Australia, begun on the vast pastoral stations in the Pilbara in Western Australia in 1946. The contestation for wages, conditions and access to territory that existed when the play was set is still under question in the current context of the extended mining boom (and subsequent bust) occurring in Western Australia. Using a Marxist-Lefebvrian construction of place and space, I consider the continuing construction of social space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia and the ways in which social space might connect with theatre-made places.
The Odyssey, the second case study, directed by Michael Kantor and written by Tom Wright, revisits Homer’s legend of Odysseus. Odysseus is cast in this production as a World War I soldier returning from Gallipoli to Australia. This exploration into myth re-maps a version of Australia’s progress from colonial outpost to nation across the imaginary places of Odysseus’ original journey. I consider the profound sense of human displacement that this production expresses (and creates) for me, within the non-places of what ethnologist Marc Augé (1995) has described as ‘supermodernity’.

And finally The Drover’s Wives, directed and written by Sally Richardson, is a dance-based, multi-media reworking of Henry Lawson’s famous bush story The Drover’s Wife. The places made in this production offer glimpses into Australian women’s lives that are drawn not only from Lawson’s story, but are built on the place-endowed bodies of the performers and their own lived experience of the contemporary Australian landscape.12

Each of these works has been performed locally (as ‘here and now’ as I could manage within the contingencies of the thesis) within the period 2004-2006, in my own home town of Perth, Western Australia.

I also offer my own creative response to the theoretical ideas at work in the thesis via two creative works. In both pieces, I apply the prism of place as a dramaturgical tool in writing for performance. This entails writing with an awareness (a mindfulness) of the embodied contingencies of being in the ‘here and now’ and with an understanding that the body, and bodies together, think and carry their own kind of knowledge.13 As I

---

12 The Drover’s Wives also toured to China in November, 2007 to perform in the 5th Beijing Dance Festival and the 9th Shanghai International Arts Festival.

13 This notion of thinking with the body is, for me, related to what Casey terms the “arc of embodiment” (1993: 110–111) in which “we emerge into a larger world of burgeoning experience, not only by ourselves but with others” (1993: 111). A similar approach to the meanings the body can make, in context, is taken by Elizabeth Grosz, who considers the body as a “sociocultural artefact” (1998: 42). Theatre conceived as a ‘sociocultural artefact,’ created by the body in place, is I believe, well positioned to contribute to a fundamental rethinking of how place can be created in the world.
write, I am conscious that meaning does not exist as something fixed in the text or in the
director’s vision, or in the music or the choreography, or in any of the other elements
that make up performance. Rather, it is made in the moment when all these elements
come together, in the embodied process of being in place for the audience and the
performers, within the duration of the performance.

Following this dramaturgical approach, I have adopted strategies that might be termed
post-dramatic in my creative works, where time and place and the subjectivities that
exist within them move beyond the proscribed limits of traditional dramatic structures
and the relationship between audience and performers is fluid and interactive. To
reiterate, I do not wish to champion certain places and condemn others, but rather, wish
to investigate the human agency involved in making the places in which we live and to
chronicle how particular places shape us. My investigation, The More I Study Nature:
Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity, is presented as a prologue to the thesis.
This performative lecture or exhibition re-enacts an example (or presents a specimen) of
place-making in colonial Australia, in this case one that forms around the botanical
exploration of West Australia.

Orchids and Insects concludes the thesis and is presented not so much as a play in a
dramatic sense, but rather as a script for performance. I build upon Georgiana’s story,
introduced in the Prologue, in order to demonstrate the layered and changing intensities
in people’s lives that constitute the making of place over time and the making of place
that comes to constitute a culture. Orchids and Insects begins in contemporary times, at
the point of Emelia’s death. It employs post-dramatic strategies of fragmented, parallel

---

14 Post-dramatic is the term that has been applied to a contemporary style of theatre that embraces a
polyvalent layering of signification that does not necessarily privilege text. It is the subject of Hans-Thies
Lehmann’s work Postdramatic Theatre (2006), where he argues for a vision of theatre “without the
representation of a closed-off fictional cosmos, the mimetic staging of a fable” and focuses instead on the
emergent meanings that arise from the interaction of all elements on stage (Karen Jurs-Munby, in
Lehmann 2006: 3).
and entwining story lines, open relationships between audience and performers and the use of multi-media, dance, movement and music to explore the places that a life, or rather a number of intersecting lives (Georgiana’s included), might engender.

My case study analyses and creative works connect with a range of different cultural, philosophical and political forces that I believe surround and underpin major themes running through contemporary Australian society. I am particularly interested in how dramaturgies of place in theatre can explore the ways in which men and women coming from elsewhere have taken this country as their own. I also consider the relationship and history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and how this might be addressed within theatre. In engaging with these themes, in my case studies and in my creative works, I aim to develop a poetics of place for theatre that interrogates the ethical, political, aesthetic and ecological capabilities that adhere to notions of place. I apply this topological, place-aware approach in order to better understand the dramaturgical possibilities of how place is made in theatre and also in the world.

A topological approach

Topoanalysis, then would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives. In the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles. At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being’s stability - a being who does not want to melt away. (Bachelard, 1964: 8)

I must acknowledge that my own implacation within this project is totally implicated and entwined with each of the case studies under analysis, in that I know and in many cases have close associations with people in the different productions. For me at least, this does not compromise the project but rather illustrates the contingent, contextual and inter-subjective nature of place. I came to Perth at the beginning of 2004 from Melbourne along with my young family in order that my husband might take up the role of Artistic Director of Black Swan Theatre Company. As I write this we are packing to
return to Melbourne. These are the projects that have been happening around me and
have been the preoccupation of people that I have known and, of course, continue to
know. This thesis, in a sense, encapsulates a certain time and place for me; it is a case
study of my own experience of being implanted, at a particular time, in a particular
location, within a particular milieu. The topological approach I take to the making of
place in theatre is therefore, in this, and every way, situated and embodied in my own
life. In emphasising this, I aim for a certain reflexivity that acknowledges the “use of
subjective experience” in the pursuit “of a more effective objectivity” (Kellor in Lang,
1999: 19).

My understanding of this reflexive process of being in place is tied to my own
(embodied) experience of making place in theatre. This most ancient and yet most
modern of art forms uses as its primary instrument of expression the most fundamental
of all human places, the body itself, and the body, as I will argue, connects all variety of
places.

Deleuze and Guattari write that a

body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance
or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfils. On the plane of
consistency, a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude: in other words
the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relation of
movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude): the sum total of the intensive
affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing
but affects and local movements, differential speeds. The credit goes to Spinoza
for calling attention to the two dimensions of the Body, and for having defined the
plane of Nature as pure longitude and latitude. Latitude and longitude are the two
elements of a cartography. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 251)

I come to this project with a background as a theatre maker, as an actor of mainstream
plays and of new work, as a devisor and writer. All these roles involve the making of
place with the body. I have not come across a closer description to my experience of an
actor’s body in performance than the body described above.
As an actor, I have physically built places with my body in the theatre every time I have performed. My performance training and experience have taught me about the plasticity and dynamics of theatrical places, created and then recreated in performance. I know about using the body to create the topography of the stage, building places with breath, with energy coming out of the actual and the imagined ground. I know how this energy alters both the quality of my gaze, and the way the audience looks back at me, how this effects the speed and force by which I move through the space, how energy bounces off the architecture of the theatre and the set that contains the story I am telling. I know how this energy changes the rhythms and shapes of my body, how it alters my relationships with other bodies and objects in the space, as the narrative is played out and theatrical places are formed and reformed in performance. I have also experienced how different buildings in different cities and countries also create their own un-reproducible environment for the same production.

Approached from another angle, as a writer and devisor I have worked conceptually to generate words and mise-en-scene using a descriptive, representational approach to place. I have created these places through storytelling, dialogue and the kinds of relationships that form between actors, objects and audiences in the theatre space. These theatrical places are signified by objects in the theatre space or defined by the symbolic and syntactical uses of text. These significations do not remained quarantined on the page in performance. They are implied through action, through the quality of the words as they are expressed, their sounds and shape in the mouths of actors, in how they

---

15 Jane Goodall pointed out in a Masterclass on ‘Performance and Performativity’ held at the University of Queensland in 2005 the connection between embodied energetics (and associated second law of thermodynamics) and the study of acting. This connection was brought home to me in a subsequent workshop with American theatre director, Anne Bogart, who works consciously and systematically with actors’ energy in the space. The focus of this workshop for actors was on activating the energy between the bodies in the space and with the architecture of the room. Bogart’s book The Viewpoints Book (2005) is a guide for making work with such a focus.
resonate across and through the bodies of the actors and across the other bodies and objects, on stage and in the audience.

Bert O. States approaches these intersecting forces at play within the theatre (and within theatre analysis). “Putting semiotics aside” he writes

we tend generally to undervalue the elementary fact that theater – unlike fiction, painting, sculpture, and film – is really a language whose words consist to an unusual degree of things that are what they seem to be. In theatre, image and object, pretence and pretender, sign-vehicle and content, draw unusually close.… Put bluntly, in theatre there is always a possibility that an act of sexual congress between two so-called signs will produce a real pregnancy. (1987:19-20)

Although I have never gone as far as to produce a real pregnancy on stage, I can appreciate State’s point. I have found this combined embodied and textual experience of making place in the theatre to be one that blurs the boundaries, for me as a performer, and as an audience member, between the imagined and the real as the performance moves through states of continual transformation and dynamic change. This shifting state where the material, the symbolic and the phenomenological co-exist in performance is, as Peggy Phelan says, “like a rackety bridge swaying under too much weight” (1993: 167). Part of the thrill for the audience is, I believe, being held precariously, along with the actors, in suspension between the reality of the body and the imaginary and virtual worlds created in performance.

To maintain a forward momentum across the distance of a performance narrative, a delicate yet sure-footed poise is required by the actors (one that might at any point falter due to aesthetic or narrative failure and send both performer and audience into the abyss!). Depending on the success or failure of this complex interaction, the performer inspires more or less confidence and involvement for the audience and sense of a shared experience between life on stage and life in the auditorium. For me at least, as I am immersed in this process as an actor, it is not what I look like or what I represent on stage that is important, (though that of course, plays a part) but what I am doing. It is
this leaning toward embodied action that holds my attention and, hopefully, the attention of the audience. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests:

> What counts for the orientation of the spectacle [around me] is not my body as it in fact is, as a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal “place” defined by its task and situation. My body is wherever there is something to be done. (in Casey 1997: 232)

This interactivity between the body and an understanding of what the body might do in performance provides the excitement and dramatic tension. It also creates an environment in the theatre for questioning and reflection. Phelan suggests that this situation contains the possibility of both the actor and the spectator becoming transformed during the event’s unfolding … this is precisely where the ‘liveness’ of live performance matters … this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical. (2003: 295)

The in-between place of performance is always relational, involving bodies on the stage and the bodies in the audience; it is always enacted in the moment, and most importantly, as I argue here, always occurs in place.16

### The Body and Place

---

16 Physicists talk about electro-magnetic fields holding matter together and exerting influence on other forms of matter: bodies, buildings, even light globes. For instance, I recently went on a guided tour at the Gravity Centre in Gin Gin, north of Perth, Western Australia, a new facility run as the public education arm of the Australian International Gravitational Observatory (AIGO), within the University of Western Australia; anecdotally, the tour guide (who was a scientist), claimed that more often than not, he could blow a street light by concentrating his electro-magnetic field at the globe. He explained that this is in effect, a physical response generated by his bodily presence. He suggested that electromagnetic fields may be the source of ghostly presences within buildings, where intense affect emanating from a person once living, is being held within walls etc., via an electromagnetic field. Amazingly, he explained that this is extreme-science, and a growing field of serious interest for physicists. If it is true, it might be that magnetic fields hold the affect and feeling force of bodily presence in theatre and that some actors and audience members are more attuned to transferring and receiving such a force. As unlikely as it sounds, this extreme-science might explain the power of personal charisma and presence on stage (that is, of course, if a scientific explanation is necessary).
The importance of the body to place has long been recognised within classical philosophy. Bertrand Russell reminds his reader in *History of Western Philosophy* that “Aristotle says in his Physics 208b ‘The theory that the void exists involves the existence of place; for one would define void as place bereft of body’ ” (1946: 89). In fact, as Casey points out

more than any other single factor – more even than the psyche or society, architecture or politics – the organic body links the diverse appearances of place: it renders them all incarnate, part of the history of the body itself. (1997: 339-340)

I suggest that the body is both place productive and the means by which we as humans can experience and understand ourselves in place. This ontological twist or paradox of creating, being immersed in and consciously experiencing at the same time, captures the human condition in place, both in theatre and in the real world.

The poetics of place that I wish to apply to theatre is, following this, both corporeal and conscious. It challenges notions of an idealised human subjectivity, secured within transcendent reason, one in which “the philosopher’s systematic thought is self-contained … [a] self-enclosed system set over and against a world of objects” and nature (Lang, 1999: 19). Rather, the idea of place that interests me acknowledges the indeterminacy of embodied meaning and the human agency that negotiates the contingencies of place and lives with its consequences. This poetics of place, as it is expressed in theatre provides a site of creative tension, a three-dimensional, spatio-temporal, corporeal field of considered action in which the philosophical conundrum entangling reality and representation, nature and reason (that has so fascinated Western
thinkers and theatre makers throughout history) can be played out again, and yet again, re-negotiating and transforming what it is to be human, in place and in time.17

Following Casey, I argue that in the West the importance of place has been obscured to the detriment of our necessarily place-bound, lived existence. Casey suggests that at work

in the obscuration of place is the universalism inherent in Western culture from the beginning. This universalism is most starkly evident in the search for ideas, usually labelled “essences,” that obtain everywhere and for which a particular somewhere, a given place is presumably irrelevant. (1997: xii)

Along with Casey, I believe that the universalism that applies everywhere but belongs nowhere comes at a cost that needs to be considered. Apart from (or perhaps, parallel to) the very serious ecological implications of a place-challenged environment, what appears in the stead of an encultured particularity of place within a globalised world is a monocultural flatness across which a consumer oriented space passes for culture. Casey notes that perhaps most crucially, the encroachment of an indifferent sameness-of-place on a global scale – to the point where at times you cannot be sure which city you are in, given the overwhelming architectural and commercial uniformity of many cities – makes the human subject long for a diversity of places, that is, difference-of-place, that has been lost in a worldwide monoculture based on Western (and more specifically, American) economic and political paradigms. (1997: xii)

Place, Casey maintains, “brings with it the very elements sheared off in the planiformity of site: identity, character, nuance, history” (1997: xiii). I believe that developing awareness and an understanding of bodies in place in contemporary society is of growing importance in an increasingly troubled global environment that privileges systems which tend to efface the body and its implaced contingencies. Re-inserting the

---

17 Richard Schechner refers to this reiteration in theatre as “restored behaviour” emphasising (like States) not a semiotic reading of the performance, but the ritualistic, experiential contract between the performer and spectator (1985: 36).
body into the equation by a conscious revitalisation of what I term here a poetics of place in theatre, is I propose, a place to start.

**Narratives of place**

I begin here (and now) by suggesting that every place tells a story (and of course, some stories are better told than others). Further to this, I propose that the qualities of each place are not fixed but depend largely on how that place is perceived and experienced. In this way, one person’s wilderness can be another’s livelihood, home or traditional country, and yet another’s holiday destination, with all the political, economic and social implications such thinking, labelling and habitation might involve. Although being-in-place provides the very real limits of the embodied ‘here and now’, place, considered in this way, is also inherently dynamic. In fact, Casey notes that

> place, precisely because it is not merely positional and often has indeterminate boundaries, presents itself to us as an ambiguous phenomenon – as ambiguous as is the lived body by means of which it is experienced and known … Not being the content of definite representations – whether ideas or images – place is not determinate in character. (1997: 231-232)

Casey’s definition understands place as being indeterminate, not just in its many manifestations in the world, but by its very nature. He argues that within contemporary Western culture, the notion of place is finally emerging not as a receptacle (Plato), or as an essential boundary or container (Aristotle), or as a part of space (Newton), or as location within an extension of space (Descartes, Locke), but rather as a *process* whereby things are implaced, in relation to each other.

Considering this all-pervasive, surrounding and encompassing, active quality of place, it is not surprising that the notion of place has come to mean many things to many people over time (and to be recreated and represented in theatre in many ways). It is an
indeterminate notion that responds to and reflects the changing conditions and
developments of the world, and the ways people think about the particular world in
which they live. Place is, in fact, such a broad notion, accommodating such range of
approaches, that it does at times become dangerously non-specific. To preclude this, I
would like to articulate a position toward place at the outset that will be reiterated a
number of times throughout the thesis. Most simply, for me, place is embodied
meaning; it is meaning that I make with my body, that is engendered or implied through
bodily presence and action, not just in the theatre, but in the world as well. Beyond this
are the many abstracted spaces that exist within theatre, and of course the world,
through which embodied meaning is conceived and made.

The bodies that make place in theatre addressed throughout the thesis, through the case
studies and creative works, are the individual bodies of the performers and their
audience (and of course, the associated creators of theatre such as writers, directors,
designers, technicians, administrators, etc) as they experience what it is to engage with
live performance. I suggest that this experience of making place in theatre does not
stop, nor does it begin at the theatre door, but rather works across time and resonates
into society, contracting versions of what it is to be, and indeed what it might yet come
to be, (in terms of this thesis) an Australian, in place, in the twenty-first century.

In embracing the fundamental indeterminacy of place, my proposition that theatre
makes place connects the body in place with human agency and the fluid political,
ethical and aesthetic conditions through which subject positions are formed and
transformed in society. This relational, contextual, inherently political and ethical
process lies at the etymological heart of the word ‘place’. Casey states that

both “politics” and “ethics” go back to Greek words that signify place: polis and
ethea, “city-state” and “habitats,” respectively. The very word “society” stems
from socius, signifying “sharing” – and sharing is done in a common place. (1997: xiv)
The accompanying notion of community or *communitas* that is implied also lies within the compass of place, and at the heart of human society. This notion of communitas has been used, notably by anthropologists such as Victor Turner and theatre anthropologists such as Eugenio Barba, to describe the type of shared involvement provided by both sacred and secular community rituals. It is through such ritual and community involvement that cultures are articulated and evolve. I suggest that theatre is a forum in which place is constituted and enacted amidst all its indeterminacy, and it sits very comfortably within such a teleological frame, as a robust epistemological, ontological and artistic expression of human place-making in society. Theatre, in this sense, is a proving ground of human experience, one in which cultural innovation and experiment can be tried, and human action and the places it creates can be considered and then re-considered.

I believe that theatre informed by a poetics and a dramaturgy of place must consider not only what is represented on stage by the body of an actor, but must also study how place is produced in theatrical space. It must understand and work to manipulate the dynamic indeterminism of place. Such an interrogation must ask what the *action* is, what transformations are under way and how they are achieved. It must observe the flows of energy and movement that the body creates across the stage and into the auditorium and back again.

In *The Production of Space* (1991) Henri Lefebvre considers the dynamic creation of places and spaces. A house or a street or a city, he suggests brings to mind bricks and mortar, roads, trees, shops and so on. While he acknowledges the importance of the representational knowledge such places afford, he insists that a critical understanding must address how these spaces and the places that constitute them *work*.\(^\text{18}\) He

\(^{18}\) The same could be said of good acting. An older actor once said to me “acting is all about plumbing, it’s about connecting everything up right so things don’t get blocked up”.

contemplates “the convergence of waves and currents” that permeate the house or street or city and make them function in the world. This approach requires that the “image of immobility” of place and space “would then be replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits” (1991: 93). As Lefebvre notes, “space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure” (1991: 94). A dramaturgical approach to place, I suggest, reveals a theatrical morphology in which function and structure are similarly bound in the theatre, both to the art-form and to lived experience in the world.

I apply a dramaturgical analysis of place that focuses not only on the topological formation of place in people’s lived experience, but also on the processes by which place operates (the flows and mobilities) such as Lefebvre suggests. In my case studies I investigate how ideas and constructions of place inform and drive each work and also suggest ways in which such a dramaturgical approach might be extended and enhanced.

In The Drover’s Wives for example, the performers’ bodies are presented as both figure and ground within a number of different iconic Australian settings, based on Lawson’s original story. I interrogate how the piece works with five different bodies to re-map the implacement of multiple Wives within an iconic piece of the Australian literary imagination. I consider the ways in which the production uses dance, multi-media, live music and fragments of the original text to reflect not only on the past, but also on the contemporary, lived experience of Australian women who might be isolated with care and responsibility, in whatever rural or urban situation they find themselves in. I trace the movement between the domestic lives of these five Wives and their embodied experience of a sublime, wider landscape. This dramaturgical play between different experiences of place creates, for me, a strong sense of the struggle women continue to
have with issues of belonging in the Australian landscape and their sense of containment within this culture.

*Yandy* embraces a more conventional, storytelling style. Working with what Paul Carter describes as the ‘lie of the land’ (1996), I argue that *Yandy* crosses a contested social space shared between Indigenous communities and mining/agricultural interests in Western Australia as both parties traverse a rapidly changing economic and cultural landscape. In this discussion I read the ‘flows and mobilities’ of power and history as (I perceive) they contribute to the making of place. I argue that *Yandy* not only represents an historical episode of resistance to capitalist imperatives by Indigenous Australians in the Pilbara in the 1940s, but also presents an opportunity to expand and negotiate the social space shared between the two cultures in the changing circumstances of contemporary Australia. I consider the meanings that occur as ‘extra’ to the text, including the lived experience of the audience and performers, as they re-negotiate this shared social space. I propose that in *Yandy*, an awareness of the body’s active creation of place, beyond the confines of the text and mise en scene, can break open rigid and constricting representational tropes in theatre (and totalising ideological systems in the world) to the indeterminability of the body’s situated, lived experience.

This indeterminacy of bodies in place can and has been mobilised as a resource and critical strategy. Edward Soja works, strategically, to re-spatialise discourse by underlining the importance of the body, nature and the earth. He too draws on Lefebvre’s work to develop a critical approach that he terms “thirding-as-Othering” in order to combat what he considers to be the reductionism of the “lure of the binary, the compacting of meaning into a closed either/or opposition between two terms, concepts, or elements” (1996:60), which he argues is so prevalent in Western modes of representational thinking after Kant and Hegel (1996: 48). He argues that a creative
focus on material bodies in place “begins an expanding chain of heuristic disruptions, strengthening defences against totalizing closure and all ‘permanent constructions’” (Soja, 1996: 61). Such a focus does not seek to resolve or reconcile difference, but rather creates and allows it, questioning and breaking down binaries embedded within culture. I suggest that at its best, live theatre produces narratives of embodied place, ‘thirding-as-Othering’, acknowledging and creating difference, as it goes about its daily business.

I consider how mythical representations of place and space might be imagined by contemporary Australian theatre makers. In a curious twist, the production of *The Odyssey* discussed in Chapter Three recruits Homer’s original story to fashion a version of Australia’s colonial journey toward nationhood. and in doing so, I argue, deliberately reactivates ancient binaries to assert and authenticate a gendered construction of place and space in which the masculine is aligned with conceptual space and given precedence over embodied place. Odysseus is cast in this production as a WWI soldier, is presented as the iconic Australian ‘digger’ returning Home from Troy, (old world Europe), to Ithaca (a version of new world Australia), via the colonial outposts of Empire. He travels over the placeless sea, across unknown feminised landscapes, towards ‘home’ and the waiting Penelope.

I draw on the work of Anne McClintock to investigate the triangulated theme of gender, class and race within colonialism and imperialism to suggest that this play deliberately reactivates ancient binaries which assert and authenticate a gendered construction of place and space in which the masculine is aligned with conceptual space and given

---

19 Irigaray draws on the story of Penelope in this context, claiming that women in a phallocentric culture provide place for men to occupy. Following Irigaray, Casey points out, “to be place as such is to lack a place of one’s own” (1997: 327).
precedence over embodied place.\textsuperscript{20} unwittingly reifies and supports the assertion of a
hegemonic neo-colonial, national state. I consider the contemporary political
implications of the construction of place in theatre as I chart Odysseus’ mythical
journey across the ‘unheimlich’ space of colonial Australia. Within this reading, I map a
journey across the non-places of supermodernity (discussed by Marc Augé (1995)), and
posit that this Odysseus is not so much a returning hero, as an eternally displaced tourist
in his own story.

In all my case studies, I focus on the dynamic indeterminacy of place. In doing so, I
concur with Jeff Malpas who posits that “place does not so much bring a certain politics
with it, as define the very frame within which the political itself must be located” (1999:
198). Malpas argues that place is, in fact, \textit{“integral to the very structure and possibility
of experience”} (1999: 32, original emphasis). It must be conceived, he believes,
“neither in terms of some narrow sense of spatio-temporal location, nor as some sort of
subjective construct, but rather as that wherein the sort of being that is characteristically
human has its grounds” (1999: 33).

Malpas
He emphasises the connection between place and human agency, suggesting that
“grasping the capacities for action” is part of being a body in place (1999: 134) and that
“agency is, in turn, an indispensable element in the structure of subjectivity, so
subjectivity can itself be seen as dependent on spatiality and embodiment” (1999: 136).
Place, according to this reading, becomes a dynamic function with human agency at its
core, bringing all the places of human experience into existence. Theatre built upon
such configurations and indeterminacies of place is an obvious forum for the
exploration of human action and the political, social and emotional forces that motivate
and ensue from such action.

\textsuperscript{20} Irigaray draws on the story of Penelope in this context, claiming that women in a phallocentric culture
\textit{provide} place for men to occupy. Following Irigaray, Casey points out, “to be place as such is to lack a
place of one’s own” (1997: 327).
Throughout the thesis I work with an understanding that cultures and the people they belong to have tendencies and inclinations to make certain places and to inhabit them and understand them in particular ways. I propose that the intimate knowledge we have of ourselves as human beings comes to us as an encultured, qualitative, affect-full narrative of who we are in relation to the things, creatures and people we encounter in the world. The proposition that theatre makes place with the body (and the dramaturgy and poetics of place that arises from this proposition) works then, not only with the political and ethical expression of place, but with the personal aspects and aesthetic experience of place as it is found in feeling and affect, via the senses and embedded within narrative. This connection between narrative and place is, I suggest, fundamental.

Michel De Certeau, in fact, proposes that “[e]very story is a travel story – a spatial practice” and that stories themselves, organise space; “from here (Paris), one goes there (Montargis); this place (a room) includes another (a dream or a memory); etc.” (1984: 115). In my play Orchids and Insects I experiment with narrative as a spatial practice. Rather than structuring my story around the unfolding of event in linear time, events are linked by narrative fault lines that exist across what Plato has describes as choric space. This is a theatrical space “which is eternal and indestructible, which provides a position for everything that comes to be (Timaeus 52)” (in Lehmann 1997: 56). This post-dramatic approach to theatre as a choric rather than necessarily dramatic form implies a status of language defined by a multiplicity of voice, a ‘polylogue’, a deconstruction of fixed meaning, a disobedience of the laws of unity and centred meaning. It amounts to a different kind of architecture and music of the theatre. (Lehmann 1997: 57)

The three different narratives around which the characters interact in my play are ordered in relation and in proximity to each other across lines of affect, feeling and thematic association rather than along pathways of a more conventional epic narrative
or dramatic structure. The logic of choric space does not work to produce a complete, fixed and singular unity. Instead, the characters in Orchids and Insects are placed so that they might resonate against each other as multiplicities within a virtual world where anything might happen.

I also mobilise post-dramatic strategies that foreground the body and the way meaning is constructed around the body in place. In The More I Study Nature: Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity I use the narrative of Georgiana’s story to map what I believe to be a version of a ‘minoritarian becoming’. I draw upon her experiences in Australia as she collects indigenous flora and sends them back to Kew Botanical Gardens to be categorised within the Linnaean system of plant taxonomy. Using the core conceit of a performative exhibit to set a pulse between notions of transformative ‘encounter’ of art and the necessarily reductive scientific process of ‘observation’, I compare what can be known through observation with what we can come to know through affective experience. In doing this, I hope to contribute to a poetics and dramaturgy of place that demonstrates that it is possible to understand something in theory (by means of observation, calculation and discursive analysis) and at the same time, to risk one’s own sense of self in an unsettling encounter with that thing, as it is situated in performance (expressed in place through feeling and affect, and accessed via the body).

My proposition that theatre makes place with the body promotes an active awareness and commitment to understanding ourselves as embodied creatures that can only ever experience our lives in place. This proposition activates the political, ethical, aesthetic and personal dimensions that adhere to place in theatre. I consider that this awareness of the indeterminability of place constitutes an emergent poetics which can be purposefully pursued as a dramaturgical strategy in theatre. Such a strategy calls for an understanding
of the interconnected, contingent and often divergent dynamic of places and place-making and of the bodies that bring these places into being. I propose that such a poetics unites bodies and minds to the conceptual possibilities, material consequences and ethical dimensions of what it is to be in place in the world and to what might yet be imagined.

Body and soul in theatre

Throughout the thesis I consider the connections between theatre and philosophy in order to develop the possibility of applying philosophical ideas of place as embodied dramaturgical tools. I propose that these two ways of examining the world, philosophy and theatre, have since the time of Ancient Greece been thoroughly entwined, both of them teasing out and tying down Western understandings of how the body and mind are situated in culture and in place. In Chapter One, I draw on the story of Penelope, the figure from the great Homeric epic of *The Odyssey*, and posit that just as Penelope is awarded only a minor place in the pantheon of Homeric myth, so theatre might be understood as a minor but nevertheless, important player within the wide landscape of Western culture, an embodied *place* that is, that exists within a culture that seems pre-occupied with an on-going fascination with conceptual *space*.21

---

21 Conceptual space conceived by Emmanuel Kant, is, according to Casey, not only all-embracing but also all-consuming, remaining unappeased in its insatiable appetite for ingesting places, along with the positions and points to which places themselves get reduced in the course of the two centuries that compose the modern era. (1997: 193)

Casey adds that the attraction of such space lies in the fact that “is not only measurable and predictable (hence mathematizable) but altogether ‘passable.’ Like the metaphysical dove invoked at the beginning of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, one imagines oneself cleaving the air of infinite space freely and without hindrance” (1997: 339). He does concede, however, with a glimmer of hope, that “despite the seduction of endless space (and the allure of serial time), place is beginning to escape from its entombment in the cultural and philosophical underworld of the modern West” (197: 339).
In her book *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy* (1995), Adriana Caverero argues that the threads that the philosopher Penelope, (mentioned by Plato in his *Phaedo*) weaves together and then pulls apart in her perpetual labour as she awaits Odysseus’ return, are the threads of body and soul, and that the time Penelope takes for herself as she weaves and unwraps her thread is time taken outside of the dominant epic. What occurs within Penelope’s weaving time, the time she quarantines, follows her own inclinations and tendencies. According to Caverero, with this weaving and unwrapping, Penelope has created for herself a powerful and potentially subversive *place* within her own largely invisible Western epic, one that acknowledges the importance of the body in place while at the same time dares to disentangle the body from place through conscious effort and daring, as a means to her own ends.

Drawing on this alternative reading of Homer’s myth, I argue that theatre’s weaving and unwrapping of meaning on the body creates a similarly powerful and potentially subversive *place* for itself within Western metaphysics. This metaphysics has traditionally eschewed the finite, fleshy places of the body and instead yearned for the universal certainties and disembodied ideals of the mind and spirit. I believe that meaning made in embodied place offers an alternative paradigm within Western metaphysics, one which relies upon and values the body with all its earthly limitations.

Further to this, I propose that place as it is expressed in theatre is especially capable of subverting and renewing culture in unpredictable ways that are, like Penelope’s metaphysical weaving, constructed across the both the body and the mind.

A poetics of place that mediates bodies and the environment in what is understood as a reciprocal encounter, one that acknowledges “a renewed respect for the body’s presence” (Casey 1997: 339-340) and opens the body up to a face-to-face, living, breathing encounter with all life forms that share that environment, is vital to a liveable
future for us all. Theatre, I believe, can act as a midwife to such a rebirth of place and
can facilitate a renewed respect for bodily presence in place and in life.
Chapter one

Triple capture of place

The primacy of place is not that of the place, much less of this place or a place (not even a very special place) - all these locutions imply place-as-simple-presence - but that of being an event capable of implacing things in many complex manners and to many complex effects. (Casey, 1997: 337)
The ‘here and now’ that constitutes place within theatre is indeed a complex, multifaceted notion. In this chapter, I propose that theatre becomes a triple capture of place. This triple capture consists of the context surrounding the performance; this context includes the architectural, geographic, social, economic and political environment that make up the place in which the performance occurs. Another capture involves the imaginary and symbolic places built upon the play text and laid out in dialogue, stage direction, and design. A final capture of place works with the affect, energy and materiality of people and their bodies, that occurs during the performance. This capture happens in breath and rhythm, sweat, flesh, movement and effort and the accidents and occurrences that happen in life and in the theatre. This embodied capture of place comes alive for the audience and for the actors as they experience the imagined realities of the performance and the physical realities of it as it is constructed around them. It is not necessarily confined to the time of the performance, but reaches back into the rehearsal room, and after the performance; this capture exists in the bodies of the performers and the audience and their combined and co-emergent perception and reception of the work as it unfolds in time.

Embodied meaning within this triple capture of place is not something caught solely within representation, but relayed by the energy of the bodies involved, across all three articulations of place. The connection between audience and actors in performance is, I suggest, something like an entwining double helix. The bodies involved create a living place, for the duration of the performance, in their interaction with both the imaginary,  

---

22 I have adapted to place in theatre what Brian Massumi applies to architecture, discussed below. (Massumi, 2007: np) I formulate this triple capture as a model to assist my own understanding of the ways in which different notions of place can work as dramaturgical tools in theatre. I do not intend to suggest a set of philosophical distinctions with this model, but rather, hope that it might provide an entry point to a dramaturgy of place.
symbolic places held by the text and mise en scene and the real world places provided by the built environment and social context in which the performance is held.\textsuperscript{23}

Across this active triple capture, the places and spaces of theatre are constantly in a process of transformation. Gay McAuley notes in \textit{Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre} (1999) that “[t]he specificity of theatre … exists essentially of the interaction between performers and spectators in a given space” (1999: 5). Building upon this, it could be said that the specificity of place within theatre lies in the dynamic of theatricality or, (after Lefebvre) in the theatrical morphology between place and space, as it plays out upon the bodies of performers and spectators; it is the force of theatricality that determines how place and space are organised in theatre.

Somewhat similarly, Michel de Certeau describes space as “practiced place” (1984: 117, original italics) and proposes that stories … carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organise the play of changing relationships between places and spaces. (1984: 118)

Within this formulation of practiced place, theatre space and the narratives that are told there provide not so much \textit{where}, but \textit{how} place is practised in theatre. (Bodies ultimately supply the where.) The spatial dynamic played out upon the bodies of performers and spectators organises the field of possibility and ‘changing relationships’ within all the possible story-telling places of theatre. Understanding this dynamic, and the articulations of place across which it occurs provides an entry point into a

\textsuperscript{23} Although the bodies of audience and performers create the place of performance, I suggest that a theatre space can also be considered to be psychically active, attuned and primed for creative transformations. For example, spaces like La Mama in Melbourne, which is tiny, has paint layered inches thick on the walls, built up from set design after set design after nearly thirty years of constant activity. The history of work, whether good or bad, resonates in such a space and provides a fully charged environment within which actors, writers, directors and designers can pursue their art in a positive environment. Jane Goodall writes of the non-place of the traditional stage, as a “psychically sterile” quarantined space that is set aside and “freed of local identity, so that it can be any place” (2006: 112-113). Such spaces, she suggests, invite bad acting (2006: 117). Paul Carter also criticises the flattened out space of agora, or later the mead hall, where poets sing the same songs over and over (1996: 308). His assessment is mentioned in my analysis of \textit{Yandy} in Chapter 2.
dramaturgy of place. These transformations become a dramaturgy of place (and space) that I interrogate in later chapters of this thesis, and in my creative work.

The notion of *duration* is a philosophical concept that can be usefully applied within the poetics of place in performance that I also wish to develop. It refers not just to the time it takes to repeat or reproduce a performance that is already fixed and proscribed: rather it is “the ‘field’ in which difference lives and plays itself out” (Grosz, 2005: 4). In her article “Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming” Grosz notes that

> duration is that which undoes as well as what makes: to the extent that duration entails an open future, it involves the fracturing and opening up of the past and the present to what is virtual in them, to what in them differs from the actual, to what in them can bring forth the new. (2005: 4)

Echoing the action of Penelope’s weaving, the action of making and unmaking in performance opens the actor’s body to the bodies in the auditorium, for the duration of the performance, working actively to create a shared experience of being in place that is unique to that moment. I argue that this notion of duration also extends (in a non-linear way) to rehearsal processes, where actors interact with each other, making place, and where different versions of an audience are more or less implied by the ‘outside eye’ of the director and in the actor’s own understanding of how their craft works for the audience. Similarly, once the performance has run its course, the embodied memory of what has happened, continues the effect of the performance into the future.

Bert O. States talks about “the first four seconds” of encounter with an art object, that moment of “perceptual explosion” when meaning and feeling arise in direct response to the work (1992: 370). He refers to the “moment” – soon or late – in which an object or an image establishes itself in our perception as something, as [the poet] Shelley puts it, that “creates for us a being within our being [and] compels us to feel that which we perceive.” He reminds us “it is beside the point to claim that the first four seconds are always tainted by a lifetime of perceptual habit within a narrow cultural frame. It is only the moment of absorption that counts. (1992: 370)
I suggest that this ‘moment of absorption’ does not necessarily occur during a performance, or even in four seconds; the bruising or moment of ‘punctum’ (as Roland Barthes might put it) can happen over time, like a slow burn. It is, I believe, at the point when the audience member is actually affected, moved, shifted and changed by the performance that the real encounter with art occurs and something other than a mere opinion is formed.

So if in one way, the ‘here and now’ of theatre is absolutely here and now in a material, embodied sense, what people do in theatres, the actions they take and the energy that they create and experience is, paradoxically, at the same time, capable of moving beyond the here and now in order to create a ‘here and now’ of the ‘there and then’. This is topological expression of place is one that exists in the realm of the virtual; it is one to which the audience member might yet come to, ‘– soon or late –’ and when and if it is come to, it will happen in context and via the body, across a triple capture of place.

As I have suggested, the ‘there and then’ of bodies in place is never fixed or given but indeterminate and constantly emerging. In theatre, this means that place is not just a place to be, but a place that the performer and/or audience member (as mentioned above) might possibly come to. As in life, this “virtual dimension” of place also provides “an indefinite horizon of … possible action” (Casey, 1997: 232, original italics) that unfolds as one of many potential outcomes. Even if the narrative remains the same during every performance, meaning unfolds in time and in place uniquely and to different effect for every body who experiences it. (As Heraclites says, you cannot step in the same river twice.) I argue that this indeterminacy provides an ethical dimension to a dramaturgy and poetics of place that actively produces difference (rather than a mimetic reproduction of something already existing) across all the embodied
places of performance. The creation of difference in theatre, I maintain, hinges upon this
notion of the virtual. The active production of difference is something I aim to highlight
via the triple capture of place within theatre.

By its dynamic triple capture of place, theatre combines the material, phenomenological
and symbolic expressions of place in ways that link the body and places made by the
body into a signifying and sensory system across and against a background of the
virtual. This complex relationship is interrogated throughout this thesis for two reasons:
firstly, because I believe that a better understanding of how theatre makes place with the
body can contribute to a dynamic dramaturgical awareness of the practiced places of
theatre and thereby create a better, place-aware theatre; secondly, in an increasingly
fragile, place-challenged world, an understanding of theatre’s virtual ‘here and now’ of
the ‘there and then’ and our embodied, responsible place within it is especially capable
of addressing the deep complexities at play in the places in the world that we are
currently constructing for ourselves and for those who come after us.

The virtual dimension of place

Brian Massumi studies the potential of virtuality to provide a way of dealing with
continuity across the abstract and the concrete. This continuity relies on movement and
change occurring across and between both states. He suggests that the

problem with the dominant models in cultural and literary theory is not that they
are too abstract to grasp the concreteness of the real. The problem is that they are
not abstract enough to grasp the real incorporeality of the concrete. (2002: 5,
original italics)

Setting out to “get a grasp on the real-material-but-incorporeal” through the medium of
the body, he sees that the body (like place) is an indeterminate thing that includes the
incorporeal as “something like a phase-shift” existing in virtuality, as the “conversion or unfolding of the body *contemporary* to its every move. Always accompanying. Fellow-travelling dimension of the same reality” (2002: 5, original italics). This incorporeality of the body is brought about by the movement, change and variation that are part of being alive. It is I suggest, in the movement between the virtual and the actual, the corporeal and the incorporeal that place, like the body, attains its inherent dynamism.

Massumi applies what he calls “an ontology of the virtual”\(^{24}\) across the plane of immanence to the emerging forms and functions that architecture takes over time.\(^{25}\) The plane of immanence holds the concepts that exist in this virtuality away from pure chaos by giving them consistency across the entire plane into infinity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 37). All those potentialities that have not been actualised still lie across the plane of immanence, pulsing with more or less resonance, teased into and out of existence by whatever tendencies are at play. They are the virtual events, lying immanent, that are just as real as actual events but have not, or have not yet been instantiated. I draw on this ontology and apply it to theatre in order to more fully explore the potential for change that lies within the aesthetic, political and cultural dimensions of the ‘here and now’ of the ‘then and there’. Following Massumi, I suggest that theatre produces concepts across a plane of immanence and that these exist, along with the body in place (as co-travellers), for the duration of the performance.


\(^{25}\) Deleuze and Guattari include a chapter “The Plane of Immanence” (1994: 35-60) in their last book written together, *What is Philosophy?* (1994) in which this idea is discussed. They describe the plane of consistency (or immanence) across which concepts exist, as one that operates within the notion of *event*: The plane is the horizon of events, the reservoir or reserve of purely conceptual events: not the relative horizon that functions as a limit, which changes with an observer and encloses observable states of affairs, but the absolute horizon, independent of any observer, which makes the event as concept independent of a visible state of affairs in which it is brought about. (1994: 36)

This notion of *event* is discussed at greater length later in this chapter.
Massumi proposes that in architecture such an ontology works a triple articulation of meaning with the forms a building takes across time. This dynamic, temporal form of architecture occurs in phases: those phases being firstly, design, then built or static form, and finally, the building responding and yielding to the demands of the living body and to the environment within which it is situated. Massumi describes each phase as a “capture of the same phylum” that is expressed differently (2007: np). This is not a sealed process of homeopoiesis that refers and changes only in accordance to itself, but rather an entirely open function of heteropoiesis involving dynamic encounters with the world at large. Architecture described in this way enters the world not as a definitive statement but as an opening remark in an on-going conversation. The life of the building, according to this ‘ontology of the virtual’, opens out to the world in active encounter, in place, within a range of contexts.

Foucault scholar Paul Hirst frames architecture somewhat similarly as a discursive event. His analysis can also be usefully applied to the way meaning is made in theatre with the body and with the mind. Following Foucault, he posits a theory/praxis nexus in which buildings are seen as statements, and discourse is “part of the order of statements” (1993: 53). He connects this idea directly with bodies as they inhabit the buildings, that is, with the life of the building in the world. According to this reading of discourse, there is no distinction between “a brick and a word; both may be elements of a discourse” (1993: 52). Foucault, Hirst claims

extends the concepts of statement and discourse from their confinement within the realm of ideas. Discursive formations can be complex structures of discourse-practice in which physical objects and activities are defined and constructed within the domain of a discursive formation. (1993:52)

I suggest that this discourse as practice also applies to theatre and to all the elements of theatre across the three articulations of place, with each articulation being ‘part of the order of statements,’ in an on-going conversation within culture.
If a theatre production is considered in the same way as a building, the “capture of the same phylum” that Massumi activates within his ‘ontology of the virtual’ can not only be applied to the triple capture of place, but also can be used to describe the temporal phases of theatrical process in the creation and performance of a work, that is, in the conception, execution and on-going life of a play or production. In an exponential complication (that I hope my model can withstand), these phases are all, in themselves, different expressions within a triple capture of place. In theatre, each temporal phase takes a different material form (and occurs with a varying configuration and speed) to architecture; nevertheless both disciplines work through similar heteropoetic creative principles.

The “ontology of the virtual”, Masumi asserts, must be considered as a “performative measure [my italics]” of engagement with a range of contingencies as they exist in place, in society, and not as crystallised content or fixed meaning that exists a priori the event (Massumi, 2007: np). This approach to virtuality is particularly useful in a theatrical application because it wrestles the emphasis of a work away from meaning held as text, or manifested as form, or style, something static and repeatable. Instead it places the ‘performative measure’ of the theatre back into the encounter between audience and creators, measured against the state of affairs in which they all find themselves.26 This performative measure occurs across the many different planes of consistency, including the aesthetic, ethical, political and social, and across every capture of place. Meaning and the theatrical form meaning takes, is in this way, liberated from the bounds of representation because it resides in the intermingling of bodies and event, in a textual, theatrical, embodied, co-emergent and indeterminate encounter in art.

26 Deleuze and Guattari write “From virtuals we descend to actual states of affairs, and from states of affairs we ascend to virtuals, without being able to isolate one from the other” (1994: 60), emphasising the constant state of movement between the two dimensions.
Massumi encourages strategic involvement with each phase transition, with a focus on
indeterminacy and on the potential of surplus value. This model of working
imaginatively and self-reflexively with virtual and made-up versions of real
environments in the theatre, that is, with the infinite varieties of the ‘there and then’ of
the ‘here and now’ (that exist across the plane of immanence and are actualised in
place), will be applied and pursued throughout the thesis, in the belief that such a model
can be used as a tactical response to the complex and fast-changing environments of the
twenty-first century.27

The event

Places remember events. (James Joyce).

Echoing the approach of many Western feminists, Elizabeth Grosz has consistently
rejected the notion that “the human subject [is] a being [] made up of two
dichotomously opposed characteristics: mind and body, thought and extension, reason
and passion, psychology and biology” (1994: 3). She objects to such culturally
entrenched “bifurcation” because “one becomes the privileged term and the other is
suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart” (1994:3). Her early work, *Volatile
Bodies* (1994) employs the image of the moebius strip to connect body and mind.
Instead of privileging either term, she proposes that body and mind are equally

---
27 This model, in principle, resembles the feminist approach to mimesis suggested by Elin Diamond in
*Unmasking Mimesis*. “If there is such a thing”, she suggests, this feminist mimesis
would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not to
reproducing the same. It would explore the tendency to tyrannical modelling
(subjective/ideological projections masquerading as universals truths), even in its own
operation. Finally, it would clarify the humanist sedi-mentation in the concept as a means
of releasing the historical particularity and transgressive corporeality of the mimos, who,
in mimesis, is always more and different than she seems. (1997: xvi)
implicated in making meaning in the world. It could be said that the mutually self-productive relationship that exits between body and place also challenges such a bifurcation, and that the meanings created between body and place in theatre constitute, following Grosz and the logic of the moebius strip, an event.

The event is illustrated in my model of the triple capture of place in the intertwining double helix of the audience and actors coming together for the duration of the performance. Claire Colebrook proposes that “it is through the active event of discursive procedures that positions or selves are effected” (1999:175, my italics). If performance can be considered a discursive formation, as I argue it certainly can, then place in theatre can be understood as an event where ‘positions or selves are effected’.

Colebrook, in fact, describes a process that can be applied directly to the event of meaning-making in theatre, whereby meaning is effected by a transfer, through thought and through bodily experience, from one body to another, and that this process makes a difference in the world. Such a process occurs, not just symbolically, or in the virtual world of ‘as if’ … but actually. Following Deleuze, Colebrook points out that thinking and meaning are positive and differential: not the replications of some prior presence but forms of force and difference in themselves … The event is not the replication of being – as a copy or double – it is a force in its own right … The event is not meaning; it is that passage or path from the corporeal to the incorporeal. The event is just this passage or creation of sense. (1999: 174 -175)

This paradigm of process (not product) occurs in theatre via an enculturated, political and ethical poetics of place, in the embodied act of making and interpreting meaning.

Within the poetics of place that I develop, this process does not work through universalising imperatives and ideologies of disembodied space but rather sets up the conditions of an embodied place-aware environment within which difference can be experienced and created positively. It is an action or a practice, a ‘contracted habit’.

Such an approach has possibilities across a range of environments and circumstances. It
critiques the frame of mind (or the image of thought) that has historically brought about the estrangement of place from space and instead encourages a conscious interaction across that pervasive bifurcation, so deeply embedded within Western culture.

Again theorising a situation that could be specifically theatrical, Grosz maps the event as that crucial moment when (not binaries but) multiple singularities intersect or occur in the vicinity of each other in order to form something entirely new in the world.

Events, Grosz reminds us, do not provide solutions for problems they merely provide the field through which a solution may be found. They

   generate ways of living, the realignment and transformation of habits and practices. The solution is a practice, a mode of addressing these problems through concepts, which are both generated by their own practices (in philosophy, the sciences, the arts) and which in turn infiltrate and affect other practices. (2005: 160)

Such problems, Grosz explains, also get the solutions they deserve.

Theatre operating as an event is at its best when it poses interesting and useful problems via interesting and useful practices. (I believe that a poetics of place provides such a practice.) It uses a specifically embodied modality to address how we might effect and inhabit possible scenarios in performance. Seen as an event, the practice of making place in theatre does not merely re/present some ideal image or essential state, something exterior to itself, but actively creates interior and exterior, connects and intertwines them across time, within (as I propose here) a triple capture of place. In this sense, place as it is found in theatre, is always a ‘doing thing’ rather than a ‘describing thing’; it is in the business of producing difference rather than merely referring to it.

Theatre conceived of in this way, presents a working example of a poetics of place where meaning is active and emergent, not only, or rather not just a product or representation, but a process of bodily activity in art.
Within a poetics of place, theatre as an Event with a capital E (as well as a series of small events in performance) can be seen as a place-filled proving ground or arena for the ‘passage or path from the corporeal to the incorporeal’. Good theatre manages numerous corporeal to incorporeal transitions with grace and acuity, whereas bad theatre does not. The artistic challenge within a poetics of place in theatre requires that place is operational and active and appealing so that theatricality (that is the transition of place to space and space to place) can affect an audience. Theatre can be seen, perhaps, as a way of framing such a poetic, providing a working model or a proof of concept, as it were, across an array of situations that might also apply outside of the theatre. I argue that dramaturgical strategies revealed within a poetics of place, work not only for the sake of theatre, but also for the sake of place.

An ontological twist

Deleuze and Guattari note, significantly, that “art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts” (1994: 66). Theatre enters the paradoxical, ontological twist between being and doing, and thinking about being and doing, through the medium of the body.28 Its triple articulation of place, across text and social and geographical circumstance is driven by and finds its energy and coherence in affect and

---

28 In “Performance Studies and Po-change’s Ox: Steps to a Paradoxology of Performance” (2006), Baz Kershaw reviews Jon McKenzie’s Perform or Else and Richard Schechner’s Performance Studies: An Introduction, and comments on the state of Performance Studies. He coins the phase paradoxology to describe the immersive, ‘being and doing’ entanglement of theatre and of life:

This paradoxology suggests that, just as performance is constitutive of hominids in performative societies, so paradox may be constitutive of performance in many of its guises. If this is the case, if paradox characterises some key aspects of human performance, it would seem not unreasonable to claim that performance may produce the paradoxical primate. (2006: 31).

He offers a paradoxical quote from John Cage who said; “I’m saying nothing; and I’m saying it” (2006: 42).
percept, (accessed by the body). The body in this formulation becomes the assemblage or machine through which the energy of ‘affect and percept’ is expressed.29

Perhaps not surprisingly, this process of energy transfer from what might be limitless chaos in the universe to a semblance of order within a theatrical production, has proved, throughout the ages, to be a source of continual fascination for both philosophy and theatre, and has also been a source of demarcation dispute between the two disciplines. Martin Puchner notes, “from Plato to Hegel, there ranges a heterogeneous tradition of thought that is deeply intertwined with the theatre, if in an often conflictual manner” (2002: 521). It could be said (extending Puchner’s continuum into the twentieth century) that performance plays a central role within Deleuze’s philosophical writing, while he, at the same time, seems to maintain an ambivalence toward it. Puchner points out that this is particularly evident in *Difference and Repetition*, which stresses the importance of theatre as a “presentational, as opposed to representational” art form (Deleuze in Puchner, 2002: 525). Deleuze, it seems, is at pains to distance himself from any mimetic function of theatre, instead championing

the eventful presence of live performance, a theatre consisting of ‘unmediated movement,’ ‘pure forces,’ ‘gestures,’ and ‘spectres and phantoms,’ a theatre without prewritten text and ‘without actors’ … In other words, Deleuze must insist on the theatre as a performing art and repress the function of the theatre as a (representational) medium. (Puchner, 2002: 525)

29 The machinic quality of the actor’s task, is evident in Rousseau’s vituperative remarks, as they are paraphrased here by Derrida:

The actor is born out of the rift between the representor and the represented. Like the alphabetic signifier, like the letter, the actor himself is not inspired or animated by any particular language. He signifies nothing. He hardly lives, he lends his voice. It is a mouthpiece … [they] make a duty of saying what they do not think. (Derrida in States, 1987: 107)

This interpretation of the actor’s task in this case locked within a representational model, obviously does not consider the effect of bodily presence and the embodied, interpretative and theatrical skill of the actor. What is also omitted is also the virtual/physical dimension within which that ephemeral quality of charisma exists. It might also be that the actor in this case is becoming-imperceptible, which might in fact be an indication not only of great transformative skill, but of radical indeterminacy.
It is one thing to use theatre as metaphor within philosophy, but another entirely to make a philosophical idea work in performance. 30 I find it difficult to imagine exactly what the revolutionary theatrical event ‘without actors’ described by Deleuze would look like on stage or why it would necessarily be a good thing to jettison representation entirely. I argue instead for an additive, more pragmatic approach; an approach that allows breath and dialogue between representation and what might lie beyond. The test of success or failure of an artwork (and therefore its efficacy across a range of criteria, be they philosophical, literary, theatrical, ethical or political) is whether it has created a shared ontological ground in its encounter with an audience. It is this performative measure (illustrated by the double helix of my model) of theatre across the range of articulations of place, which gives a work of art life and brings it into meaningful existence in the world, in whatever context or form.

Similarly, I maintain that the power of theatre lies in the force of feeling and affect it can exchange with its audience for the duration of the performance. In this formulation, the force of affect held by the body in place in performance does not only depend on what is already known and might be recognised, or what might be written about it subsequently or even beforehand, but rather exists in that transforming free-fall of involvement that is facilitated and released in the moment of encounter. Barouch Spinoza wrote about the overwhelming nature of affect in a way that I believe can be usefully applied to an encounter with an artwork. He explains that:

An affect toward a thing we imagine to be free is greater than that toward a thing we imagine to be necessary, and consequently is still greater than that toward a thing we imagine as possible or contingent. But imagining a thing as free can be nothing but simply imagining it while we are ignorant of the causes by which it has been determined to act. Therefore, an affect toward a thing we imagine simply is, other things equal, greater than that toward a thing we imagine as

30 Puchner acknowledges Deleuze’s well known debt to Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and its “violent and uncompromising critique of dramatic masterworks, and, by extension, of the dramatic text” itself (Puchner, 2002: 525).
necessary, possible, or contingent. Hence, it is greatest of all. (Spinoza, in Agamben, 1990: 104.5)

Within a thesis that aims to combine and entwine theoretical readings of place and the creation of place in the theatre, it must be pointed out that my embodied ‘actorly’ understanding of place came to me through a storytelling tradition that existed before the academy, before philosophy in fact, before Plato and his cave, before Aristotle and his unities of time, place and action. Such a tradition has been making complex, ‘affect-full’, conceptual meanings in place, before writing was invented to write about it.

I do not for a minute want to pitch philosophical or academic traditions against the place-productive meaning-making and embodied understanding that is activated in the theatre, but I would like to signal my acknowledgement of the intertwining complementarity of these two forms and, if not to touch on their sibling rivalry, then at least to mention their birth order. Given this, I believe it is useful to retrace the shared journey of philosophy and theatre, back to the days of Ancient Greece in order to visit again and better understand the forces at play between them. To this end, I reconsider a foundational myth from Ancient Greece from a different perspective in order to explore an embodied and mindful poetics of place that has, I suggest, lain dormant for too long within the imagination of the West.

**Penelope’s room**

She retraces her steps  
For her the experience  
Of the Frontier  
Is the raging water at the shore-  
For Odysseus the crash,  
And a dreadful death  
Against the rocks, into legend  
(Bianca Torozzi, in Cavarero 1995: 20)
Penelope sits in her room and weaves. As she and her handmaidens work, they create a force field of combined effort. This work done so painstakingly during the day is let loose at night. Unpicked, undone, until the bare threads are left, to be woven again from scratch. The next day the performance is repeated. Penelope’s work is to all accounts useless, unproductive, and yet it holds together the threads of something far larger than a mere woven picture or piece of fabric. Her work is political, serious, clever, strategic and inventive. It takes time and is far from heroic in a conventional sense, but for twenty years, it keeps body and soul together. Penelope’s weaving in fact, allows her a place to call her own. I would like to compare Penelope’s weaving to the theatre and the kind of weaving together of mind and body, in place, that happens in theatres. There are, I believe, many similarities between Penelope’s weaving and theatre, most important of which, to my mind at least, lies in the compromised position that they both take within the story of philosophy.

The weaving of Penelope and the work of the theatre are similarly time consuming, crafted and executed by real bodies working with and against each other; individual threads each combine to make up a whole. Theatre is a weaving together of story, real and virtual bodies across a framework of time. Theatre, like Penelope’s weaving, requires collaboration, attention to detail and a sense of purpose tied to a commitment to live in the moment. Both are put together painstakingly during the day and spun out during performance or in the darkness of night. In some ways this analogy may seem counterintuitive, in that the common image of the creative process entails a weaving together of threads to make meaning. I propose, however, that it is in the act of letting

31 Deleuze and Guattari use this metaphor of weaving between body and mind in their description of the operation of the plane of immanence:

The plane of immanence has two facets as Thought and as Nature, as Nous and as Physis.
That is why there are always many infinite movements caught within each other, each folded in the others, so that the return of one instantaneously relaunches another in such a way that the plane of immanence is ceaselessly being woven, like a gigantic shuttle.
(1994: 38)
go the threads of meanings in performance that their affect is transferred. It is an embodied process of release and response across the auditorium and the stage. In theatre there is nothing much left at the end of the evening but the ephemeral proposition ‘what if’ and the promise that the same story will be told at the same time and same place, across a similar collection of bodies, tomorrow.\textsuperscript{32}

This does not of course mean that what happens in theatres has no durable effect. This very ephemerality presents an unsettling challenge to the authority of the material world and to vested interests of sedimented power. In fact, the existence of her own strange, ‘no man’s land’ kingdom is maintained by this daily and nightly process. In the same way that Penelope’s work of weaving and unweaving has serious consequences for Penelope and her court, theatre’s ephemeral ‘what if’, built with careful consideration and mindful intent, may also have lasting repercussions and deeply felt significance for an audience. Given the importance of Penelope’s occupation and the analogy I aim to draw between her weaving and the theatre, it is perhaps useful to examine more closely the hidden dynamics at play within this woman’s minor role in the great Western Odyssey, and perhaps, in the process, to draw some connections with the minor role of theatre in its own Western Odyssey.

To recap the story: while Odysseus is away at sea, perhaps never to return to Ithaca, Penelope’s weaving is constructed to keep the men who have come as suitors in his place at bay. By day she weaves a cloth with the promise that when it is finished she will marry again. At night she unravels all the woven threads in order to actively maintain a world of her own choosing, “rendering futile what little she has done, she weaves her impenetrable time. This extended intermission becomes an absolute time

\textsuperscript{32} Kershaw posits that the durable ephemerality of theatre is one of its many paradoxical twists. He quotes Ionesco, saying “only the ephemeral is of lasting value”, and Heraclitus asserting “it is in changing that things find repose” and comes up with his own statement of performance paradox: “Performance always endures its ephemerality” (2006: 42). This perspective takes into account the intense feeling that an audience may be left with as residue after the ephemeral ‘what if’ of performance is over.
removed from history’s events” (Caverero, 1995: 14), and also, as history would have it, from the phallocentric code that is not entirely her own. When Odysseus finally returns, beggared and bereft, Penelope does not recognise him. He is displaced. It is only when he slays her suitors and hangs her handmaidens by their necks from a tree outside the palace, that he wrenches back control of kingdom. By this bare-faced, merciless violence, the phallocentric code is restored and the king can get back to being the centre of his own story. Odysseus is free to journey again to another far distant elsewhere and Penelope’s story is, for all intents and purposes, well and truly over. Or is it? Caverero asks us to consider once again what other legacy Penelope’s story might have hidden, what other resonances and potential (virtual) forces her story might hold. Drawing on this feminist re-reading of Penelope’s Odyssey, I too intend to investigate what I believe to be a similar hidden power within theatre (and by implication, in place and in the body) that has been operating quietly but effectively throughout the many epochs of Western thought.

In order to tease out this notion of theatre as the occupation of Penelope’s invisible loom, I first need to investigate the dynamics of the philosophical principles operating in Penelope’s story. Caverero steals the figures and tropes that Plato (and a raft of subsequent male philosophers) has taken to populate his stories and extrapolate his themes. She liberates these figures from the confines of the “phallocentric code that sustains the male symbolic system” (Braidotti in Caverero, 1995: xii).33 The female figures within a story of the phallocracy for the most part play minor roles in the larger

---
33 According to Braidotti
the distinguishing feature of phallocracy is precisely the fact that it negates, denies, and wilfully obliterates the feminine, appropriating entirely the process of making meaning. Instead of recognising the embodied, sexed, and corporeal nature of the living beings, phallocratic thinking replaces the maternal origin with the highly abstract notion of man being at the origin of himself. This is a cerebral reappropriation of origin by man, which condemns the feminine to a subsidiary position of necessarily silenced other. (1995: xvii)
stories of men. Having brought them out of the phallocentric cave (as it were), Caverero considers with fresh eyes the metaphors that are embedded in their stories.34

Rather than work forensically to reclaim some lost or hidden essence within these female figures, or undertake a Herculean construction of some alternative system of signification, Caverero explores what Deleuze and Guattari might call the myriad “becoming-minoritarian of every-body” (1987: 10-106) that are sometimes made possible through small, subversive acts of liberation. Penelope plays a minor part in Homer’s epic. Unlike her husband Odysseus, she is not the main character but is part of the supporting framework of a cast of characters who must play their more or less minor parts appropriately in order for the major stakeholder (Odysseus) to take centre stage as the stable constant, the focus against which others may measure and mark themselves. Minor figures once liberated from other people’s big stories have no foregone conclusion towards which they must travel. No one has written their story and so these figures are free to impose their own standards upon a turn of events. Such minor subjects once liberated are unstable; they are a threat to authority and to those who seek to impose their own, (majoritarian) happy endings on other people’s stories.

To be in a such a minority is not necessarily to be a fixed subject among a grouping of other subjects, nor is it defined by the weight of numerical value, that is, being fewer in

---

34In Unmaking Mimesis, (1997) Elin Diamond puts ancient stories under similar pressure when she draws upon Irigaray’s work on mimesis and theatre. She notes that Irigaray wittily retrieves and confirms Plato’s worst fears about theatre, female duplicity, and, by implication, maternity. Platonic philosophy wants to place man’s origins, not in the dark uncertain cave, but in his recognition of the (Father’s) light. The philosopher wants to forget – wants to prove illusory – his female origins. Irigaray turns that wish into a playfully anarchic scenario; philosophic man discovers that, horrifically, his mother is a theatre. (1997: xi)

Diamond mentions Irigaray’s ironic reference to Plato’s phallocentric cave as the “womb/theatre”. She states that Irigaray makes explicit the birth metaphors implicit in Plato, [and] exchanges the metaphor for metonymy; cave as embedded enclosure becomes the womb or hystera embedded in the maternal body/earth. And this hystera, by Plato’s own account, is nothing less than a fully operational theatre.” (1997: xi, original italics)

This interplay of mimesis and metonymy within a theatrical reading of place is something I elaborate further in my chapter, ‘The Drover’s Wives’.
number than those in the majority; but rather being minoritarian involves taking a particular position towards power across a range of potential (virtual) subjectivities, which are liable, under certain conditions, to change and transform. I suggest that like Penelope who creates a time and place of her own with her covert act of weaving and weaving, the embodied weaving of meaning across time and space in theatre creates a site of potential subversion.\textsuperscript{35} Such minoritarian-becoming are not always revolutionary, neither are they evolutionary; rather they encourage minor players to follow their own logic and make their own way, or as the Deleuze and Guattari might say, to ‘reterritorialize’ majoritarian power (1987: 105 -107, 238 - 239).\textsuperscript{36}

It is never a foregone conclusion where this will lead, but the “continuous variation, as an amplitude that continually oversteps the representative threshold of the majoritarian standard, by excess or default” defines such a becoming, and ensures an adaptive response to whatever contingencies may arise (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 106).

Outcomes under such conditions may not provide ‘happy endings’, but they are always emergent and on-going, suit the purposes of those doing the becoming, and are woven in their own time.

\textsuperscript{35} Writing of the difference between major and minor languages, Deleuze and Guattari explain the transformative, value adding, indeterminate aspect of becoming-minoritarian.

Subtract and place in variation, remove and place in variation: a single operation … The problem is not the distinction between major and minor language: it is one of a becoming. It is a question not of reterritorializing oneself on a dialect or a patois but of deterritorializing the major language. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 104)

\textsuperscript{36} In this sense, ‘becoming’ is conceived at the alignment of unlike things. It is an “aparallel evolution” (1987: 10) of two things that are not necessarily alike, but which serve a mutually useful purpose. Deleuze and Guattari use the trope of the wasp reterritorializing on the orchid and vice versa to create the “becoming-wasp” and the “becoming-orchid” (1987: 10). They write that such an evolution has nothing to do with filiation or likeness, but rather relies on alliance and symbiosis. Such becomings once entered into are irreversible. “There is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend” (1987: 238). They are more like a contagion and, in this business of becoming, it is theatre’s business to infect. Deleuze and Guattari state that the term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is “involution,” on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. But to involve is to form a block that runs its own line “between” the terms in play and beneath assignable relations. (1987: 238 -239)
I wish to uncover a similar minoritarian-becoming in the theatre (and by implication, of place and of the body), by way of Penelope’s weaving. The problematic that this story offers (and that I suggest is contained within theatre and in concepts of place), concerns the connection between body and mind; it asks whether this connection can only be transcended by the death of the body, or, alternatively, whether it might be embraced and celebrated in life. In order to continue this philosophical journey into a poetics of place as it might be found in theatre, I need to consider more closely some of the philosophical forces at play within the great majoritarian epic, *The Odyssey*.

Within Odysseus’ story of grand deeds and heroism, Caverero identifies a hyper-masculine code; one that she believes valorises death over birth. This code, espoused by Odysseus, seeks immortality in the endless, bodiless, *space* of death. Within this formulation, female power that engenders life through birth and values notions of *place* and *being* in place within what is lived everyday and known, takes the minoritarian position.\(^37\) Caverero sees Penelope’s work as a weaving and unweaving of the philosopher’s work that valorised death over life. She quotes Plato’s *Phaedo*:

> The soul of a philosophic man will reason as follows: it is the task of philosophy to untie the soul from the body, then the soul itself, untied from the body, should not return to prior pleasures and pains, nor deliver itself to their chains, thereby doing Penelope’s endless task, as she weaves and unweaves her cloth. Rather, it should secure protection from these, by following discourse [*logismos*] and always keeping within it, by contemplating truth, the divine and what is not appearance, and being nurtured by it. The soul thus believes that it must live for as long as life lasts, and when life finally comes to an end, the soul goes towards that which is naturally similar to it free of any human evil. (in Caverero, 1995: 11)

---

\(^37\) Caverero underlines the pervasiveness of this cultural imperative; she identifies in this story the persistent ‘living for death’ that constitutes one of the most consistent principles in the philosophical tradition of the West … this principle emerges here in a complete and well-argued way, and within a philosophical doctrine that will exert enormous influence on tradition … [This] strange historical reality of an ancient mind – body dichotomy, with its strong hostility to the body, persists along the entire history of Western philosophy. (1995: 24 – 25)

She believes that such thinking lies at the heart of the civilization that the Ancient Greeks have bequeathed to us and explains the phallocentrism that has, by claiming death rather than birth as the defining moment of human existence, wrested power from what was a matriarchy and set in place the binary system that continues to this day (1995: 11 - 30).
According to Plato, securing the split between body and mind is the active task of philosophical discourse because things of the body lead inevitably to appearance, falsity and a quagmire of the flesh. This of course results in illusions that deceive and coerce and cause trouble within the polis. Plato argues throughout his dialogues and particularly in the Republic for a city-state with no poets, musicians or actors. It is the philosophers’ task to unstitch that thinking part of the soul, theNous, the realm of pure thought from things of the body and material life, physis.

The phallocentric code operating in Odysseus’ story is one that is troubled by the contingencies of place-bound bodies, the finitudes and rhythms of embodied experience and a life lived in place. Activating ancient binaries, it favours the boundless freedom of the high sea and ideals that reside in the ideal, immortal world. Within this code, Odysseus opts for the “the crash/ And a dreadful death/ Against the rocks, into legend”. Penelope settles into silent insignificance obscured within the earthbound, body bound, contingency of place.38 Penelope’s illicit act of minoritarian subversion within her own story, according to Plato’s philosophical metaphor, is not that she unweaves what she has done, because it is the philosopher’s job to unweave the body from the soul, but rather her transgression as a philosopher is that she weaves the two together in the first place (1995: 28). What is more, the time she claims in doing this is her own time, belonging to no-one but herself. The place she creates through this work is outside of the phallocentric, majoritarian code.

---

38 Caverero draws attention to the work of other female philosophers who also follow this line of thought. She mentions that Hannah Arendt takes her distance from this tradition and plants the roots of her thought in the category of birth. In her view, the otherwise rather strange historical reality of an ancient mind – body dichotomy, with its strong hostility to the body, persists along the entire history of Western philosophy. (1995: 24 – 25)
Penelope’s weaving as an analogy of the work done in theatre similarly reunites body and soul, and then, metaphorically, pulls them apart again in the making and performing of a work. This weaving of embodied meaning reties the threads of a thick fabric where embodiedness is knotted to the soul, and most of all to thought, the part of the soul that (male) philosophers wish to untie from the body more than anything else. Penelope tangles and holds together what philosophy wants to separate. She brings back the act of thinking to a life marked by birth and death. (Caverero 1995: 29)

What emerges from Penelope’s story and what can also be observed in theatre is an in-built resistance to the pervasive imperative running throughout the whole of Western history, that tries to disassociate body and mind, and by implication, privileges conceptual space from embodied place. Theatre as an expression of Penelope’s project integrates body and mind, weaving both together and then releasing them in performance. Body and mind expressed in such an action are not separate but co-emergent. I suggest that theatre in its very form does not resist, but actively exploits the possibilities of this co-emergence. It manipulates notions of representation and presence, the literal and the symbolic, the ideal and the material, containing and working simultaneously with all these things. Like the action of Penelope’s weaving, theatre demands their integration and then sets them apart in an unsettling, unstable and paradoxical ontological twist.

The power of the body in place in theatre, as I argue throughout this thesis, lies in the body’s capacity to negotiate political and cultural stratifications of authority by directly accessing the pre-symbolic, the things that lie before thought, hidden within the body,

---

39 This connection of body and consciousness is the study of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). He writes consciousness in the first place is not a matter of “I think that” but of ‘I can’ … consciousness is being towards the thing through the intermediary of the body … we must therefore avoid saying something is in space, or in time. It inhabits space and time … I am not in space and time nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines them and includes them. (1962: 137 – 140)
and then saying them again, according to its own embodied logic. Theatre in this way plays in the most vital way with symbolic structures, with language, with representation and agency, by-passing, revising, undermining, reifying, reassessing, all these frames or modalities. As such, place, and the body in place in the theatre, in all its ontological, place-producing indeterminacy, is a site of fruitful contestation and one that must be pursued, not just in theory, but also in praxis.

**Theatre and a politics of place**

Like Caverero, (and Deleuze), I too am interested in rhizomatic, minoritarian becomings and subversive acts of liberation. I believe that at the beginning of the twenty-first century theatre and its reliance on the body in place can be understood to be a minoritarian art form, a relic from the wrong side of the binary track that was bequeathed to Western civilisation by a raft of male philosophers following in Plato’s footsteps. I am most interested in how theatre has built into its very form, into the very fact of its embodied liveness, a denial of a split between body and mind and in this sense is a radical rejection of Plato’s dualistic philosophical discourse and its ultimate claim over knowledge and meaning. As such, I would like to release theatre from the particular tendency in Western thought that has valorised space over place, mind over body, and, as Caverero so eloquently argues, death over life. In short, I intend to engender a similarly subversive act of liberation throughout this thesis by considering theatre in the same light as Penelope’s story of weaving and unweaving, as an art form that weaves together body and soul and then separates them again in a on-going process of generative becoming.
By developing a poetics of place in theatre, I hope to “plug the tracings back into the map, connect the roots or trees back up with a rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 14), in this case, a specifically place-conscious rhizome, inserted into a space-oriented world, in order to see where these new connections will lead. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari reject the arborescent model of power that supports majority rule of the latter-day Platos. They state

> to be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses. We’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicals. They’ve made us suffer too much. (1987: 15)

The authors give instructions as a ‘User’s Guide’ on how to engage in the creation of a rhizome, that sounds to me like a blueprint for a rigorous rehearsal schedule in theatre:

> This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find a advantageous point on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensity segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight. (1987: 161)

Imperceptibly, quietly, playfully, passionately, wilfully, minoritarian-becomings, engendered in small ways (such as Penelope’s, such as might happen in the theatre) can transform society, not by violent shifts, but perhaps through a number of discreet alterations and realignments. Once begun, the process can take on a life of its own. Alternatively, it can be trained and moulded strategically (following the User’s Guide) to instantiate desired outcomes.

Penelope’s weaving room is not the wide open oceans and distant lands of the far roaming hero, Odysseus; neither is it the hyper-mediatised ‘anything is possible’ global screens of digitised technology; nor does it demand violent overthrow through revolution and starting again from scratch. It is a place that Penelope has maintained with the labour of her own hands, and a place that can resist the clamouring attention of
those who would have her disappear entirely into their own story. If the minoritarian-becoming that Penelope has left us resides in the legacy of place, then, as Caverero reminds us, in an increasingly hypermodern world “we women will have to leave Penelope’s Ithaca. But precisely because Penelope was able to stop there, we will be able to leave a place without forgetting or losing it” (1995: 22). Theatre, in the full power of its own minoritarian-becoming, can and does act as such a reminder, a touchstone of place and of the first principle of embodiment that place demands.

I argue that theatre is constituted not just within one, but a series of potentially subversive twists and paradoxes. It is an art form that resolutely makes place out of space, and then undoes that process; it draws a virtual world upon actual bodily presence; it is ephemeral and transient, but repeatable and endlessly productive in and of itself. Because it is place-bound, it cannot be thought away or disconnected from the body and what are often the excessive and messy bodily affects that human communities engender. As such, it remains steadfastly resistant to the lure of the clean lines of universal solutions and disembodied systems of pure thought. It weaves together in each performance things of the body and things of the mind in an entangled embodied, virtual and representational reality that addresses both place and space in a time-space continuum that is totally of its own making. This impossibly old-fashioned cottage industry is built on blood, sweat and tears and all the other comings and goings held within the one place we can truly call our own, the body; this art form that is more ancient than philosophy itself, remains to tease out the elements in place, with our own bodies, of what is and what may yet be possible within the history of our own lifetimes.
Chapter Two

*Yandy: Walking the Lie of a Mining Boom*

*Yandy*, Black Swan Theatre Company
Isaac Maza Long, Doris Eaton, Rosie Lawford Wolf
Photo, Jon Green
An act of translation

Capital fixity must of necessity, take place somewhere, and hence place can be taken as a specific form emergent from an apparent stopping of, or as one specific moment in, the dynamics of capitalist social space. (Merrifield, 1993: 521)

… and the history of substance (stone) shifts with complex social implication into the theory of power (metal). This may be described as the first displacement of Western civilization. (Carter, 1997: 344)

This became a big story for them out there. The kids are really proud, everyone knows now, everyone. There is even a Yandy park with a statue. (Jolly Read, 2004)

Yandy is adapted from the book Kangkushot: The Life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin (1999), a biography of Indigenous elder Peter Coppin, written by non-Indigenous journalist Jolly Read in collaboration with Coppin over a period of several years. The biography begins with Coppin’s birth at Yarrie station by the De Grey River in the Pilbara in 1920 and follows events of his life until around 1997. Read’s extensive research and Coppin’s recollections describe in detail the harsh living and working conditions endured by Indigenous workers and their families across vast pastoral leases in Western Australia since the Pilbara was first opened up for white settlement in 1861 (Coppin and Read, 1999: 3).

After the book was successfully launched in 1999 by Pat Dodson, former chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, and Kim Beazley, the then Leader of the Opposition, Black Swan Theatre Company, the flagship state theatre company for Western Australia (and therefore positioned very much within the white mainstream), approached Read to adapt the book into a playscript. She did this in close communication with Coppin. The show previewed in the Pilbara for the Indigenous, Yandeyarra community, and opened its

40 Coppin died on 12 September, 2006.
41 Black Swan Theatre Company has been active in producing Indigenous works since its inception. Black Swan’s first Artistic Director, Andrew Ross was instrumental in developing and touring Jack Davis’ and Jimmy Chai’s Bran Nue Dae (1993), and Corrugation Road (1995), producing Sally Morgan’s Sistergirl (1992) and Career Highlights of the Mamu (2001) amongst others. Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre (2004) by Maryrose Casey records this wave of contemporary Indigenous theatre across Australia.
Perth season at the Octagon Theatre in the grounds of the University of Western Australia where it played to large, appreciative and predominantly white middle-class audiences throughout its three-week season.42 The warm welcome the play received from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities indicates, I believe, beyond the parameters of the actual event, that this cultural translation provides a site for the two communities to acknowledge a shared history. It also provides the ground for ongoing cultural and economic negotiations relevant and unique to the mineral rich mining areas across the Pilbara.

Directed by Indigenous director Rachael Maza, the play tells the story of a key group of people involved in organising the first Indigenous workers’ strike in Australia. The strike began in the Pilbara on May Day, 1946 “when 800 workers walked off 27 stations” (Read, 2004). It focuses on the group of Indigenous workers, including Peter Coppin, Ernie Mitchell, Clancy McKenna, Dooley Bin Bin, and Daisy Bindi who organised their people to fight for wages and for freedom of speech and movement across their country. According to Coppin,

we all left. About 700 or 800 people from everywhere in the Pilbara. It was clean right through. A big mob went. Might be a few left, one or two ... we made sure we took all our gear, all our big suitcase and tin trunks, though we didn’t have much, not much clothes, not like now. We took it all in. We came in from every station, like from Yarrie, Limestone, Warrawagine, all them sheep stations. I never said anything to the station people. I never tell anybody. (Coppin and Read, 1999: 73)

The strikers and their families endured great hardship and suffering over many years. The story of their resistance and their fight for rights went through many translations, cultural, social and economic on its journey to the stage, and became the site of many negotiations of place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. I suggest that Yandy provides an example of theatre-making that finds its most profound meaning in the contingent and

42 Critical response was positive as can be seen by preview and review headlines heralding the production as “The Black Eureka” (Laurie, 2004) “Passion Powers Strike Epic” (Banks, 2004), “Great Story Well Told” (Everett, 2004).
ongoing relationships that communities create within a sustainable and ethical poetics of making place.

In *Getting Back into Place* (1993) and *The Fate of Place* (1997) Casey encourages his readers to value the things and experiences that we can know only through the body, and to be wary of too much reliance on the universal laws and principles of conceptual space. Even so, in this discussion of *Yandy*, I consciously (though warily) move beyond concrete examples of place and into the realm of social space. I do this to explore how theatre can make place with the body (consciously), as a social intervention. I mobilise Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of the production of social space and particularly his notion of representational space. This space “[embodies] complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art” (Lefebvre 1991: 33). The representational space that I consider in *Yandy* is created in the embodied reality brought about by two communities working together for the duration of the performance as practitioners, audience members and communities. I aim to demonstrate how within the triple capture of place in the theatre, *Yandy* becomes an implaced event in which the two communities can meet (in place and in social space), in order to weave an alternative history into the social fabric and lived reality of Western Australia, and to negotiate their very real and lived differences, face to face.

In the audience on opening night of the production in Perth, all the bodies in the auditorium, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were experiencing this story together, and if it can be judged from the warmth of applause, finding an inclusive place within that story. For me, this experience engendered a greater sense of ownership of a shared history and culture, or, if it is not too big a leap, a sense of community. As Ghassan Hage suggests
after all – communities are not just imagined; they are also so many bodies relating to each other. They are a practical ensemble of relations between people that one uses as a support in the pursuit of being. So being part of a community provides a very important objective and subjective gratification for people … subjective in that you kind of ‘take on’ the greatness of so many more people when you are living in a community. (1998: 162)

Within the community built in the telling of Yandy, we in the audience, black and white, were asked to identify with the courage and strength displayed by the protagonists. We were invited to make Yandy, for better or worse, our collective story. The performance in this way creates an opportunity to negotiate and rework the cultural space that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in contemporary Western Australia, across all three captures of place, in order that both cultures might practice place in a mutually beneficial way.43

Following a more topological approach, I also draw on the poetics of place that Paul Carter discusses in his book Lie of the Land (1996). I do this in order to better understand the negotiations that occurred between the two cultures in the production of Yandy, as they travel together across some uneven social and economic territory.

Carter points out the importance of feeling one’s way in such negotiations. He suggests that

without a feeling for the natural tracks of things, movement from one place to another remains penetrative, violent. Instead of marking the ground lightly, the passage of feet flattens and obscures the land’s lie. The land, instead of being of potential proximities, folding in and of sight, becomes a landscape pinned to the distance. (1996: 305)

He outlines the notion of methexis. This practice, so different from Western mimetic understandings of art, connects the person, the art work and ritual understandings of the ground upon which the art is made in the act of performance. Carter describes mimesis as “the representation of far-off events” (1996: 307) or more harshly as “the no less than

43 Germaine Greer’s essay “White fella Jump Up” (2003) discusses the unspoken connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. These involve not only a shared history, but also, as she argues, a disavowed, but shared culture.
imprisoning system of sign-worship” (1996: 30-31). It is, he attests, a Western tradition that “thinks in straight lines (1996: 321). By contrast, the song-dances of traditional Indigenous culture work methktically, in the moment, with a hierarchy of expressive languages enfolding one into the other, continuously situating the ground of their own coming into being, and by this means ensuring that the physical ground is metaphysical ground of their performance. (1996: 69)⁴⁴

Methexis and its ritual connection with the land can be applied, I suggest, beyond the immediate ground of performance (and the material work of art), to the ground or social space (complete with rituals and protocols) from which the work arises. In the case of Yandy, this ground is created, or sung up between the two cultures. Such a ground provides both the place and the space whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can move together to create new ways of co-habiting the land, and out of which new approaches to doing art, politics and economics might incidentally emerge.

Joanne Tompkins, also drawing on the work of Carter, points out that methexis can be “both actual and metaphoric” (2006: 11), and that theatre is a forum that embraces both these modalities. Tompkins explores the interactive relationship between place and space in theatre in her book Unsettling Space: Contestation in Contemporary Australian Theatre (2006). She works with Lefebvre’s definition of the “essence of space” that breaks space into three interrelated components: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (2006: 2). The social space that I activate in this discussion of Yandy aligns closely with Tompkins’ reading of Lefebvre’s representational space. Tompkins writes that “such representational space need not be concrete” (2006: 3). She notes that

⁴⁴ A deep regard for such Indigenous cultural practice that can move beyond the moment of its execution and into social space is described by Stephen Muecke when he states that the resurgence of the power of Aboriginal cultural formations in the context of Australian a nation in recent years is not just as a consequence of calculations about politics and justice, but also because of the resurgence of the power of Aboriginal rituals and of Aboriginality in rituals. (2004: 118)
theatre’s live, three-dimensional activation of the theories demonstrates how the
discursive potential of these reading strategies may generate tangible results. The
performance of potential world (uncanny, methektic, or otherwise) on stage
engages the theories more fully than discursive alternatives. (2006: 12)

I argue that Yandy intervenes in its own more than three-dimensional way, across
cultures, across discourse, in the theatre, to give material ‘in place’ form to a poetics of
social space.

The creation of theatre methektically, in the social space between Indigenous and non-
Indigenous Australia, is a continuing work in progress. I suggest that even though the
social space of Yandy exists within an emerging poetics, the work on stage is still
largely contained within traditional Western mimetic understandings of theatrical
representation. I propose that an understanding of an expanded poetics of place in the
theatre might allow theatre makers and audiences to embrace methektic as well as
mimetic dramaturgies, both on stage and across the important social spaces out of which
theatre might emerge, in order “to change the probabilities of what can occur in that
place” (Muecke 2004: 80) and in the many places in and around theatre.

**Yandy restages the struggle: A walking motion**

*Yandy* takes its name from the traditional wooden food gathering implement (see photo
on page 72) that was used by the strikers and their families to sift tiny fragments of gold
and tin dug from the desert soil in order to support themselves, both during the
industrial action and in the long and punishing years afterwards. Although the strike
officially ended in 1949, most of the Indigenous workers did not return to the stations
and many never returned to employment within the settler workforce.45

---

45 It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in any detail the current difficulties facing Indigenous
Australians living and working in the Pilbara, but according to the Australian National University’s
Most of the action of the play concerns the events leading up to and occurring during the strike. It begins during the early days of World War II on a remote cattle station in the Pilbara, and relates how Indigenous people were not being paid for their labour and were under the complete control of the station bosses. In the audience, we see a representation of how abuse and exploitation of Aboriginal people was common practice. A secret meeting was called by Indigenous leaders where it was decided that they had to wait till the war ended to take action and long-term strategies were put into place. Messages were spread across the thousands of square miles of the Pilbara to ensure that the workers could walk out together on May Day, 1946. The play relates how these messages, in the form of calendars, were pasted onto the back of jam tin labels and sent out so that people who were effectively held captive on their own lands could secretly mark the days until the mass walk off. The audience discovers that the annual Picnic Races were used as an opportunity for clandestine industrial meetings, and that when the strike was eventually called people were caught, jailed and persecuted, yet they persevered.

The extended story of the strikers and their families continues and the audience learns that they persist for years mining for tin and gold on their traditional lands. Eventually, with the help of Don McLeod, a white contract worker (and significant character in the play), they form a company and buy pastoral stations of their own with the money they have saved. The play recounts how some of the strikers went on to own Yandeyarra, a beef cattle station where they and their descendants live today. Finally, the audience learns that bad advice from McLeod causes the families to lose control of Yandeyarra to the banks, and then in 1974, under the leadership of Coppin, the group negotiates with

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, problems have been endemic since (and in different ways, than before) leaving the stations. For more information see their Research Monograph *Indigenous People and the Pilbara Mining Boom: a Baseline for Regional Participation* (2005).
the then Department of Native Welfare to claim Yandeyarra, close to half a million acres, on a perpetual lease from the Aboriginal Lands Trust.\textsuperscript{46}

**Walking through country**

As the lights go down after the speeches of welcome on opening night, eleven performers come on to the stage and perform a “walking through country Inma” (Read, 2004: 4). Doris Eaton leads the Inma. In a set of relationships that blur representation and reality, Doris is the daughter of Ernie Mitchell, a head man of the strike movement. She has travelled the two thousand kilometres from Yandeyarra to Perth for the play, with another elder, Stephen Stuart, or Number 2 as he is known because he was Number 2 man during the strike to Ernie Mitchell, who was Number 1. These two have taught the dance to the cast of non-Indigenous and Indigenous performers some of whom have come from other parts of Western Australia, some whom have come from interstate.\textsuperscript{47} Eaton and Number 2 are custodians, not only of the story of the strike, but also of their traditional culture as it is being performed. In interview, Eaton emphasises that the “dance is very special and we had to get permission to come here to safeguard the play and the song”. Her involvement indicates how the play developed ‘on the ground’, methektically (perhaps), and according to custom. She adds: “and we end up doing the bits and pieces in the show too” (Eaton in Campbell, 2004a). During the Inma, Number 2 sings a Tabi, a Law song that is part of the walking through country ritual.

\textsuperscript{46} The leasehold amounts to 433,933 acres (175,743 hectares) (Read, 1999: 153).

\textsuperscript{47} Such a cast could be called intra-cultural. Rustom Bharucha defines ‘intracultural’ as “the interaction of local cultures within the boundaries of a particular state” (in Tompkins and Holleje, 1996: 200).
**Yandy**, Black Swan Theatre Company  
Isaac Drandich and cast, photo Jon Green

In a design that is iconic in its representation of ‘country’, there is a fire burning at the front of the stage and the down stage playing area is defined by a layer of red sand. At the back of the stage there is a structure that is used as a pastoralist’s house, a court, a shop – all ‘whitefella’ places. In the first scene the strikers, Dooley, Peter Coppin and the Storyteller address the audience at times in English, and at other times using the local (to the Pilbara) Nyamal language. They tell the audience that Aboriginal workers had no basic human rights on the stations. As well as receiving no wages for their work, they were only allowed to leave the stations under loan to another station or with the pastoralist’s permission. They had no freedom of speech or movement and had no opportunity to organise their labour in any way. Trevor Jamieson, playing the Storyteller, speaks directly to the audience during the play. He recounts in the opening lines that

[Beginning in Nyamal [traditional language] and then breaking into English]
it was a big story all right. We were just blackfellas to be used as slaves on the stations. We got no proper pay, no proper houses – just a bit o’ tin, a bit o’ paper bark, a bit o’ blanket, down in the river. That’s how we lived then. (Read, 2004)

The Storyteller speaks with a clarity and care normally reserved for children or the hard of hearing. The audience is being instructed in an important story, a story that belongs to both Indigenous and settler communities. This open and inclusive relationship continues throughout the production as the story moves through myriad historical events, beginning with the ‘then’ of the past and moving through to the ‘now’ of the present, as it drives along an extended, linear narrative pathway.

**Lie of the land**

In *Lie of the Land* (1996) Paul Carter writes of an approach to negotiating Australian culture and the places it creates that I would like to apply to this reading of *Yandy*. Carter follows William Defoe’s story of Robinson Crusoe to analyse the construction of colonial space and the pivotal role it plays in the capture of power. He notes that when Crusoe rescues Man Friday from certain death at the hands of cannibals, Friday “kiss’d the Ground, and laid his Head upon the Ground, and taking me by the Foot, set my Foot upon his Head … in token of swearing to be my Slave for ever” (in Carter, 1996: 12). Carter points out that Friday “submits to allowing Crusoe to be the ground and author of his own life; what he does not see – at least not yet – is that by setting his foot on Man Friday’s head, Crusoe makes him the ground of his own mastery” (1996: 12). Carter argues that within the master/slave paradigm of colonial imperialism settler communities, such as Australia, necessarily walk on the heads of those whose land they have taken. Their progress can only be mediated by and through domination of the first people and, because of this, the invaders cannot, to everybody and everything’s detriment, experience the actual earth beneath their
feet. He notes that “Defoe’s insight is to understand that the colonizer produces the country he will inhabit out of his own imagining” (1996: 10). According to Carter

our relationship to the ground is, culturally speaking, paradoxical: for we appreciate it only in so far as it bows down to our will. Let the ground rise up to resist us, let it prove porous, spongy, rough, irregular - let it assert its native title, its right to maintain its traditional surfaces - and instantly our engineering instinct is to wipe it out; to lay our foundations on rationally - apprehensible level ground.

We do not walk with the surface; we do not align our lives with its inclines, folds and pockets. We glide over it; and to do this to render what is rough smooth, passive, passable, we linearize it, conceptualizing the ground, indeed the civilized world, as an ideally flat space, whose billiard-table surface can be skated over in any direction without hindrance. (1996: 2)

This is a matter both of poetics and politics. Michel De Certeau also cites Robinson Crusoe as “one of the rare myths that modern Occidental society has been able to create” (1984: 156) that defines the parameters of a poetics that itself underlies a politics of appropriation. It is a myth, De Certeau argues, that awakens Robinson to the capitalist and conquering task of writing his island. [This] is inaugurated by the decision to write his diary, to give himself in that way a space in which he can master time and things, and to thus constitute for himself, along with the blank page, an initial island in which he can produce what he wants. (1984:156)

In order to do this, the coloniser must not only inhabit the country physically but efface and effectively control the stories that reside there.

Carter focuses on the operations of mimesis, methexis and ideas of narrative perspective within his study of this colonial project. He urges contemporary Australians not to blaze a trail across country (literally or metaphorically) but to follow the lie and land, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture walking together to balance and propel the other across an uneven and unpredictable cultural and geographic landscape. Such a process does not rely on a path of unrestrained capitalist domination imposed on the landscape (and by implication, on the Indigenous inhabitants of the land) through universalising modes that enable modern populations to travel swiftly over a
transformed, passable space. Neither does it demand conventional representational frames through which to view a passive and inert landscape (because such a landscape is only activated by technological and creative input of the master). Carter asks his readers to consider the possibility of different cultures working together in co-operation within a shared landscape, within country, using knowledge and stories gained through lived experience. This way of knowing acknowledges difference and allows for contingencies. Carter believes that walking together in this way negotiates difference without subsuming it, thereby liberating a dynamic movement between divergent ways of being.

*Yandy* takes, I believe, a tangled step in this direction, one that might be an example of what Deborah Bird Rose articulates as an ethical move toward “intersubjectivity in which each of us is always, already, responsible for other” (2004:13). It also highlights the pressures involved in negotiating the fast-changing political and economic terrain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within Western Australia, positioned as it is between a global mining and resources boom, recurring Native Title claims, and encroaching environmental concerns. The play could, in fact, be described as an attempt at connectivity, a stumbling, (at times even lurching) poetical and political attempt between Indigenous and white Australians to walk the lie of the land together.48

---

48 Significantly, Deborah Bird Rose notes a connection between “the social and ecological impacts of conquest” (2004: 4) that I believe a poetics of place such as that being developed in *Yandy* can address. She focuses on the violence of conquest and the devastation that brings both to traditional Indigenous society and to the land. Underlining an alternative view of what it is to be ‘wild’ for example, she quotes Hobbles Danaiyrri “a historian and political philosopher by inclination, and a lawman and community leader by education, birth and community demand” (2004: 3). Inverting the usual (white, hegemonic) order, Danaiyrri suggests that it is white man’s savagery, his violence and cruelty that brings devastation to both land and Indigenous society. He states that because Captain Cook order: You got to clean that people up, right up. And put all my whitefellows on top. This my country. Good people this I bring in one day. They all ready for the Aboriginal people. He’s the wild one. No good keep this land. (in Bird Rose, 2004: 3)

The different perspective Danaiyrri offers on who and what is truly ‘wild’ allows an alternative understanding of how this country has been transformed since the arrival of settler societies, from an environment that has sustained perhaps 60,000 years continuous human habitation to (what might in some circles be described as) a deforested industrial site, criss-crossed by roads and fences that service high density coastal development, inappropriate agricultural practices and open-cut mining. Bird Rose argues
The creation of a place within expanded social space

_Yandy_ creates a place similar to Crusoe’s diary, the initial Island, a theatrical page where historical injustice can be redressed and rewritten according to a contemporary political and economic agenda. _Yandy_ is, I suggest, actively in the business of writing Indigenous communities and concerns back onto the ‘blank page’ of capitalism. To this end, the story of the strike is first carefully placed within the broad spectrum of Indigenous politics. In the opening lines of the play the Storyteller reminds the audience, that

> you fellas heard about that fight for wages at Wave Hill in the Northern Territory. In 1966. Well, this fight – in the Pilbara – was twenty years before that. (Read, 2004)

Whereas Wave Hill became part of the national zeitgeist, the emotional epicentre of the fight for Australia’s Indigenous population to be awarded the vote, the story of the strike in _Yandy_ did not go on to form part of the folklore of Indigenous resistance. It did not find its pathway out of the Pilbara and into popular consciousness, but instead was buried by the authorities, by the distances involved, and by its own political and economic untimeliness. _Yandy_ seeks to return the story to the page of history, to expand the social space in which Indigenous communities can operate within a booming modern economy. It creates a place of resistance within the theatre, one that recuperates that it is time we follow Hobbles Danaiyarri’s advice to “turn away from cruelty and become mates” (2004: 123) for the sake of country. She exhorts all of us to hear, to witness, “to be drawn in to a world of ethical encounter … to become entangled,” in the process of decolonisation (2004: 123). Such a process she believes, offers a hopeful, alternative vision of what can be lived and imagined from the past, into the present and future.

49 Read explains that Wave Hill happened around the time of the referendum [in 1967 a referendum put to white Australia the question as to whether Indigenous Australians should be given the vote] and by that stage it was being looked at that Aboriginal people didn’t have rights and that was wrong. Back in ‘46 it didn’t register. It wasn’t something that people thought should be honoured or revered or written about, it was pretty well buried. And it’s so remote up there, imagine in the 40s … It was circumstance but it was also deliberately buried by the establishment down here [in the capital, Perth]; right through government, to the ministers, through newspapers because WA newspapers were really controlled by the establishment. (Read in Campbell, 2004b)
an historical precedent and operates as a contemporary opportunity for (entangled) inter/intra-cultural interaction.

In order to provide an appropriately economic conceptual framework for the resistance that occurs within Yandy, I turn to Andrew Merrifield’s model of place and space within a systematic reading of capitalism. I realise that in doing this I activate the Western tendency critiqued by Carter and others (Casey, as mentioned earlier, and Malpas to name just two), to conceptualise space away from lived experience and away from the body. Despite this, I suggest that this abstracted approach to knowledge has proved to be an exceeding powerful conceptual tool. Certainly, Merrifield does not approach place as an expression of lived experience. Instead, he applies a structural reading of place and space, developed by Lefebvre, to Marx’s notions of fixed and circulating capital. Merrifield proposes that within this frame, space and place are forged together in a dialectical unity in which the material landscape and practices of everyday life occurring in different places under capitalism are inextricably embedded within the global capitalist whole. To this extent, the global capitalist system does not occur solely in some abstract sense; it has to ground itself and be acted out in specific places if it is to have any meaning (cf. Lefebvre, 1991b). The space of the whole thus takes on meaning through place; and each part i.e., each place in its interconnection with other parts (places) engenders the space of the whole. (Merrifield, 1993:520)

Yandy, within such a reading of place and space, becomes the theatrical place or ground where a resistant politics is acted out within the social space of capitalism. This dialectical approach understands place and space within capitalism not as two ends of a linear conception, but one in which “space is already flow and place – it is simultaneously, a process and a thing” (1993: 517). Within this simultaneity, place is inherently political, implicated and active. Similarly to my understanding of the

---

30 The application of the tools of abstract thought to ‘nature’ is the subject of the Prologue, *The More I Study Nature: Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity* included here, in which Georgiana plays a part in introducing the Linnaean system of plant taxonomy to the Australian environment. This abstract “tabular form of presentation” is also part of what Foucault describes as “a discursive formation” (Hirst: 1993: 52); it is a technique or approach to using abstract thought.
operations of place and space in the theatre, Merrifield points out that within this

Marxist reading, place and space are part of the same phylum; they are

in the end, but different ‘moments’ or characteristic forms of the same – i.e. circulating – Capital. In other words, fixed capital is the apparently static material thing-form quality of the embodied process of circulating capital … This process represents the rootless, fluid reality of material flows of commodities, money capital and information which can be transferred and shifted across the globe. (1993: 521)

Merrifield posits that this morphology of “social space” is, in fact, a “material process” (1993: 521) created by the flows of capital, which is subsumed into the on-going process of production. He sums up that

put simply, we can say that capitalist social space is subsumed under the domain of capital, since its command of property, money, power, technology and mass media enable it to dominate and appropriate the space of global capitalism … From this standpoint, social space becomes a force of production itself. (1993: 521)

The point of vulnerability within this capitalist construct, and therefore the point of strategic entry for artists or anyone wanting to interrupt or influence the system, is that point when capital is made manifest within the world, as place. According to Merrifield capital fixity must of necessity, take place somewhere, and hence place can be taken as a specific form emergent from an apparent stopping of, or as one specific moment in, the dynamics of capitalist social space. (1993: 521)

He proposes that because flows take on a thing-form in place they are most susceptible to political resistance while they are “place-bound” (1993:521). It is at this point that theatre and the resistant places that it creates in projects such as Yandy can intervene in order to re-write the (as it turns out,) not-so ‘blank page’ of capitalist space.

In Yandy resistance to the otherwise unhindered flow of capital across the Pilbara drives the narrative content of the story. This resistance is evident in both the retelling of the historical story of the strike and in the on-going, contemporary negotiations to win rights and opportunities for Indigenous communities in their own traditional lands. It
also occurs I argue in the development of an expanded social space between the
Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities as they come together to create the play
itself.

Mobilising this conceptual analysis of place abstracted into space demonstrates that
within the global, capitalist social space of mainstream Australia, and even in Western
Australia, caught as it is in the grip of major mining boom, it is possible to make places
of resistance. Theatre, I suggest, offers the opportunity to fashion an alternative, more
spontaneous, irregular, disruptive place, a place in which imbalances and injustices can
be addressed or at least highlighted. In such a theatre made place, sung up between
Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, ways of living and walking together across a
shared land can be developed. In this sense, theatre-made places have the capacity to act
dynamically within the universalising social spaces of capitalism.

Theatre is not, of course, exempt from or above the workings of capitalism; in fact it is
absolutely embedded within the system.51 Even so, I believe that in the reflexive
dramaturgical strategy that I aim to formulate here, the “totalizing nature of capitalism”
can be addressed through an understanding of the multifaceted nature of place, without
place itself becoming a totalising paradigm (Merrifield, 1993: 517). I should also add
that this conception of theatre as a purely political instrument is lacking an organic
intensity and is doomed to fail if it does not also contain the chaotic, disruptive,
excessive poetics of a desiring, living body. Engagement with systems of production
and consumption and the spaces and places they create, via the body, is in this way, the
realm of politics and economics and also of theatre.

51 Adorno and Horkheimer’s famous critique of spectacle of consumerism in their essay “The Culture
Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (1944) (and after them Debord and Baudrillard) points out
the political and economic machinations at work under the aegis of notions of ‘style’ and through the
display of wealth.
Theatrical style as vehicle

Director Rachel Maza initially had trouble finding a style for the play. She was brought into the project just before rehearsal started and had to find a theatrical style that suited Read’s finished script. Maza’s task could be seen as an extended process of translation that involved not only translating across cultures and language, from Nyamal into English, but also required that the literary form of the book be translated into a theatrical form. The play in its final incarnation is the result of an extended process that translates Indigenous experience of white settlement across traditional lands, to a re/presentation of that story, on a Western stage.

With a mix of burlesque, parody, earnest social realism, pantomime and pathos, Maza and the cast devise a performance style is broadly and at times self-consciously theatrical. The actors use direct address to comment on actions of the characters and to joke among themselves and with the audience. Narrative frames are also interrupted by the projections of landscape images of the Pilbara, documentary film footage and photography, as well as the use of traditional singing and dance. The actors draw attention to the theatricality of what they are doing by making obvious set and costume changes. These techniques are used to propel the epic story and to indicate to the audience the political and historical implications of the events that are being described. An overtly political approach is frequently taken, often with a comic tail spin.52

The politically charged storytelling techniques adopted in this translation sits within the ideological positioning of Don McLeod, the central non-Indigenous figure in the story.

52 The informal, audience friendly, storytelling, improvisational feel present throughout Yandy could even be said to be part of a recognisable style of Indigenous theatre. Plays that have used this style to great effect include Jack Davis’ Bran Nue Dae, and Corrugation Road, Sally Morgan’s Sistergirl and Leah Purcell’s Box the Pony, to name a few.
Played by non-Indigenous actor Phil Thompson, McLeod is the white contract worker on the stations whose commitment to communist ideals of social justice for Indigenous workers runs as a significant subplot through the play. This ‘red’ thread is also highlighted by the (non-Indigenous) character of Dorothy Hewitt, a flamboyant West Australian communist, journalist and playwright who would be familiar to many in the audience. McLeod calls in Hewitt to publicise the strike. It is revealed that McLeod’s political beliefs and the involvement of Hewitt taps into deep anti-communist sentiment that ran through much of Australian politics after World War 2 and into the Cold War era. Her role in the strike as a high profile supporter, played tongue-in-cheek as a series of ‘colour-blind’ burlesque moments is handled with comic flair by Indigenous actor Ningali Lawford-Wolf. The larger- than-life acting style is commented on by reviewer Ron Banks. He notes that there is a naïve, unsophisticated style to some of the playing, perhaps to reflect the simple, honest approach of these untutored communities that needed great tenacity to survive the white duplicity. (Banks, 2004: 7)

The beginning of the strike action is marked by a comic scene at the Annual Picnic Races where the Aboriginal community is secretly meeting to plan the strike; the Race Caller begins: “And it’s a brilliant start by Racist and Whitey over Blacky. They’ve taken the ground from under him straight away!” He finishes “It’s Racist first, by a nose. Whitey second and Squatter’s taken third over Protector” (Read, 2004). It is worth considering that the burlesque style of presentation was chosen by Maza and devised by the cast in response to the script (Read’s primary experience is as a journalist and political speech writer), and not because of simplicity (historical or otherwise) as Banks suggests. It might be, perhaps, that this style was devised with a white audience in mind, ‘untutored’ as they are in this alternative history of their State and of country. Significantly, Read also observes that
it is very much part of that culture to turn serious things into fun. To take the light side, that way they make up the stories and the tabis to explain things … it becomes part of their storytelling process. Humour is so much part of that cultural way of being, so it seemed that it had to be done that way [and partly because] there had to be some relief. (Read in Campbell, 2004b)

This last comment reflects a desire perhaps to keep the audience engaged in a story that occurs over extended vast distances, both of time and in space, that included hundreds of people and that had for the Indigenous communities involved very little in the way of light relief.

**Refiguring the landscape**

Although in many ways the places that are represented within the play remain contained within mimetic formations, Read is nevertheless deeply aware of the different cultural understandings around issues of place. She relates that embodied knowledge of country was fundamental in her co-writing the book *Kankgushot* and how she had to go out traveling all his country with [Peter Coppin]. We’d go out for weeks and covered thousands of kilometers over the years. To get the context of the stories I had to go to the places as well, so we would go for days and days and drive and drive and drive. (Read in Campbell, 2004b)

She explains that the dimensions of the story only became clear to her over time, as she gained Coppin’s trust and was permitted to know more. Elements are incorporated into the performance to both indicate and enact the dimensions of the story and its relationship to the land. Archival photographs and films are projected onto a large scrim at the back of the playing area showing people working in the desert with their wooden yandys, or gathering together during and after the strike. As Read relates it:

you think oh, yeah, they just went out and dug a few holes and found some tin but in fact they had to hand dig, I mean miles and miles and miles and miles, I mean hand dig to get roads through, equipment through. It’s such a harsh place, there’s willy willies and cyclones and dryness and Spinifex and everything is bleached so the
yellow and blues are all pale and it’s big. So in a way to get that across in a play, that’s a hard thing to do. (Read in Campbell, 2004b)

Both Read and Maza mention the enormous dimensions of the story, the fifty-year time span, the thousands of kilometres of country that the story covers, the number of significant characters, and the number of strikers as a daunting challenge in terms of the form of the play. Interestingly, Read’s first image was a circle,

like a corroboree and when you go out dreaming your corroboree, your law, creation stuff, you go out, you might sing, like Peter Coppin has got two hundred and seventy six songs or so, it takes him two weeks to sing for Law. He goes right across his country, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming and dreaming all the country up, then they come back so it’s a big circle and the corroboree they sing that for Law, so I saw that it was the only way I could tell that story … coming in and out of that circle is the same as corroboree as well. I found that really fascinating as well, how playing that way in the Octagon, the audience, people felt, lots of people said it, they just felt part of it too. (Read in Campbell, 2004b)

There are sequences in the play when the theatre space is used with great confidence and the story, for me in the audience, really does take on this extra dimension. When McLeod’s attempt at lobbying the government in Perth for regular pay and improved conditions for the Indigenous workers only causes more trouble, he is asked by the Indigenous leaders to attend a special Law meeting at Skull Springs to help organise the strike. He “would be the one whitefella amongst 200, 300 Lawmen” (Read, 2004). Again using direct address to the audience, the Storyteller explains that

the big meeting at Skull Springs took place in 1942. There hadn’t been a meeting like it in 50 years. Lawmen came from all over the country – from across the Pilbara, the Kimberley and the central desert … There were 23 languages spoken, and though many of the men were multilingual, 16 interpreters were needed. The meeting lasted six weeks! (Read, 2004)

This Skull Springs meeting is played throughout the auditorium with actors entering at the top of the seating banks and speaking across the audience. It is as though the audience are in fact “the 200, 300 Lawmen”. This implied audience participation in the story continues the theme of what could be called ‘colorblind casting’ within the play (the predominantly
white audience takes the part of the gathered Lawmen) in a subtle and inclusive manner, while at the same time gently challenging and implicating the audience in the action.

Similarly, the use of archival footage and photographs of the strikers meeting in the Pilbara and of women and children working in the hard dirt of the desert with their yandies helps to bring home the reality of the lived experience. These highlighted *placial* elements were particularly present on opening night where the real Peter Coppin and some of the workers photographed in the dirt as children were sitting amongst the audience. These elements were also implied in the black/white inversions that occurred, not only on stage but across the body of the audience, in the inclusive song and dance and in the relaxed relationship between performers and audience.

*Yandy*, Black Swan Theatre Company
Isaac Drandich, Heath Bergerson, David Ngoombujarra,
photo Jon Green
The social ground upon which Yandy is constructed is in these ways, and in many others, complicated, uneven and unpredictable. When travelling across such territory Paul Carter offers this advice:

It is the irriuous uncertainties of the ground that introduce us to the adventure of taking calculating steps, of engaging with in-between spaces; and this adventure translates itself into stress and breath patterns. So that – to walk in the other direction, to turn this argument almost on its head – the achievement of a world society capable of living on and with the earth depends not simply on the evolution of democratic polities but on the achievement of an environmentally-grounded poetics. (Carter, 1997: 5)

It is precisely within these unstable, creative constructions of place, both on stage, in the auditorium and in the wider world, that change may be contemplated, embodied and enacted. Yandy provides a strategic example of such an attempt. The task of the theatre makers in these situations is to keep these creative places as open and yet as specific as possible. Such a balance between connectedness to place and what is possible in the world is, I suggest, vital.53

The spaces we make: mimesis and methexis

In Yandy a number of conflicting or, at least, contrasting paradigms of place are to be found in translation. The theatrical form of the show emerges, I argue, in the interplay between methexis and mimesis, two divergent approaches to art that I believe carry the project in a reeling, two-legged inter-cultural walk, across the lie of the land. I would

53 De Certeau also talks about “Strategies and tactics” (1984: 34-39) around notions of place in the struggle to resistant power:

I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power … can be isolated … It postulates a place that can be delimited … By contrast with a strategy [, a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus … In short, a tactic is an art of the weak. (1984: 37, original italics)

Within this reading, a strategy originates from within a place, where power can accrue, whereas a tactic has no place, nor does it have a base from which power can be consolidated and expanded. In their opinion as to whether being imperceptible is a good thing or not, De Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari, it seems, differ.
like to consider these two cultural approaches and the ways in which they operate (as I understand them) in Yandy more closely, in the hope that a clearer poetics and a dramaturgy of place might be developed between the workings of the two.

Carter argues that these different understandings of art arise out of cultural connections with the land. Whereas a mimetic approach might impose a particularly Western order upon a landscape, reshaping it to some *a priori* idea and following universalising principles that are *representational*, a methektic approach works with an embodied understanding of what is given in an interactive and responsive way. It is a ritual that is actively creative and *presentational*.

Also describing the differences between mimesis and methexis, Tompkins explains that

the mimetic, linear approach to land encloses that which it controls and attempts to reproduce on it the topography of (the colonizer’s) home. Methexis, on the other hand, follows a fluid interpretation that is most clearly understood in terms of – but not limited to – traditional Aboriginal uses of space and land management, and to the topography of the land itself. A consequence of the methektic response to the landscape is to disclose the political effect of enclosing land and place. (Tompkins, 2004: 10)

This analysis of difference underlines the particular process whereby art and the way social space is constructed in the material world arises directly out of the intellectual, spiritual, social and economic relationships that cultures have with land and the way in which this understanding sculpts and shapes the places that are created and recreated within a culture.54

---

54 Matthew Potolsky charts the profound significance of mimesis within Western thought. He outlines the ways in which the very concept of art, for Western culture at least, is inconceivable without the theory of mimesis. For the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who introduced the term into literary theory over two thousand years ago in his dialogue the *Republic*, art ‘merely’ imitates something real … Without a knowledge of mimesis, one simply cannot understand Western theories of artistic representation – or even realize that they are theories rather than facts of nature. (2006: 2)

In contrast, Carter’s poetics across the lie of the land highlights the political reading of art and challenges the Western obsession with mimesis. He looks toward an alternative, performative paradigm that will liberate the West from the void of restless propulsion through and across flattened out, place-emptied space. He describes methexis as a “way out” of “[t]he coercion inherent in the poetics of representation”
Unlike mimesis, methexis does not rely on things just ‘looking like,’ or even ‘pretending to be;’ nor does it need to capture things in a fixed, prefigured and static manner by holding them at a distance. It does not produce a polemical argument, nor does it provide dramatic structure or resolution. Instead, methexis is both embodied and implaced. It is participatory and produces in and of itself, across and within difference. It insist[s] on an empathy with that which [is] palpably present, not necessarily to the sovereign eye [locked as it is within mimetic ideas of representation] but certainly to the eye and ear in their physical association with the body’s endless plotting of the ground. (Carter, 1997: 85)

The contained, causal connection between space and time is another important feature that distinguishes mimesis from methexis. Methexis works with the contours of time and things take as long as they take, coming into existence continually through time. Mimesis by contrast is very much connected to linear time, segmented, delimited and controlled. Carter notes that

the force of mimesis lies … in its conception of what is absent as a sequence of events, lineally related one to another, each bounded by a beginning and an ending; history as a sequence of episodes loosely sewn together distinguishes mimesis from methexis. (1997: 307)

In Yandy, the somewhat expository ‘once upon a time’ storytelling, history lesson style mentioned above is highly mimetic. A mimetic approach is also manifest in the material placement of the story within the stage landscape. There is in fact, a slight tongue-in-cheek feel to the construction of space and place within Yandy. The set has a deliberately cardboard cut-out, pantomime, two dimensional quality. It articulates mimetically, almost within inverted commas, with its ‘stagey’ representations of ‘wild-west’ colonial settlement buildings that are inserted into other notionally familiar representations of a Pilbara desert

(1997: 84). This coercion has been “unmasked” he believes “as a device of patriarchy” and presumably in that case, within what has been argued to be the triangulated theme of imperialism, of race and class as well (McCintock, 1995: 8).
setting. The emblematic set and flattened theatrical landscape of these ‘whitefella’ places and the seeming simplicity of the narrative moving across its linear pathway all hold a curious set of contradictions concerning the ways in which this alternative history is constructed. These issues are not necessarily resolved within Yandy but offer a valuable opportunity to investigate how power relationships might be embedded and reworked within such representational forms.

The mimetic storytelling form of the play is for the most part left to carry the feeling of this vast desert landscape and I am left to ponder what other elements might have brought such an experience to life in the theatre. I have no concrete suggestion here as to what these ‘on-stage’ methektic practices might be that would connect performers, community and country. Tess de Quincey’s Bodyweather Project aims to connect body and place in performance, is discussed at length in Gay McAuley’s Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place, and particularly in Stuart Grant’s chapter “How to stand in Australia” (2006: 247-271) is one possible place to start imagining the effects of country on the body in performance. Trevor Jameison and Scott Rankin’s Ngapartji Ngapartji (2005) works to create an immediacy of experience for the audience, including community members on stage throughout the performance and introduces Pitjantjatjara language as a means of crossing the representational boundary between audience and actors. Isabella’s Room, a needcompany production from Belgium by director Jan Lauwers, brought African tribal objects into the performance that were then described to the audience in all their ethnographic detail thereby breaking the fictional frame of the narrative and highlighting how such objects are fetishised within Western cultural discourse.
Belgium by director Jan Lauwers, brought African tribal objects into the performance that were then described to the audience in all their ethnographic detail thereby breaking the fictional frame of the narrative and highlighting how such objects are fetishised within Western cultural discourse.

The process is far from simple; it requires a deep reconsideration of fundamental cultural assumptions. For example, Tompkins and Hollege remind us that “[d]ismantling imperial history is a complex process which requires more than merely filling gaps with untold stories” (2000: 110). They argue that in theatre it is not enough to reach for old representational forms. Such forms constructed around the representational demands of mimesis demand that the audience observe more or less passively, viewer separated from the viewed, as a narrative, drama and/or spectacle unfolds in a predetermined sequence.

Similarly, Matthew Potolsky points to the inherent social and political dimensions of theatre practice. He notes that

none of the material things that contribute to theatrical mimesis – stage backdrop, props, actors, audience, texts – is inherently mimetic. They only become so in and through a given production and by virtue of the conventional beliefs and practices of the participants on stage and in the audience. Theatrical mimesis, to this extent, is at once nowhere and everywhere. It is a form of attention, a conceptual envelope that surrounds and transfigures people and things rather than a discrete object, location or form of action. The words theatre and theory, we might note, share the same Greek root: thea, meaning to ‘look or ‘view’. Theory, like theatre, assumes the possibility of finding an external standpoint, of distinguishing the known subject from the known object. (2006: 75-76, my italics)

Leaving aside related questions around the potential relationship between theatre and theory for the moment, it becomes apparent that in order to construct a new ‘form of attention’, a new ‘conceptual envelope’ that might interrupt entrenched flows of power and capital, a play like *Yandy* must do more that merely tell an ‘untold story’. It must, I believe, also address the positioning from which we, in an audience, and as critical observers, view such stories in the theatre and the role we might play in them, personally (and by extension, in society). Tompkins and Hollege argue that
since space is the grammar not only of the landscape but also of the mise-en-scène, theatre has the potential to reconstitute the structural basis of historical conception, to make space/place a performer rather than the medium on and through which the pageant of history seems to merely unfold. The more conservative view of theatrical space – that it ‘colours’ all relationships within its limits (see Suvin, 1987:322) – does not adequately account for the proxemic systems of much post-colonial theatre where space becomes a force that potentially determines such relationships rather than simply affecting them. (2000: 146, original italics)56

They suggest that “the fracturing of time works in tandem with the historicising and remapping of space” and advocate that something entirely new must be imagined for real change to occur. This, they believe, “is a central project for colonised peoples whose lands were invaded, and in some cases permanently sequestered by, European powers” (2000: 145).

Carter (1996) similarly calls for resistance to invisible cultural imperatives when he seeks to negotiate the lie of the land. He argues that these imperatives affect not only imagination and art, but also map and shape the material world in which we live. This ethos of space that creates flat, smooth pathways, in turn, facilitates, indeed invites endless movement and speed. He suggests that these deeply embedded cultural preferences multiply and self-perpetuate within representation itself. He speaks of both the lure and the dread of the agora, the bifurcated ground of Western representation, separating audience from the performer who

occupies a theatrical place, and it is precisely its emptiness, and the silence that crowds in on every side, that obliges him to raise his voice and defiantly sing of the places, other far-off times – without whose memory the loneliness of the migrant condition might be intolerable. (1996: 308)

In Yandy, the flat floor the agora is claimed but this time by the Indigenous owners of a story of resistance. These people might, in this context, be described as economic migrants to their own land, (and to the representational space of the stage) forced to work within a

---

56 This view is also echoed by Peggy Phelan who argues that ‘visibility’ or mere representation cannot reconstitute political equations of power. Engaged in another representational “battle for eye-balls”, Phelan notes “if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture (1993: 10).
foreign order that is altogether hostile and unaccommodating to their previous traditional
way of life. That they chose to adopt Western representational forms to tell a story that lives
within a Western capitalist paradigm is not inappropriate; in fact, it might well be
considered strategic. (And of course, Western forms are also their own to claim.)

But, I argue, the story of *Yandy* does not end with what happens on stage. Another
performance is also in process that I think activates a deeper, more profound strategy. I
suggest that conventional mimetic methods adopted on stage are harnessed within a larger
process of social methexis in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are both
participants.

**A performance surrounds a performance**

[M]ethexis adds to – rather than overlooks – mimetic responses already in place …
Both are discursive methods that point to the possibility of critical dialogue to
rethink the self, the other, and the relationship to space in Australia. (Tompkins,
2006: 12)

I would like to apply an abstracted model of methexis in the calling up of the social
ground across which *Yandy* is produced. In the first instance, such a model can be
observed in the cultural protocols that were implemented with care from the beginning
of the process. For example, Rachel Maza’s appointment as director of *Yandy* was
important to the project in terms of cultural ownership of the story. She confirms this in
an early interview, saying:

What was critically important for a project like this in this day and age is that if
you are telling an Indigenous story it’s paramount that there is an Indigenous
person in the director’s position. (Maza, 2004)

This view is verified by Eaton who explains:

I felt like I knew where Rachael was coming from. And the players, we feel like,
in that short time that we made a little family. An Aborigine director, directing
Aborigine players … it was just like we took over the show. And it’s like there’s no white person telling us what to do. It was just handled by everybody. And it makes the job more easier too, because she’s got the same background and she understands. (Eaton in Campbell, 2004a)

Although the play is written by a non-Indigenous woman and performed in a mainstream venue, this observance of a protocol of respect for the ownership of the story seems to model Carter’s poetical and political motion shared between cultures.

The entangled relationship between performers and audience in the Yandy story was most apparent in the audience attending the show on opening night. Within the large room that was the theatre auditorium, several of the actors and many in the audience had direct connections with the original strikers or the pastoralists. There were a number of Indigenous people from the Pilbara who had been transported by bus from Port Hedland to Perth, a distance of 2,000 kilometres. This group included children and babies, parents and old people. Also in the audience were corporate sponsors, arts people and dignitaries (at one point in the season the Governor attended). The inclusion of Indigenous community elders Eaton and Stuart, again as participants in the performance, establishes a particularly close set of connections between the real and the representational. Peter Coppin himself had been flown to Perth for the opening night by Consolidated Minerals. Dooley BinBin was performed by prominent Indigenous actor David Ngoombujarra, a nephew of one of the strikers. It was, as can be deduced by these complicated connections, very much a community affair.

In this way, the process of experiencing a communal bond through the telling of an iconic story occurred not just in terms of the imaginary frame of the show but also in terms of lived experience of it, on the ground; it was both performative and participatory. The real people involved and/or their descendents were actually there, reinscribing their history and

---

57 I asked Eaton what her ultimate dream for the production would be, the best outcome, she responded that she would like to take it to the Queen. So in an (albeit symbolic) sense her desire was partly fulfilled in that, at least the Queen’s representative came to see the show.
experience and bearing witness with their presence to the evolving relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. It could be said that the show acted as a modern-day ritual, a corroboree perhaps, singing a story into history and culture, marking the social ground shared between the cultures.

Susan Bennett outlines an audience-focussed model of theatre that might describe the involvement of community in the production and performance of *Yandy*, whereby

> the outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space. The audience’s role is carried out within these two frames and, perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection. It is the interactive relations between audience and stage, spectator and spectator which constitute production and reception, and which cause the inner and outer frames to converge for the creation of a particular experience. (1990: 139)

Bennett proposes that the introduction of these contextual or, as she calls it, “liminal aspects to the process of theatre attendance complicates the more traditional concerns about the audience’s perception of the play performance” (1990: 11). She believes that these “liminalities are always ideologically encoded” (1990: 11), and that this creates the frame through which the whole event is experienced both by the audience and by the performers.

The extended and intense liminal (indeed, methektic) activity surrounding the play is notable. Historically, relationships between Indigenous communities and the mining companies that run the mines and support towns throughout the Pilbara have been poor.58

---

58 S. Halcombe relates that

Gold was discovered at Nullagine (about 240 kilometers north east of the Hamersley mines) in 1878, and alluvial tin four years later. By 1906 about 300 Aboriginal people were panning these tin fields developing a small-scale subsistence economy...These Indigenous miners introduced a technical innovation in the use of a traditional winnowing dish and container, known as the Yandy. This flattened dish enabled Aboriginal people to compete effectively with European miners on the tin fields. The fact that this type of mining was labour-intensive also meant many otherwise unskilled Aboriginal People could be successful. Those most skilled in its use were Aboriginal women ... Until 1967 Aboriginal people in the Pilbara still held 30 mining tenements in the northwest and 28 in the Eastern Goldfields. Later, however, the mineral leases were increasingly taken up by large mining companies and Aboriginal people became less able to compete. (2004: 2-3)
Halcombe points out that “the exclusion of Aboriginal labour was inherent in the planning of these new mines” (2004: 3). Eaton also mentioned this, saying that the mining companies “give us but not much. They give it to shut our mouths I suppose … what money they make, they give half to the government, we just took the leftovers” (Eaton in Campbell, 2004a). From Eaton’s Indigenous perspective, it is a story of one displacement following another.

59 A lucrative contract was signed between bhpBilliton and a Japanese corporation shortly after the play opened and a new mine site was subsequently opened at the Yandi operations.
The event began with a traditional welcome in language welcoming the Yandeyarra mob from the Pilbara onto ‘Nyungar budga’ by the traditional Nyungar owners of the land on which the performance was being held. There was also an official thank you in Nyamal to BHPbiliton, Hamersley Iron and Consolidated Minerals, all of whom had contributed to the production.\textsuperscript{60} At the beginning of the play all the actors formed a line across the stage and danced towards the audience. Their bodies were painted in traditional white clay markings. These ceremonial markings were placed across a range of skin colour. The Inma line was made up not only of Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors, but on opening night at least, the children and babies of the actors and community members in the audience came on stage to be included as well. This welcoming ritual of one community on stage, to another altogether mixed community in the audience made up of Indigenous people from the Pilbara and local Nyungar people, representatives from the sponsoring business communities, interested West Australian theatre goers and allied artists in the field, was led by Eaton and Number 2, the two Indigenous community elders. This intra-cultural ritual acted, in Victor Turner’s sense, as a site of separation from the here and now, to the constructed world of the play, from a Western theatre space to an Indigenous performative place.\textsuperscript{61} It was a moment of open movement between cultures, and a significant cultural negotiation, unique to Western Australia, across what I argue to be mimetic and methektic understandings of performance.

\textsuperscript{60} Even though Pilbara Iron was the production’s major sponsor, Consolidated Minerals had managed to pay for the bus that brought the Yandeyarra community from Port Hedland to Perth.

\textsuperscript{61} In his seminal article “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology”, Victor Turner describes this moment as one “when persons, groups sets of ideas, etc., move from one level or style of organization or regulation of the interdependence of their parts or elements to another level, there has to be an interfacial region or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of margin or limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance” (in Counsell, 2001: 206).
In his early work defining the field of performance studies, Richard Schechner applies a sociological frame to the analysis of performance that I think can usefully be applied to *Yandy*. According to Schechner it is

context, not fundamental structure, [that] distinguishes ritual, entertainment, and ordinary life, from each other. The differences among them arise from the agreement (conscious or unexpressed) between performers and spectators. (in Bennett, 1990: 11)

The ‘context’ of *Yandy* in this instance breaks conventional, Western mimetic theatre-going boundaries and might well be described as a blurring between entertainment and social ritual. In *Yandy*, the boundaries between community, corporate power and cultural positioning are raw, fluid, and are negotiated in the moment, through a movement between ‘rituals, entertainment, and ordinary life’ that is created on the ground. The show operates in this sense, not just as a theatrical performance but, more broadly, as a cultural ‘event’ or an embodied enactment (in place; albeit that place was mainstream theatre space) of ongoing cultural negotiation. Read observes

it was really cathartic for some people, there were all these oldies in the audience, so many people who had worked up there in the 60s as bureaucrats or had been station owners getting up and saying, ‘we remember Dooley’ … or ‘I worked up there in the 60s and I was shocked at how we as a white culture treated these people’. (Read in Campbell, 2004b)

This feeling of inclusion and participation was present in all levels of the production for reasons that were economic, cultural and historic and existed both in terms of making the work and presenting it. I believe these considerations played a large role in the success of the production.

It could be argued, then, that *Yandy* operates most comfortably as a community ‘event’ working mimetically and methektically to provide a forum for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to recuperate a little-known but significant episode of political resistance and to celebrate at least for a short time, a sense of communal belonging and
shared history, perhaps even a glimmer of hope for the future. This hope depends upon both communities walking uneven cultural ground on an equal footing. Eaton reminds us about the importance of this communication:

there is a lot of stories about Aborigine people and this one about people in the Pilbara took off, but there is some other stories about what the government did to Aborigine people that’s never been taught. Like when I went to school, I had to learn about Captain Cook and how the first settlers came in here, but there was nothing about Aborigine stories been handed down. This is the first time … took them how many years …this is 2004 … to light this story up, about how they been treated and how they had to fight to get where they are. (Eaton in Campbell, 2004a)

Yandy seems to form a confluence of lived experience and its description on stage. It blurs the lines between the story, theatre, the real lives of the people playing the characters and the lives of the people sitting in the audience, creating (at least for a time) a social space within which new dynamics can be formed.

If it stumbles over uneven ground, as I argue it does at times, it is a false step that is well worth examining, particularly in the context of negotiations over land, history, human rights, economic benefit and, finally, whose stories are told and how. As Maza says it is “an amazing story that needs to be told, needs to be heard and wants to be heard” (Maza, 2004).

The journey of Indigenous politics

The open and inclusive style of Yandy at times masks the underlying seriousness of the state of affairs that the people involved in the story were enduring. At the beginning of the play we witness an example of the kinds of sexual abuse Indigenous women suffered at the hands of their white employers. The grinding brutality of this circumstance is related by Mary, one of the house workers. After she is yet again raped by the station owner, she says
I don’t want him doin’ this to my daughter, touchin’ my daughter too … I got nothin’. We got nothin’. None of us got nothin’. I can’t take this no more. I can’t take this no more. (Read, 2004)

This moment provides the catalyst in the play for the strike movement. The episode is played with quiet dignity between the performers and works toward touching the horror of such situations. Deborah Rose Bird discusses the significance of similar stories, reminding her readers that systematic sexual abuse has recently been “included within the United Nations definitions of crimes against humanity” (Bird Rose, 2004: 110). She believes that this practice, along with other “colonising regimes” such as the forcible removal of children from their parents, does not occur in “empty homogenous space” but rather invades the future and the past, as well as overwhelming the present. She names the effect of this violent sexual invasion part of a process of aenocide:

Aenocide was practiced over decades and decades, and the result for many women was that survival became a curiously empty proposition. To live as the utilitarian object of others meant being physically invaded by bullets that ripped right into one’s own selfhood, taking the future and starting to unmake the past. (Bird Rose, 2004: 112)  

According to Bird Rose such practices rupture fundamental connections of meaning, “amplify[ing] catastrophe, causing multiple waves of pain and loss across time, through social relations, and within the corporeal and consubstantive relations between people, other living beings and country” (2004:112). Eaton is fully aware of this effect. Pointing to her own skin and its colour, she relates in interview that

even now that is because of your colour they say, ‘Oh well you can’t prove that you’re Aborigine’. But people don’t understand that our ancestors do come from this land, and they was full-blooded. Our colour here [indicates her skin], it wasn’t meant to be put there, our old people used to get raped and abused and that’s why we got mixed colours. But we know in our heart that we are Aborigine people, but we still have to prove ourselves to be Aborigine people. Because our culture is strong and we want to see our culture keep going for our young ones, not to knock it back. There’s not enough, they don’t want to fund culture. We don’t get enough money from the government to practice our Law because they don’t think that it’s important. Work is important [that is work for money is considered more important than culture] and they

---

put us under this CDEP program, cover the dole up. We are still struggling. (Eaton in Campbell, 2004a)

This unstable positioning between traditional culture, colonisation and the crude power of global capital is written not only on the body, in the colour of skin but is also lived everyday on a political level in the way the Indigenous communities in the Pilbara now act both as gatekeepers to country for the big miners and as receivers of mining largesse. The pool at Yandeyarra, the school and clinic are all, for example, facilitated by the willingness (indeed eagerness) of twenty-first century mining companies to invest (and to be seen to be investing) in community projects.⁶³ Even so, Eaton is very clear that the pressure to follow demands of the same capitalist system that her father fought to be included in, that is the subject matter of Yandy, still threatens her culture. She sees, for example, that the government’s Community Development Employment Projects program that operates as a ‘work for the dole’ scheme, as yet another demand being made of Indigenous culture that breaks down traditional ties to land.

---

⁶³ The logic behind this eagerness to be seen to be caring is expressed in BHPbilliton’s Company Charter that states:

As a resources company, our license to operate and grow depends on the responsible operation of all aspects of our business, which includes our ability to work effectively with the communities in which we operate. Responsible social performance also has the potential to reduce business costs. Community goodwill can mitigate the risk of interruptions to our business, facilitate regulatory approvals, enhance our reputation as a responsible and caring employer and so enable us to attract and retain a skilled and motivated workforce, and place us in a good position as a partner of choice, even in areas where we may not have previously operated. Predictably, this logic is framed as a business rather than a social imperative.
Much of the story of aeonicide within *Yandy* is told lightly, with dialogue delivered in a bantering, comic style that at times mocks both perpetrator and victim, inverting the seriousness of the material that is patently, achingly, unfunny. The nature of the material itself speaks over and above theatrical style and it is when this light-hearted approach is pushed into a kind of grotesque mimetic parody or pantomime that the play’s political comment is at its most pointed. When Dennis Simmons, one of the Indigenous actors, enters a government office dressed as a demented panto-dame complete with oversized backside, fake wig and shrieking falsetto, the overlay of laughter is disturbing. Her four children have been stolen by a welfare officer and she has come to get them back. She threatens the bureaucrats and the audience with a fire hose. The ‘white’ bureaucrats, played
by black actors, react with outrage and hilarious pandemonium ensues. This kind of comic destabilising is played throughout the production and, whereas at moments it runs the risk of trivialising the incidents, it also provides a strategy for speaking the unspeakable.

Strategies in which Indigenous actors play white perpetrators of violence allows audiences to watch the performers construct ‘whiteness’ across their own bodies, demonstrating what Michael Taussig calls “mimetic excess” (1993: 246). When ‘white’ justice played in relief, as it were, across the ‘black’ bodies of the actors, the non-Indigenous audience is given an opportunity to enter another’s experience methektically; “to become aware of the West in the eyes and handiwork of its Others, to … abandon border logistics and enter into the “second contact” era of the borderland where “us and “them” lost their polarity and “swim in and out of focus” (Taussig, 1993: 246). This activation of bilateral, two-legged movement between subjectivities in Yandy, between audience and performers, allows a constructive poetical and political environment for both historical and contemporary events to take their place within a shared understanding, as both parties move together across the uneven lie of the land.

Travelling the distance

Nevertheless, there comes a point in the farce, the melodrama, the pantomime, the parody, the exposition of the historical epic, when I am reminded that Yandy continues to be a work in translation. I realise that the linear narrative structure of the play and the appealing but crudely wrought heroes who overcome the villains and make wrongs right, work within an imposed Western mimetic aesthetic that is ultimately at odds with the real breadth and the depth of the material. This aesthetic seems to demand a ‘happy ever after’ resolution that in this play, never seems to arrive. In order for the cultural envelope to be expanded, I suggest
that a poetics of place must also to be approached at the fundamental level of form. This involves that the transformation of space into place and place into space that is equally expressive of both cultures.\textsuperscript{64}

I argue here for a poetics of place in theatre that accommodates time and the events that occur and drive a narrative, but also reaches for the embodied experience of place and the ways in which those places might be experienced in the theatre. Paradoxically, it is the (mis/placed) reliance on a narrative timeline in \textit{Yandy} that I believe, unsettles its mimetic form. It is at this point, where the form fails, that something unusual and far more interesting begins to happen. The breach becomes most obvious when McLeod falls right outside of his predictable representational trajectory and instead becomes a ‘villain’, a self-serving, deluded, white gatekeeper using his position to wield power over the strikers. The ‘communist workers’ hero’ story super-structure that has formed around McLeod in the play and carried the story (and in fact threatened to overtake the Indigenous story at times), is sloughed off as his hard-line ideological stand and the failure of his investments on behalf of the strikers leads to the loss of Yandeyarra station. Without the unifying social realist narrative trope (that usually leads to a happy ending, or at least some sort of resolution) the story that is being told in \textit{Yandy} begins to become less recognisable in its trajectory. It begs a question: if it is not a story of workers uniting and overcoming hardship, then what kind of story is it?

History continues to buffet the strikers, without a cohesive narrative thrust. Although there is no stylistic shift in the performance, a strange rhythm sets in. There is no beginning and middle and end to this story it seems; instead it becomes an on-going, endless journey.

\textsuperscript{64} Stuart Elden’s commentary on Heidegger’s ideas of history and its relation to place offers some insight into the fundamental conceptual frame behind such a possible translation. Heidegger’s work, Elden suggests, makes history a critique of the present. And it has been suggested that this history is one that takes a far greater interest in the \textit{spatial}, as opposed to the merely temporal. Heidegger … has with waxing clarity moved from an understanding of space experientially to dwelling in place poetically. (2001: 62)
enacted as though it were a story, by people who are actually living it, without resolution. The story becomes baggy; it loses its straight lines. It is filled with intimate detail, personal observation, weighty commentary and factual observation. There is more suffering and a ‘split’ in the movement. We find that the company set up by McLeod and the strikers went on to own, then to lose and then to regain a number of pastoral stations. We learn of the deaths of Mitchell and Dooley and the descent of Clancy into alcoholism. In an oddly subdued return of the storytelling circle, the Storyteller tells us that Yandeyarra is currently home to over 250 people, and that it is a working sheep station, runs a school, a hospital clinic, a store and even boasts an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Despite these hard won victories, by the end of the play there is no triumphant narrative ending for the Yandeyarra community; there is no happy ever after. The struggle for Indigenous economic, political and cultural rights charted throughout the play continues in real life, seemingly in perpetuity.

It is, I believe, at the very point where the staging of the story fails and the seams of translation become most visible that the real life, place-bound aspect of the situation being represented on stage begins to emerge, methektically.. In the audience, I have no idea how this story is going to finish. Within the welter of information, the comings and goings of characters, the incidents and conflicts, the time span, the joking, the absence of a stable central character within a representational form that seems to demand one, the failure of an appropriately cathartic dramatic climax or resolution, the translated Western narrative trajectories fall away and the underbelly of an entirely different performance begins to emerge across the lie of the land or the landscape of the play.

65 There is irony however. Daisy, one of the characters notes that that whitefella mob at the council, they decided to give Kangku the ‘key’ to Port Headland not long ago…To make him a ‘Free Man’ of the town, they call it! That’s pretty funny when you think back all them years ago when we were banned from goin’ there after dark. (Read, 2004)
Recognition that this performance is doing something more than “merely filling [history’s] gaps with untold stories” (Tompkins and Hollege, 2000: 110), comes to me through a growing awareness of my own implacement and responsibility within an Australian context. It becomes apparent that, apart from being a story about cultural oppression and economic exploitation of other people, this story is also (amongst many other things) a story about me. This realisation tells me that there is more to this story and this country, these people and my relationship with them, than meets the representational eye. It draws me into my own emerging Western/Aboriginal culture, and makes me responsible for what has happened here, into the future. This process reflects the willingness on the part of the story’s owners and creators, I believe, to follow the contours of meaning and context that this story seems to offer across a Western representational space and out the other side of it.

In the audience, it seemed as though I was part of something like the corroboree, mentioned by Read as her initial image for the play, performed not in the desert, but this time in the (not-so-sacred) space of a Western theatre. I argue that *Yandy* is best understood in this way as an event that works methektically as well as mimetically. What emerges as the production itself begins to bog down is a different type of representation, one that is perhaps neither wholly methektic nor mimetic but might even be a strange combination of the two. *Yandy* arrives then, in the world, as a newly formed material commodity in place (to refer to Andrew Merrifield’s analysis). It is itself, a living, hopeful monster, not displaced but implaced within a particular social ground, unfolding in the present, formed by layers of connections between audiences, performers and the events that are being described on stage in place.

In the final image, almost as a codicil, the actor playing Peter Coppin reminds the audience that

we’re standin’ ‘ere on our own country. And for all of us here the land is just like our mother … we call the land ‘mother’ because everything come from that. (Read, 2004)
It is this enduring image that sustains a powerful dynamic within the play, acting as the stable ground into which the unstable or discredited Western narratives might eventually fall. With a somewhat lurching poetical and political gait, Yandy achieves at least some kind of connection between mimesis and methexis, across a triple capture of place, negotiating difference as it moves along. The question remains, of course: can such a struggling poetic survive to travel the distance?66

Postscript

The pressing need for the story to be told is pointed out by Eaton. She relates her belief that

the major message of the play is to tell everybody and the government as well that they fought for their rights. They weren’t treated like they should be treated as human beings and they were locked away, wasn’t even allowed to cross their land. Yes, it’s a message to everybody. It’s a little bit of a wake up call for all of us, to make us all understand we have to stand united, together. For whatever reason we have to fight … for land claims … we have to stand as a whole. They did it as a whole. (Eaton in Campbell, 2004a)

This necessity for the play to address current concerns in the fight for Indigenous rights is also reflected in the views of Fred Chaney, the co-chairman of Reconciliation Australia and a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Fraser Government, when he says

66 Outside of the theatre, I believe that real change can occur when Indigenous communities and mining companies work on more of an equal footing to renegotiate the lie of the land. Such a relationship would demand that these communities did not just receive financial help and royalties from the companies but were actually granted equity in the business. As reported by ABC Local Radio, this approach is not generally welcomed by the mining industry, but is, nevertheless, being negotiated between the Martu people and junior miner, Rewards Minerals, in a new mine in the Western Desert.
(http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/04/06/2208985.htm Accessed 14 June, 2008) Interestingly, Victoria Laurie also writes about the Martu people of the Western Desert in “On the Whitefella’s Road”, in the Weekend Australian (June 14 -15, 2008. 20 -25). She states that “a century after Alfred Canning blazed a drovers’ trail across the Western Desert, artists are reclaiming its Indigenous history.” In this feature article she discusses the Canning Stock Route Project the aim of which is to “document the indigenous history of the stock route in paintings, artefacts, photos, films and oral histories” (2008: 21). The stock route, “a car-width dirt track” built in 1906, crosses the Tanami, Great Sandy and Little Sandy deserts of Western Australia and has been, Laurie reports, contested territory from the outset with stories of “sex and death and life and murder and revenge. It’s epic in its historical scale, like Greek tragedy unfolding.” (2008: 22). It might be that the active and empowering cultural connection with the land and its stories, documented in the Project, plays a part in the success of the Martu’s claim on equity in the mining business, underlining perhaps, the power of art, in and of place, to renegotiate social space and thereby, or after the fact, effect economic change.
I cannot understand the desperate desire of some to avoid an honest telling of our history. I have never forgotten the abuse of Aboriginal people, and have consistently witnessed the denial of basic human rights that we have tolerated for much of my lifetime. The fact that there are serious and at times even drastic problems in Aboriginal communities today is no excuse for distorting the truth and denying our history. Thankfully, today's policies are not those of the Past but our history contributes to where we are today and will contribute to where we may be tomorrow.

Unfortunately, in Australia, unlike a number of other countries, we are yet to identify, let alone provide, a constructive response whereby these families can heal the wounds that have been inflicted on them, so that we as a nation - together - can move forward. Distorting the truth and denying our history will not aid this process. (Chaney, 2001)

Chaney came to see Yandy and then sent a letter to Read saying how moved he was and that the performance would stay in his memory. It is precisely in this sense that Yandy operates as a ‘constructive response’ to a difficult cultural topography and negotiates the lie of the land with halting, yet spirited steps.
Chapter Three

_The Odyssey_: On ‘Home’ as the Beginning of a Journey

_The Odyssey_, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Suzannah McDonald, Stephen Phillips, photo Jeff Busby
I aim to try things out rather than write down the truth because I think this is the only way to proceed honestly, which means to proceed with a strong awareness of events around us and of how we can participate in them ethically. (Muecke, 2004: 8)

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called metaphorai. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor” – a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. (De Certeau, 1984:115)

**Embarking**

In Yandy: *Walking the Lie of a Mining Boom*, I considered how Lefebvreian readings of place within capitalism can be applied to the refiguring of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships in theatre. My chapter on *The Drover’s Wives* discussed how ideas of place might be rendered and constructed upon women’s bodies. In this chapter, I follow the journey of Odysseus across mythical places; from a war-blasted Troy toward his home in Ithaca. *The Odyssey*, directed by Michael Kantor and adapted by Tom Wright for Black Swan and Malthouse Theatres casts Odysseus as an Australian archetype, in this incarnation, a ‘digger’ or soldier returning from a mythical Gallipoli home to Albany in the south-west of Western Australia after WW1. The audience follows the progress of this antipodean version of Odysseus, across vast oceans and studded with outposts of Empire. On his journey home, our hero encounters exotic, colonial adaptations of the imaginary figures and monsters of the Ancients.

First staged in Melbourne for the 2005 Melbourne International Arts Festival, *The Odyssey* was performed in a cavernous workshop attached to Malthouse Theatre. It was then programmed in 2006, as part of the Perth International Arts Festival. In Perth the production was performed outside, at the Showgrounds. *The Odyssey* won two
Helpmann Awards in 2006 (the national awards for the Australian live performance industry). The designers, along with Kantor and Wright, enlist the myth of Odysseus to provide the structure through which a particular vision of contemporary Australian culture might find expression. They layer iconic image upon iconic image and myth upon myth, capturing the colonial places of this imaginary journey as representations built not upon reality, but upon literary and cultural reference, nostalgia and historical fancy.

Although *The Odyssey* is just one theatrical event, it emerges nevertheless, from a cultural environment whose operations diffuse across a range of activities and interactions. If, as Deleuze writes,

> culture is an involuntary adventure, the movement of learning which links a sensibility, a memory and then a thought, with all the cruelties and violence necessary, as Nietzsche said, precisely in order to ‘train a “nation of thinkers”’ or to ‘provide a training for the mind,’ (1968: 166)

then this involuntary quality of culture working upon the individual can be met and explored using reflexive strategies. Writing an auto-ethnographic account of my experience of this work allows me to contemplate the kind of Australia that these theatre-makers are in the process of making and what my place in such a world might be.

For this reason, and also because place in this production is not grounded in concrete notions of actual places in the world, but in fabrications of mythical places, I feel compelled to write something about the effects this myth-making has on me as a spectator, (a female spectator). I ask therefore what this play does in the world, how it operates and contributes to contemporary Australian culture, according of course, to my own observation and bodily experience. I want to weave both a lived and a theoretical

---

67 Zoe Atkinson for Costume Design and Anna Tregloan for Set Design.
context around this production and the way in which it contributes to making Australia the place it is, for me.

To place my own embodied experience of this production as an event, not only in the singular capture of place on stage, but also in the capture of place within a larger world of imagination and social and political encounter, I ask, what kind of society or territory is being constructed by this work? What kind of place, what kind of Australia, is being made, for me, in this production?

**A Capture of Place**

Casey argues (after Irigaray) that like the original Odysseus, Western man throughout history may supply space – for example, the global space of geographic exploration – but he fails to provide place. Not offering place, indeed being empty of place himself, man desperately seeks place elsewhere: in woman. (1997: 327)

This gendered construction of place and space extends the original binary relationship. The materiality of place for Western man becomes aligned with the feminine while things of the mind and spirit are not bound by bodily limits but are free to roam, unhindered by concerns of everyday life.

I argue throughout this chapter that Kantor and Wright’s colonial Odysseus is continually confounded by his attraction to, and contradictory fear of place, not only the place Odysseus calls Home, an idealised version of Australia, but all the places he comes to on his journey. True to the imperatives of his Ancient Greek legend, the free-wheeling Odysseus in Kantor and Wright’s production must come in close, have a lived, bodily experience with each of the places on his journey and then move on. He must confront, enjoy or conquer the mysteries embedded within each port of call in his
journey toward home. The journey, in a sense, becomes Odysseus’ search for identity. It is also offered in this production, on a larger scale, as a post-colonial journey toward nationhood.

Kantor and Wright take a design-driven approach to their colonial version of an ancient tale that I argue, reaches for the surfaces and mirrors of post-modernity. In a shifting landscape of hyper-stimulating visual and aural display, Odysseus, as centre of this theatrical spectacle, provides an exclusive, singular (in effect, totalising) point of view for the audience. We travel together with our hero through a highly wrought, fantastical Australian myth-scape, designed to titillate, amuse and suggest layers of meaning that remain fragmented, evocative and yet, strangely illusive.

In this production, Odysseus does not seem comfortable in his own skin, neither can he find a place to reconcile his history of violence. This archetypical figure arrives home sword drawn, ready for further force and blood-shed.

There is, I believe, an unresolved fear and ambivalence about place inscribed in the ancient myth of Odysseus that is reinscribed on the many representational surfaces that constitute this production, millennia and half a world away from the original. Kantor and Wright’s contemporary version of the myth expresses, for me, a profound sense of displacement as their Australian Odysseus searches endlessly, failing throughout to find a sense of authenticity and a place to be at home.
In his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Marc Augè argues that

in one form or another ranging from the misery of refugee camps to the cosseted luxury of five-star hotels, some experience of non-place (indissociable from a more or less clear perception of the acceleration of history and the contraction of the planet) is today an essential component of all social existence. (1995: 119)

Within Augé’s definition of the spaces of supermodernity

the word ‘non-place designates two complementary distinct realities: space formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these space … As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. (1995: 94)
They are the transit lounges, shopping malls, theme parks, tourist venues, highways and refugee camps that multiply across modernity. They are deemed meaningful only in so far as they can be “listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position” (Augé 1995: 78) within the seamless organisation of contemporary life. Some non-places exist only in the imagination, created by words and images that evoke excitement, exotic pleasure and luxury. These are the “banal utopias, clichés” that fill the gap between “everyday functionality and lost myth” (1995: 95).

Unlike anthropological places that Augé describes as “relational, historical and concerned with identity” (1995: 52) the non-places of supermodernity have no such internal dynamic or nuanced integrity. Augé contends that the increasing ubiquity of non-places within supermodernity work ultimately to isolate and control the people who inhabit such a proscribed physical, imaginative and social landscape. He calls for an ethnology of supermodernity that reflects on the practices that produce such conditions (1995: 120).

I take up Augé’s challenge and trace Odysseus’ journey home from war against what I perceive to be a theatrical version of supermodernity. I suggest that the experience of place created by Odysseus’ journey in this production is not built upon the particularity of character and the human relationships that arise from dramatic (or post-dramatic) encounters in-place, nor is it built upon a coherent plot or narrative, nor through a considered investigation of political or historical realities. Instead, I argue, meaning in this construction of place and space, lies in the affect bought from empty spectacle not from the in-place content or context of the images themselves.

As an audience member, I experienced the performance as a series of snapshots or video clip-like sequences, fragmented, serialised and supersaturated for affect. I felt the
performance with my body as the music and lights and novel scenarios thumped and
flashed and strobed before my eyes. At the end of the performance however, I had no
significant insight into what the journey of Odysseus and his men might mean within a
particular colonial situation, nor had I any proper historical place to put the images that
the production had offered. Instead I had accumulated a horde of visual trinkets or
novelties, glittering theatrical souvenirs of an imagistic journey that the theatre makers
had concocted for the sake of theatre going pleasure.

**Through the looking glass**

Rather like some post-apocalyptic, unshaven and handsome, male version of Alice,
disappearing into the other side of the Looking Glass, Odysseus is first flung, helpless,
on to the stage. He is delivered to the scene, near-naked and bereft; a disoriented man-
child in need of serious attention. In a series of short tableaux or ‘flash-forwards’ that
prefigure his journey, we, in the audience, first land with Odysseus on the island of the
princess Nausikaa, (the young, beautiful and available), where our protagonist, covered
in sweat and grime, is hurled headlong into a scene of bucolic charm. He finds himself
in the arms of flower-bedecked milk-maids singing sweet pastoral songs. Homeless,
lost, and a prey to these designing (though frilly and pink) females, it seems that the
only thing of which he is certain is his need and desire to be secure in his rightful place,
as king, father and husband, once again in Ithaca.

His delirium continues as he finds himself waltzing with Kalypso, half goddess, half
woman, portrayed in this production as a mature vision of Edwardian respectability.
Mistress of an Arcadia of the Veldts, she tries to persuade him that she might be
his wife, that life in this strange, savage land, in this new world, can be leisured and
privileged, that if only he stays with her, he too can be more than merely mortal. Again,
within a turmoil of temptation and choice between alternative versions of his fate,
Odysseus knows he must continue his journey. He can only escape psychic annihilation caused by what he and his men have just committed in war by returning home. In order to begin this pilgrimage we, in the audience, accompany Odysseus as he spirals toward the hell of his own making that is Troy. Like a WWI victim of shell-shock, it is for our hero, a post-traumatic return of the most disorienting kind.

The stage empties and there is an assault of sound; loud clanging and screaming, the screeching of metal against metal, a cacophony of destruction and violence. A flood of lights flash and gyrate, they whip over hard metal surfaces, simultaneously hiding and revealing the dark and treacherous places of war. In the enclosed space in Melbourne smoke machines belch out a sickly blue haze. In Perth the haze drifts into the clear open air of the star-encrusted night sky. The audience is treated by the theatre-makers, toto a sensurround, hyper-stimulating emersion into Odysseus’ Boys’ Own nightmare.68

The set is a massive iron-clad construction with a series of doors and metal ladders connecting the upper and lower decks of what appears to be (with some suggestions of the famous horse of Troy) the rusting bowels of a decayed warship from the WWI era. It echoes and imagines war machines from conflicts past, present and future. Like real war machines, it entirely dominates the space. A circular revolve extends into metal troughs and cages that fill with water and then empty during the performance, signifying both the boat and the oceans across which Odysseus has to travel on his journey. The set turns around a small central playing area into which the ship’s mast is placed. The whole construction is pushed by the actors with a degree of effort, sweat and grunt. At the rear of the stage, an impressively large portal approached by a similarly large ramp is raised and lowered like some futuristic, gladiatorial threshold. The overwhelming

68 Author, Tom Wright says: “In the end it was me making the decision that I actually really like the child story-book element of the Odyssey” (Wright in Campbell, 2005b). The story-book trope is repeated throughout the production, most notably in the Island of Listragonia where an huge story book prop is set on stage, depicting Odysseus’ ship with broken mast and cut out ‘little girl’ pictures covered in blood.
effect is of hard surfaces, industrial decay, elemental forms of iron and water against which the muscled flesh of the actors, the music and the lighting form a contrast of movement, feeling and affect.

Homer, the storyteller, is a crone in this production, while the goddess Athena, who instructs Odysseus on how he must make his journey, is a frocked and beribboned girl; a white-stockinged replica of the fictional Alice in Wonderland. These feminine forces, on either side of child-bearing age, provide the means and sing up the ground across which our hero must travel. Odysseus’ story is framed by these two feminine figures as a search for identity and for belonging, and, as his story pans out across a number of female bodies (and the places that this production aligns with them), as a journey toward responsible manhood and sexual maturity. His progress is highlighted, as it is traditionally in Greek myth, as a masculine journey through the feminine toward stability and meaning.
The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Stephen Phillips, photo Jeff Busby
A blonde Cassandra stumbles in. As I watch from the audience, she reminds me of a refugee from a Weimar Republic cocktail party gone horribly wrong. She waves a half empty bottle as she enters, her pale nakedness gleams beneath the tattered remnants of great coat from WW1. She flings herself up against a pianola, or rather, is flung upon it by an imaginary figure and raped. The weight of her body hammers out discordant notes as it beats against the musical instrument. Blood smears down her inner thighs. The simulated violence that plays across her body is intense; to her however, it doesn’t seem to signify. Agamemnon enters. He is dressed in the same dirtied, ragged uniform as Cassandra. She swigs from the bottle and tells him that she is carrying his child, adding with a laugh a prophecy that they will all be dead before their child sees the light of day. This descent into degradation is played almost as a melodrama, each step designed to be more lurid than the last.

**Simulacra of place**

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true. (Jean Baudrillard quotes Ecclesiastes 1988: 166)

Augé’s description of supermodernity includes constructed and controlled spaces of tourism and shopping malls which are designed to facilitate particular types of experiences and impressions. In such places of verisimilitude, faux-environments are simulated, made and remade for consumer convenience and of course, attendant commercial value. As Augè states, these sites “create solitary contractuality”(1995: 94) between consumer and producer. They are, according to Augé, essentially lonely places, not made for complex human relationships but. Rather, they are designed to keep the customer on track, consuming with proscribed agency. In such environments, complex, relational, embodied place is either disguised or emptied of as much meaning
as possible other than those meanings that relate to a predetermined agenda, although this is of course, just the point that such places are trying to hide. 69

Amidst the loneliness of the supermodern consumer (or theatre-goer), there is always some room for dramatic tension and thrill (or titillation) in the interplay between place and non-place. Augé notes that

place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. (1995: 79)

The theatrical morphology between place and space in *The Odyssey* is constantly arranging and rearranging itself, driven by the frenetic demands of a spectacle that forms around the hero. In the audience, my senses are fully occupied by a symphony of theatricality while the traditionally gendered constructions of place that reside within Odysseus’ myth, left unexamined, are re-encoded within a newly minted faux-‘authentic’ experience, built on sensation. Spectacle in this way works to maintain a conservative status quo across a triple capture of place.

This production empties certain layers of contextualised meaning out of the place-rich bodies of the actors and overcodes others; not of course, for shopping or travelling convenience, but at the behest of spectacle. The promise of real experience produces desire in the consumer while the novelty of ‘what’s next’ keeps him or her engaged when the actual experience of the commodity on offer palls. Odysseus, an ‘Everyman’ figure for the audience, (or for this audience member, at least) remains the atomistic centre of his own gendered spectacle; he is both hero and primary consumer of the images on offer. It is around him that this spectacular world is organised and then re-

---

69 For example, people using a mall might use the space for reasons other than shopping, but this is generally discouraged by the authorities. Similarly, the non-commercial, every-day life aspects of tourist destinations are generally obscured to the general public.
organised. He moves, himself, the centre of his own story, as a tourist might follow an itinerary across the highways and byways of supermodernity.

The trans/female figures, Homer and Athena act as the tour guides, facilitating Odysseus’ journey across the landscape of his own Western narrative with a full programme. Augé suggests that on journeys across supermodernity ports of call become (appropriately) meaningful only in as much as they provide photo opportunities, constructed, captured and then contracted within the supermodern experience:

> Space, as frequentation of places rather than a place, stems in effect from a double movement: the traveler’s movement, of course, but also a parallel movement of the landscapes which he catches only in partial glimpses, a series of ‘snapshots’ piled hurriedly into his memory and, literally, recomposed in the account he gives of them, the sequencing of slides in the commentary he imposes on his entourage when he returns. (Augé, 1995: 86)

In the audience I find myself cast as Odysseus’ ‘entourage’, as Augé would have it. His journey is delivered to me as lavish snapshots of places he visits. I see him first with Nausikaa, then with Kalypso, with Cyclops, with Circe and a list of others. Ultimately however, even as he tries to connect and make sense of the scenes and figures that emerge along his route Odysseus stares from the centre of his production not into the face of another human being, not even at me in the audience, but into empty space.

Following Augé, it could be said that Kantor and Wright’s snapshot version of Odysseus’ tale engages the audience in a strange, “solitary reversal of the gaze … [this] traveller’s space may thus become the archetype of non-place” (1995: 86).

In settler society in Australia, also uncomfortable in its own mythic and historical skin, it seems to me that this Australian, post-colonial theatrical journey, the Western archetype, Odysseus, searches endlessly for an embodied meaning he can call his own.

---

70 Paul Carter suggests the Athene is in Homer’s epic poem “the theatricalization of space personified … she defines Homer’s narrative technique, which is one of cinematographic visualization” (1996: 306). As one of Odysseus’ tour guides in this production, Athena certainly directs his journey across a format that could be compared to a visual travel diary. Carter is critiquing mimesis (and Western notions of theatricality) in this book, asking his reader to consider a methetic, alternative paradigm.
and within which he can settle. This yearning for a sense of place and belonging is, I believe, the most interesting point of entry into this version of *The Odyssey*.

**The place of myth**

In the aftermath of the Trojan War, Odysseus sets out from the ruins of Troy on his journey home to Ithaca. In this production, his journey becomes the sequence of events against which a historical vision of Empire and the maturing of the Australian nation can now be traced. Tom Wright points out that in this production

this version of Troy is in fact redolent with images of WWI and the burnt out cities of the Old World, within which Odysseus becomes something like an Australian digger about to make his way home through the outposts of Empire. (Wright in Campbell, 2005b)

In fact, as Wright points out, mythical Troy and actual Gallipoli are conveniently close. Mythically/geographically speaking, I am already wondering (intrigued and slightly confused) what the connection between the two things might be? Is he talking about the geography here or history or is he actively drawing allusions from the mythic world? Or is he perhaps eliding all three registers in order to constitute a new, seemingly ‘authentic’ myth built upon the foundations of the old? For Wright it certainly was

more than just convenient that you had on one side of the Dardanelles the Gallipoli peninsula where Australian modern identity was born and on the other side of the Dardanelles, staring at each other across the body of water there in modern Turkey, you have the ancient ruins of Troy. And like the Australian modern twentieth century men who returned from war deeply scared and had to recreate a society having learnt from their experiences, there is an element of Odysseus that represents those men who came back from Troy. (Wright, in Prior, 2005)

With emblematic imagery and nostalgic settings evoking hazy versions of Australia’s colonial past, Odysseus’ journey is framed by Wright as a parable, not only of the making of the man, but also by implication, the making of the men who made the
Australian nation and the making of the nation itself. Geography, history and ancient myth somehow work together ‘naturally’ to assert that men and nations are made through war and its vicissitudes, even if that means those heroic men and nations have their boyish dreams shattered in the process. The women in this version of Australia’s past wait, watch and offer their efforts in service to the heroic enterprise and the first people of the land, as usual, do not figure. With these conflated references to war, masculinity and nationhood, Kantor and Wright jump head first into an extremely slippery, albeit potentially fascinating teleological landscape.

If Odysseus is framed as the damaged archetypal hero soldier returning from war, then there is also a thread that runs through the performance that presents him as the damaged hero artist, struggling to continue his solitary journey amid the banalities and demands on the domestic, home front of modern Australia. This is suggested by Odysseus sword which is rendered, in this production, in the form of the bow of some stringed musical instrument. The coracle that ultimately lands him on the shores of Ithaca is the instrument’s travelling case (also in this production, looking somewhat like a coffin).

The ground upon which we walk

A blind Homer sings of our hero: “more of a rumble of thunder through all our times than a man.” She calls on us to journey with Odysseus:

---

71 As Anne Curthoys notes: Australian popular historical mythology stresses struggle, courage, and survival, amidst pain, tragedy, and loss. … This attraction to a history of suffering, sacrifice and defiance in defeat has already been noted by several commentators. Anthropologist Andrew Lattas, for example, has examined how Australian nationalist discourses emphasise a struggle in which the pioneer, the explorer and the artist all suffer as they seek to possess the land: ‘Their suffering takes on the epic proportions of a pilgrimage that redeems and heals the nation’. White settler suffering, he suggests, becomes a means for conferring right of ownership to the land. (1999: np)
72 It could be argued that the trials of Odysseus in this epic, mirrored by the fortitude of the five Drover’s Wives in Richardson’s production both engage with this layer of myth.
Homeward we go/Odysseus goes home/The first Odyssey/The original journey/The primary source/We go with him/For his journey/Is the one we all follow/Like shadows, like shadows. (Wright, 2003)

Each island Odysseus and his men travel offers some version of ‘otherness’, each is flavoured with degrees of a colonial history that is abstracted into fanciful images of images of images of Empire. The Lotus Eaters of Homer’s story, for example, become a field of Flanders poppies, producing the fragrant miasma of ‘lest we forget’. Odysseus and his crew escape this far-flung field of drug-induced forgetfulness (reminiscent also, of the exotic opium dens of the Far East) and sail on. In a truly beautiful theatrical moment, a group of veiled, white-gowned brides emerge from smoke and shadows behind the heavy iron door. They are the Sirens. Their ethereal song laces their only desire, which is to kill. In the audience, I am reminded of hot Jamaican madness and Mr Rochester’s fatal attraction to Bertha the violent, white Creole heiress in Jane Eyre. Suspended aloft by a rope, Odysseus squirms in an agony ecstasy as he listens to their sublime music. Following Homer’s myth, in this watery place of dreams and nightmares, a real hero needs to keep his wits about him, no matter what.

In the next port of call the audience meets an equally dangerous but ugly Cyclops. He is suggested by a single, staring beam of light emanating from his subterranean cave and is heard only through animalistic snarling and childish babble. On this theatrical journey through the throb, throb, throb of Empire, I read the image as a half-native Caliban, preverbal and brutish, not fit for human society. The frightful inhabitant of this place exists beyond the Pale of civilisation and can only be met, as he is in the original story, (Shakespeare’s and Homer’s) with trickery and violence. Odysseus and his men are held captive in the monster’s smelly cave. Elpanor, one of the crew is eaten before the wily leader out-smarts the grunting, primitive beast. In a “kill the pig, kill the pig” Lord of the Flies moment of savagery Cyclops’ single eye is extinguished by the combined
efforts of the worthy men under Odysseus’ charge, put out by a pole that cleverly transforms into the mast of the ship.

The performance elicits (in me at least) broad cultural associations, reflexive emotional responses and flights of conjecture. Is it just coincidence that I find myself thinking in purple prose and rifling through my High School reading list for classic literary references to make sense of this story? Or is this something to do with the ‘story-book’ inflection of the performance? Am I being ‘disciplined’ by my culture (to some as yet unknown end) as I experience the sensory force of this colonial myth-scape? The places that are evoked in this theatrical journey certainly resonate within my white, middle-class, private school background. There is certainly a particular culture at work here. At this point in the production though, I am not sure why I am being asked to return to it.

In a somewhat weak moment of transition, the now dead Elpanor exits the stage, before the ship sails on to the Island of the Winds.
By contrast, this island with its charming civilisation full of ‘beautiful people’ is a design statement straight out of 1950s ‘La Dolce Vita’ cosmopolitan chic. The actors bounce onto the stage in a synchronised dance sequence. They (the women and the actor that was Elpanor) are dressed, identically, as over-leisured ex-pats. They each wear red pedal pushers and navy & white matelot tops, white sunglasses, black wigs and vermilion lipstick. It is a vision of high camp style and sophisticated gaiety. It seems though that these people are not real enough, or perhaps their shallow, showy existence offers a glimmer of reality that Odysseus does not want to face. They have lost touch with civilisation’s true centre and everything here is an effete, glittering diversion. The hero’s weighty purpose is guided by young Athena and the journey continues. “We were just a story to them … just steps in some dance … my fate is to keep journeying home” (Wright, 2003). Having ‘done’ the Island as a tourist might ‘do’ a tropical place in the sun, Odysseus turns away from the shallow opulence of glamour and the high life. He is given a gramophone as a parting gift. It is the box of winds. With renewed determination and a sense of direction, the depleted crew sets off once more.

In the audience the wash of images, soundscapes, music and lighting as Odysseus continues his travels through his itinerary of worlds surround me. There is Nausikaa, straight limbed, healthy and terribly nice, promising a bright New World. There is Kalyspo, appearing again as the needy, yearning, desperate housewife trapped in the quiet twilight of her distant colonial outpost, surrounded by strange, okapi servants, just this side of extinction. There are the wild, cannibal children of the island of Listragonia, portrayed as a frighteningly cute band of flesh eaters; their ponytails and gym kit do nothing to disguise a tooth and claw viciousness as they happily feast on one of the crew. Circe emerges in a swathe of pink and purple, smoke-filled light. She seems to have skipped a war and is naked except for black jack boots, a loose and open jacket modelled on a Nazi dress uniform, with matching SS hat. Spot lit, pole-dancing on the
mast of Odysseus’ ship, she fascinates our hero; she is a dominatrix toying with her sex slave.

This over-coded image confronts this audience member with a full-frontal view of fetishised (schoolboy?) sexual fantasy. Am I looking at Odysseus, caught within an image of an image or does he really find this woman attractive? I am not quite sure what I am looking at and am finding it difficult to place myself in any part of this imaginary world. Who is this man and where am I exactly? When Circe unexpectedly falls in love with her prey it is confirmed that Odysseus is, like the Robert Palmer video clip of the song, ‘Simply Irresistible’. When Odysseus spies weakness in Circe’s desire I, along with our hero, manage to negotiate the slippery surface of this projection. Odysseus escapes a fate worse than death in the arms of this dressed-up, “sweaty bitch”. (Wright, 2003) and he and his men sail on.

Although all the feminine and/or primitive figures that occupy the lands across which Odysseus and his men travel seem to wish to hold and consume (literally or metaphorically) the (in this case, at least) toned, handsome, masculine flesh of the hero, it might also be said that on his journey through this production, Odysseus consistently avoids the experience of making his own place, with his own flesh. He is the exemplar of the type of Western man who

evades the specificity of his own body, the way it might become a place distinctively different from the place proffered by woman’s body. Fleeing into mind and space, he delegates to woman the entire responsibility for body and place. (Casey 1997: 328)

It could be that within this contemporary interpretation of an ancient story the author is also refusing “the specificity of his own body” as Casey mentions above, preferring instead to “appropriate place offered by woman’s body” within the machine of spectacle (1997: 328). The author has perhaps, left it to spectacle to work the audience.
Theatre critic Alison Croggon reviewing *The Odyssey* certainly notes a lack of embodiment in the writing. She states that

writers are people who respond to the materiality of language, its sensuous, sonic and dynamic qualities. This is especially true of poetry composed in an oral culture, and of writing for theatre, which is a place where language is physicalised and made gestic. This sensuous response to language is by no means a quality at odds with intelligence, but is embedded deeply within its turnings: even the most abstract thought has an erotic dynamic, the ‘wooing of a meaning’ which is ‘inseparable from its absence’ (Anne Carson).
When Wright reaches for the poetic, the language is almost completely emptied of this sensuous resonance. (Croggon, 2005)

As the story continues, it seems that the only place in which people like our hero can reside is the Underworld, beyond flesh. This is a place of spirits, through which Odysseus must pass in order to complete his mythic journey. This shadowy world is poetically rendered on stage on the other side of a vast net curtain tied all over with shipping tickets. Behind the curtain, dead people from Odysseus past emerge from the shadows, lit only by flickering open flame. The eternal, nakedness of their vulnerability is designed to confront Odysseus with his own mortality. Driving the action away from death and back into life, always, is the hero’s dream of domestic harmony; a utopia where his wife Penelope awaits.

Packed into his music-case coracle, he finally arrives at Ithaca, his destination, bedraggled and of course, all alone. His ship mates are dead or lost, and as in the original story, he is unrecognisable (except to me in the audience who has the series of snapshots to remind me of what he has become during his journey). As usual, the reality of his homecoming is far from the ideal he has been dreaming about. Penelope has let things go, in fact, she has been partying in his absence. Sword/music bow drawn, he walks through a miasma of leery, heavy metal music blasting from the oikos. Violence, it seems is his ever-ready answer to this predicament. Odysseus is travel-weary and reluctant but ever ready to confront and sort out yet another place-bound feminised territory, this time occupied by his own his wife (in this performance Penelope becomes a blank space, a question mark; we never meet her) and the domestic squalor that has ensued in his extended leave.

Odysseus might still call Australia Home, but in Kantor and Wright’s production, as in the original, this version of Home turns out to be a bitter disappointment, crushingly, ‘not all it’s cracked up to be’. It could be argued that this twenty-first century Odysseus-
digger-artist is caught within the confines of his own conceit, as he has always been, restricted to a construction of place upon the female body and the landscape with which she is conflated and that he is obliged to dominate and subdue. In this production and under these circumstances he is left afloat with nothing but the opportunistic impulse of spectacle to propel him.

The eclectic grab-bag of myth and image, reference and style that constitutes this design-driven production suggests and invokes, but does not interrogate this conceit or the theatrical construction of place and space that drives it.73 In the quest for some spectacular place within which Odysseus might reside, a number of female bodies are picked up, mulled over and spat out during the course if the production, none quite good enough, big enough, warm enough, sexy enough, exciting enough (and nor will they ever be) to quell or satisfy the raging mythic, version of Western masculinity that, I argue, eventually falls back upon itself and overwhelms the production itself.

The design machine

The production certainly emphasises spectacle and a desire to overwhelm the spectator’s senses with sheer size and audacity. Wright is very clear that the impetus behind the production was

a desire on Michael’s part to do something big … he said the fact that [he] use[s] design as the major machine of the creative process of theatre means that [he] work[s] better on scale work … Ultimately it wasn’t really for the content … it was really for

73 Miriam Cosic in her article for *The Australian* newspaper took exception to what she believed to be Wright’s opportunistic reworking of Homer’s original story, conflating characters and playing fast and loose with the plot. She accuses him of “cultural amnesia” and “scrambling the memory” of something that had survived “intact for 2,700 years” (2005: 17). Wright is very clear that the text in this play is in fact a pretext for the images. He rejects the notion of authorship in this type of ‘design-driven’ work. The theatre of the piece (and the meaning I suppose) is for him, carried in the images. In this sense, he sees himself as a “service provider” for the real author who is the director (Wright in Campbell, 2005b).
the scale of epic storytelling which operated on a symbolic, free, psychological level and a whole range of things that were designed to be big. (Wright in Campbell, 2005b)

The dimensions of the set, designed by Anna Tregloan, the volume and intensity of the sound and music by David Franzke and Iain Grandage as well as the sheer scale of the lighting rig and the number of lights used by Paul Jackson in his elaborate lighting design reflect this intention to impress and overwhelm; to do something big. Zoe Atkinson’s costumes too, are provocative, striking and witty and add to the force of the theatrical spectacle as it attempts to sweep the audience bodily into the vortex of Odysseus’ journey through (what I argue here are) the cultural by-ways of ‘supermodernity’.

Along with Odysseus, we in the audience are asked to abandon ourselves to the production’s ‘design machine’, to come in close and experience the exotic, fleshy places of this journey as Odysseus seems to, via our senses. Wright attests that this high-voltage, sense immersion is “ideally about reclaiming the sexuality of the stage” (Wright in Campbell, 2005b). Although he is not specific about whose sexuality, or what type of claim he might make upon it, he does admit that it’s a minefield that you find yourself treading through, the extent to which you objectify bodies, the extent to which you deny personality and agency and so on. And it is particularly difficult in something like The Odyssey. (Wright in Campbell, 2005b)

Wright is equally candid about an absence of unified, political intention attached to the imagery that he activates, admitting that there is “not a sophisticated, systemic, or thought-through, or even ideological program of thought about the process. Rather, it is an appropriation of imagery” (Wright in Campbell, 2005b).

Nevertheless, he and Kantor, with prior knowledge it seems, walk right into that imaginary minefield, with, or perhaps, without intention. If I am correct, they prefer to work not so much with the strict political or historical content of the images but take an
intuitive approach that taps cultural heat. Wright describes these colonial references as “portals of access” not to our own times but to the original Greek myth. He acknowledges that these access points “don’t bear much scrutiny” and that their historical reality is merely “elided over” (Wright in Campbell, 2005b).

Following this logic, the images around which the production revolves do not attempt to follow history, per se, but instead drive a spectacle that activates, for the audience, the original, mythic content of this ancient story. Wright likens such cultural reference “to costume … The idea to depict a certain scene in a particular period of settings is designed to set off resonances” (Wright in Campbell, 2005b).

With or without ‘too much scrutiny’ Wright admits that

> the sexual politics of it became very fraught because you don’t have too much female characterisation with agency there and it hit a few snags, but we stuck to it nonetheless because I ultimately thought that theatre is the point of departure for the creation of images and the creation of space and time. (Wright in Campbell, 2005b)

To return to my initial question about what kind of a place these myth makers are making of Australia, it seems to me, that while this production is clothed in the trappings of post-modernity it relentlessly reproduces conventionally gendered reading of the metaphorical places of myth.

Such a construction of place and space sees Odysseus typifying the type of free-wheeling Western man (he is after all an archetype) who works throughout his eponymous spectacle to secure his own integrity and power against his ancient fear of and confounding desire for embodied place. This unresolved dilemma concerning his ‘place in the world’ requires Odysseus to secure hegemony over the bodies of women,

---

74 Interestingly, and in a different era, Guy Debord criticises a “dehistoricization of culture” (in Fuchs, 1996: 174) in his influential work, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). He writes of the spectacle as the present social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, of the abandonment of history built on the foundation of historical time, is the false consciousness of time. (in Fuchs, 1996: 174, original italics)
children, and in this colonial context, the ‘natives’ who inhabit such places. Even within streamlined supermodernity it seems that some ‘old school’ formulations of place and space are proving hard to shift.

Reflecting on flesh

In his book *Ancient and Modern* (2004), Stephen Muecke suggests that the ancient does indeed still live within the modern. He believes that our “being-in-the-world [is] composed (like music) of layering of ancient forms and imaginative inventions” and that we in the modern world oscillate between the two (2004:12). Speaking of an Aboriginal Australia that is deeply connected with place and country, Muecke suggests that we return to ancient sources, to “deep narrative[s]” (2004: 12), in order to understand the power contained in these poetic forces. If we do that, writes Muecke, then we can

answer back to the blunt force – the primitivism – of the singular fundamentalism that tends to assert that ‘we’ are ahead of the Others. These questions are about the resurgence of the ancient in our dreams, like images from an epic poem. If this poem still sings to us of our humanity and of our virtues, it is one that may return our listening in such a way that a certain type of continuity may be recovered through the recognition that modern societies are always also quite ancient. (2004: 12)

As Wright attests, *The Odyssey* positively relies on continuities that run like suspension lines between the ancient and modern. But this play’s relationship with the ancient myths of Western culture does not proceed across a benign, reciprocal connection with embodied place. Neither, I would argue, is it a speaking back to the ‘singular fundamentalism’ of the majoritarian ‘we’. Rather, this Odysseus is the majority, speaking into the atomistic space-void, non-place of his own making.

According to Wright, each island that Odysseus comes to is a place where he must encounter both eros and thanatos. In a forum in the Speigletent, at the Melbourne
International Arts Festival, broadcast by ABC Radio National, Wright references the work of Robert Graves who he describes as “one of the best twentieth century scholars on Greek mythology”. He explains that Graves posits these various islands and the women that inhabit them as different forms of death. As is well documented in Western culture, the idea that the sex drive and the death drive are very similarly related dates back to this mythology. These goddesses like Circe, like Kalypso for that matter, or the various women he encounters such as the Listragonians who are these savages, all represent various different forms of dying and Odysseus, the symbolic king conquers death, time after time after time. (Wright in Smith, 2005)

Kantor and Wright aim directly at the ‘hot spots’ in our collective imagination. They manipulate the deep intensities of our cultural and historical past as they mesh a collage of floating images that shift around deliberately over-coded, historical representations of body and place. It is as Wright says, a

myth and myth tends to function in the realm of imagery as it does in the realm of language and it can function in the coalescence of images ... One of the definitions of myth is as a polysemic text. I think *The Odyssey* operates as a polysemic text. It is not a humanist angst piece. (Wright in Campbell, 2005b)

Kantor and Wright mine mythic bedrock in their design-driven theatre machine in order to construct an entirely contemporary myth. They refashion old world cultural debris to build a performance across the slippery, shiny surfaces of a spectacle that is haunted, like the shopping mall, like the tourist brochure, by a fear and a fascination with place.
The Odyssey, Malthouse Theatre/Black Swan Theatre Co/PIAF
Kris McQuaide, Stephen Phillips

Discussing a similar phenomena in his seminal text *Postmodernism: Or the Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson suggests that

in the postmodern, then, the past itself has disappeared (along with the well-known “sense of the past” or historicity and collective memory). Where its buildings still remain, renovation and restoration allow them to be transferred to the present in their entirety as those other, very different and postmodern things called simulacra. (1997: 309-10)

Taking Wright and Kantor at their word and abandoning the specifically political and historic, it could be said that in this postmodern, mythico/spectacular performance, Odysseus is presented not just as a tourist, but as a simulacrum, manufactured by the image makers to measure different worlds for size. Odysseus’ masculinity and agency are, in this case (and as they have always been), formed by and defined against forces of sex and death via an encounter with the feminine. Following this logic, Odysseus, as postmodern simulacrum must enter feminine territories on his journey home or at least the image of the feminine and conquer ‘time after time after time’. As this is equated in this production with Australia’s colonial progress, one could also say he must enter the
proverbial/mythical Heart of (Representational) Darkness on his journey home through
the colonies, do the necessary deed, and then move on, older and wiser.

**Post colonial provisioning**

I find this aligning of sex, death and the coming of age within colonialism constructed
across a postmodern, supermodern theatre space fascinating, but wonder whether such a
construction can ethically, historically or even aesthetically, operate in the place-
making, political vacuum that Kantor and Wright seem to assume.

Anne McClintock, in her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the
Colonial Contest* writes:

> Consider to begin with, a colonial scene.

> In 1492 Christopher Columbus, blundering about the Caribbean in search of India,
wrote home to say that the ancient mariners had erred in thinking the earth was
round. Rather, he said, it was shaped like a women’s breast, with a protuberance
upon its summit in the unmistakable shape of a nipple – toward which he was
slowly sailing. (1995: 21)\(^5\)

Putting the ridiculousness of the image to one side, this conflation of the places of
colonial conquest and exploration with women’s bodies is intensely and inescapably
political. McClintock states that “Imperialism cannot be fully understood without a
theory of gender power … gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the
securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise” (1995: 7). She posits that typically
within the colonial discourse, “land is named as female, as a passive counterpart to the
massive thrust of male technology” (1995: 26). Following this colonialist paradigm,

> Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two
gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male
penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior: and the aggressive conversion of
its “secrets” into a visible, male science of the surface. (McClintock, 1995: 23)

---

\(^5\) She goes on to talk about him as this infantilised explorer wanting to suck that nipple dry.
The technology of the surface that operates in this theatre production is found in the
design-driven machine of spectacle; one that works on stage within what seems to me to
be a highly suspect construction of place and space.

From a post-colonial point of view, McClintock argues that it is “crucial … to stress
from the outset that the feminising of the land is both a poetics of ambivalence and a
politics of violence” (1995: 28,). Similar to that of the ancient Greeks, this way of
thinking views men as “masters and possessors of nature” (1995: 24) with women, of
course, cast as the embodiment of that nature, to be possessed, used and moulded.76

According to McClintock, within this imperialist construction of space, “race, gender
and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation … rather,
they come into existence in and through relation to each other – if in contradictory and
conflictual ways … [they exist as] a triangulated theme” (1995: 5, original italics).

The triangulated theme of ‘race, class and gender’ runs throughout the colonial/imperial
project as, tarred with the same brush, it does through this play. The feminised, colonial
landscape provides the ground of Odysseus’ journey toward meaning and security. It
requires that women, children and ‘natives’ serve as the site for the story’s exploration
of sex and death. This also requires them to be “mediating and threshold figures by
means of which men orient … themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of
knowledge” (McClintock, 1995: 24). Kantor and Wright’s The Odyssey derives, indeed
embraces imagery from these colonial themes.

76 This type of operation also relies on technologies of knowledge such as maps to secure territory and
untramelled access of passage. Such things “profess … to capture the truth about a place in pure,
scientific form” (McClintock, 1995: 28). McClintock argues that the map, for example, has been used as a
technology of possession. A “potent fetish helping colonials negotiate the perils of margins and thresholds
in a world of terrifying ambiguities” (1995: 28). Theatrical stories such as The Odyssey could also be
thought about in this light, though instead of activating the instruments of science to control and direct
nature, they activate spectacular, mythic expressions of space and man’s place within it.
Given the very real and contemporary cultural heat of this ‘triangulated theme’ (particularly under the conservative government of the day, that had sent Australian troops not only to Iraq and later into the Northern Territory of Australia to sort out troubled Indigenous communities), I continue to wonder which myth or which layer of history is really being activated by this play and why the authors would align themselves with the (to my mind, discredited) political position that seems to operate so uncritically throughout?

In an interview conducted some months before the production went into rehearsal, Kantor points how actively transformative and ultimately unifying ancient stories such as The Odyssey can be in society, or alternately, one could say how political they are. He states that if

you want [theatre ] … not just to look in the mirror and say ‘this is what we are’ but try and get underneath and source what we are as Australians and what we are as individuals and citizens of the world, all at one time, which is the ambition … We wanted to talk about being human, which is a whole realm of thinking … which naturally leads to the Greeks and which naturally leads to two things, The Iliad and The Odyssey. And if we want to talk about a contemporary dreamtime, which is what we want to do, that is where we come. So that’s my point of reference and Tom’s point of reference and I think the point of reference of a big group of us. (Kantor in Campbell, 2005a)

If talking about ‘being human … naturally leads to the Greeks’ and what is ‘natural’ in this construction remains entirely unscrutinised, there seems to me to be an ideology at work in which ‘a big group of us’ may continue to feel entitled to claim territory and unquestioned rights over other people’s bodies. Odysseus’ mythic world is in this instance, created within a binary universe with women, place and body passively located on one side of the fence of humanity and men, space and thought actively run things on the other. The supermodern, spectacular version of Odysseus’ myth constructed by Kantor and Wright, I believe, continues uninterrupted, this particular line of thought.
Not becoming Odysseus

As it turns out, within the many “Odysseys within the Odyssey” (Calvino, 1986: 135-145), Odysseus’ journey home can also be seen as a journey into the unknown towards the unknown. Casey suggests that this journey is a journey through the Dispars (1993: 275-277). The Dispars is an example of the unmapped, ‘haptic’ or smooth space, described as having

no homogeneity, except between infinitely proximate points, and the linking of proximities is effected independently of any determined path. It is a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid’s striated space ... [it] ‘can be explored only by legwork’. (Casey, 1996: 304)

Casey posits that Odysseus is in his mythic story, “caught in the placeful net of the Dispars” (1993: 276). Within this space, Odysseus doesn’t have to ‘be’ anything at all, he must feel his way and respond to whatever place offers. As he moves from episode to episode in this un-measurable, delimited region, it is place that holds the memory of the events that occur and place itself that pushes the narrative along.

I suggest that an active awareness of the importance of place and its application to this story as a dramaturgical tool would potentially open the possibility of inverting agency from Odysseus to the landscape. This change of focus may reveal myriad, creative opportunities to re-imagine Odysseus’ journey and the various and different kinds of agencies he might encounter along the way. As I read it, the point of the colonial Odyssey offered by Kantor and Wright is that Odysseus rejects this possibility. In this production, the Western artist-hero-soldier draws his sword or cello bow to do the violent deed against embodied place just as he has always done. This Odysseus is not only stuck in the clichés of his own supermodern conceit (I refer here to Augè’s “banal
utopias, clichés” that fill the gap between “everyday functionality and lost myth” (Augé, 1995: 95) as discussed earlier) he is blinded, not able to conceive that there might be something more fascinating, less known (and less destructive) for him, if he could settle in his own skin and find his own nuanced relationship with place.

The imagery upon which this production is built implies an engagement with important cultural themes attached to Australian colonial history, and much is promised. However Kantor and Wright settle on a dramaturgy that delivers little in terms of informed interrogation or direct confrontation of either cultural archetypes or the ways in which myth works to inform, indeed, create culture. Although they toy with the fractured representations and imagistic, unstable narratives of postmodernity and hint at a more profound, self-reflexive and playful reading of both ancient material and contemporary politics, they perpetuate the values encoded in a myth that places “man at the origin of himself” (Braidotti in Cavarero, 1995: xvii), resting upon a power-base that is supported, as it always has been, by the lives and labours of others. They create a tour through an ancient/modern montage of non-place that in itself presents many opportunities for serious cultural engagement but embrace instead the sound and fury of spectacle. 77

77 In contrast to the pathway offered by this version of The Odyssey, Adriana Cavarero offers a feminist reading (via Luce Irigaray) of Homer’s Odyssey. Caverero’s work points out that the distinguishing feature of phallocracy is precisely the fact that it negates, denies, and wilfully obliterates the feminine, appropriating entirely the process of making meaning. Instead of recognising the embodied, sexed, and corporeal nature of the living beings, phallocratic thinking replaces the maternal origin with the highly abstract notion of man being at the origin of himself. This is a cerebral reappropriation of origin by man, which condemns the feminine to a subsidiary position of necessarily silenced other. (Braidotti in Caverero, 1995: xvii) Froma Zeitland also offers a detailed, feminist reading of the sexual politics at play in Greek theatre and thought in her chapter ‘Playing the Other’ (1990). Writing of Greek tragedy in a passage that could be applied directly to Odysseus, Zeitlin points out that the stories of ancient Greece arrive at closure that generally reassert male, often paternal, structure of authority, but before that, the work of the drama is to open up the masculine view of the universe. It typically does so … through energizing the theatrical resources of the female and concomitantly enervating the male as the price of initiating actor and spectator into new and unsettling modes of feeling, seeing and knowing. (1990: 87)
It could be said that the figure of Odysseus acts as an art historical object within this spectacle, a representation bound not only to Ancient Greece, but also to the project of Empire and the making of modern Australia. In his chapter, “Performing Modernity: The Art of Art History”, Donald Preziosi points out that within such a teleological line, modernity exists as a virtual site constituting the edge between the material residues, relics, and dreams of the past and the adjacent dream space of the future. It is what is perpetually in-between two fictions: origins in an immemorial past and the destiny of its to-be-fulfilled future. (1998: 33)

Modernity is, he posits, a “performance of the ethics and politics of identity, at every scale from the person to the race” (1998: 33). I suggest that there is a huge potential in exploring these issues dramaturgically, even (or especially) within supermodernity however, frustratingly, such an analysis remains undeveloped within this production, with the sum of the images never exceeding the parts. Odysseus as free-wheeling simulacrum never manages to break the chains that bind him, both to his own representational frame, and to the narrative consequences of his storyline. Instead, he remains enthralled by his singular, Boy’s Own Colonial Project as he travels up and down the superhighways of his spectacle.

When he finally arrives at the idealised destination of his journey, this Odysseus is ultimately at home alone, already slightly depressed and predictably dissatisfied. He is living proof (or perhaps metaphorical proof) that that “[t]he space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude” (Augé, 2004: 103).

Preziosi also argues that:

Art historical objects have thus always been object-lessons of documentary import insofar as they might be deployed or staged as cogent ‘evidence’ of the [art’s] causal relationship to the present, enabling us thereby to articulate certain kinds of desirable (and undesirable) relations between ourselves and other. No longer overly discussed in art historical discourse in this regard is the (silent) contrast between European ‘progress’ in the arts in contradistinction to the coincident ‘decline’ of Europe’s’ principle Other in early modern time, the (comparably multinational and multiethnic) world of Islam. (1998: 37)

This point could also be extended to the specifically colonial world under scrutiny in The Odyssey.
The price of freedom of movement across the landscapes of supermodernity, it seems is high, and being the singular centre of one’s own story is a lonely business.

The place of authenticity that Caverero grants her version of Penelope in her weaving and unweaving together of body and soul in community with her handmaidens is not available to Odysseus in this production’s mythical construction of place and space. Odysseus, as mythic hero, as symbolic contemporary character, as original source and singular signifier of the making of a nation, is caught within what I perceive, in the audience, to be the spectacular void of supermodernity. The tacit acknowledgment of disappointment with this state of affairs is for me, the tantalising pull of this production. I find myself wishing that the myth-makers might have taken the opportunity to use their considerable talents and resources to explore it.
Chapter Four

The Drover’s Wives: Lace Passes into Nothingness

The Drover’s Wives, Steamworks Arts/PIAF
Claudia Alessi, Felicity Bott, Shannon Bott, Jane Diamond,
Danielle Micich, Photo Ashley de Prazer
Lace passes into nothingness,  
With the ultimate Gamble in doubt,  
In blasphemy revealing just  
Eternal absence of any bed.

This concordant enmity  
Of a white garland and the same,  
In flight against the pallid glass,  
Hovers and does not enshroud.

But where, limned gold, the dreamer dwells,  
There sleeps a mournful mandola,  
Its deep lacuna source of song,

Of a kind that toward some window,  
Formed by that belly or none at all,  
Filial, one might have been born.

Stéphane Mallarmé.

The illusive ‘in betweenness’ of Mallarmé’s lace, framing, veiling, hovering, (defining the margin between inside and out), plays seductively on ideas of presence and absence. In a series of passing thresholds, the poem moves from the lace covered window toward deeper frames out of which music, dreams and ultimately, new life might emerge. Filled with awareness of the paradoxical complexities of the Jeu Suprême (the “ultimate Gamble”) between “light and dark, love and death in the sexual act, the analogous rhythm of artistic creation” (Cohn, 1977: 28), the poem finally rests mournfully, within a void, within an absence, within an empty space.

The stage is empty, in the darkness there is the shimmering sound of harmonium and strings, haunting, looping and echoing around each other. A weak light projected onto a scrim grows into the striated sky of morning, red, yellow, orange turning purple. Across the scrim, shapes appear on what seems to be a horizon in the desert; these forms emerge as the silhouettes of five women. Their figures give the desert a human dimension and imbue it with human meaning. The waiting shapes outlined against the
morning sky seem to define the boundaries of what might be a new type of inhabitation of this country, that is at the same time ancient and continuing, passed on woman to woman, (in this framing at least) regardless of race, of class. Shannon Bott, Jane Diamond, Claudia Alessi, Felicity Bott and Danielle Micich, the five drover’s wives of this production, are placed within an emerging stage landscape as icons; they are some type of pre-narratised human presence in country. This opening sequence is created with sound, light and projections by writer/director, Sally Richardson, with Iain Grandage (music composition), Andrew Lake (lighting and set design) and Ashley de Prazer (video design).

The Drover’s Wife

*The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, veranda included.*

*Bush all around – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization – a shanty on the main road.*

*The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone.*

*Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: “Snake! Mother, here’s a snake!”*  

*The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.*

*“Where is it?”*  

Henry Lawson.

Mallamé’s poem, “Lace Passes into Nothingness” falls into a billowing emptiness that implies infinite potentiality. Richardson’s *The Drover’s Wives*, a dance-based,
multimedia exploration of Henry Lawson’s iconic Australian bush tale, plays with similar notions of absence and presence. The creative team work together with each performer/dancer to personify five different versions of a Wife. I suggest that behind their multiple renderings of the ‘lone woman in the bush’ lie the strange gaps or disjunctions that occur between women’s bodily experience of place and the representations of that experience celebrated within Australian culture. As the dancers draw on their own responses to the land which they inhabit and to their memories of the real women who have inhabited it, the audiences’ gaze seems to be drawn towards what lies behind the veil of the myth. Just as there is paradoxical absence at the heart of Mallamé’s symbolist poem, similarly, the performers in The Drover’s Wives conjure potential places that can only be intuited and imagined. They move around what has not been spoken in Lawson’s story about domestic life in that most unhomely of places (to settler communities, at least), the Australian bush. Subtly, almost imperceptibly, the performance draws into focus the virtual theatrical spaces in between moments of corporeal presence and representational visibility.

In this chapter, I explore the dramaturgical play between metaphor and metonymy in the construction of place in a performance that uses dance, spoken text, live music and multimedia in its interpretation of a foundational text of colonial life in Australia. Henri Lefebvre notes that “metaphor and metonymy are not figures of speech – at least not at the outset. They become figure of speech. In principle, they are acts” (1991: 139). I argue that metonymy works within The Drover’s Wives as a “grammar of the body” (Phelan, 1993:150) as the dancers’ respond to their own experience and memories of the Australian environment. This is expressed in dialogue with the metaphors found in “the grammar of language” (Phelan, 1993:150) of Lawson’s original story of life in the bush,
as it is represented on stage. These two frames require that the bodies of the
performers capture distinctly different qualities of place in performance, and in doing
so, invite the audience to engage in different ways with those places.

Following this distinction, it could be said that within a metaphoric creation of place in
theatre, differences are subsumed into what is already known and understood and one
thing becomes like something else. By contrast, a metonymic expression of place
presents an open and immediate correspondence between the thing in the world and
body. By employing metonymy on stage, the body, preserving all its difference, can
take on or become the thing in performance, as it does so, retaining the resonance and
dissonance adhering to difference. Such an open and immediate connection can be
experienced, I suggest, by other bodies in the audience, through the same direct
mechanism. Merleau-Ponty writes about this type of body to body communication when
he says that

bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning which is
not the work of a universal constituting consciousness, a meaning which clings to
certain contents. My body is that meaningful core which behaves like a general
function … In it we learn to know that union of essence and existence which we
shall find again in perception generally, and which we shall then have to describe
more fully. (1962: 147)

This notion of reaching back to bodily experience in performance that is then ‘described
more fully’ leads me to propose that a dramaturgical framework which encourages a
movement between metonymy and metaphor can underline, and in turn, liberate the
body from cultural inscriptions of place that restrict and confine. Such a process can

\[79\] I wish to draw attention here to the similarities this distinction holds to the interplay between
observation and encounter that I explore in the Prologue to this thesis. Whereas observation draws the
eye to what is already there, (or in this case, what is already in the text) encounter opens the body to what
might yet be found out, in embodied place.

\[80\] I suggest that this process can be used as a strategic tool to expand fixed positions within, as Soja puts
it, “modernist identity politics”. Soja describes how, via a Thirdspace, it is possible to
find more flexible ways of being other than we are while still being ourselves, of
becoming open to coalitions and coalescences of radical subjectivities, to a multiplicity of
communities of resistance, to what Trinh T. Minh-ha has called ‘the anarchy of
difference.’ (1996: 117)
work to highlight differences between what the body knows and what the body has been told.\textsuperscript{81} In *The Drover’s Wives*, there is a growing disjunction between the two expressions of place during the performance, a friction that indicates how entrenched cultural myths can work to enshroud the bodies that perform them. Questions arise for me in the audience, about other stories that might be hidden behind texts such as Lawson’s.

Richardson’s choice to have not one, but multiple Drover’s Wives allows a fluid, corporeal interrogation of the original story, one that does not necessarily reach for a fixed and stable point of representational truth, held at a distance for a passively receptive audience. Rather, the five dancers work with multiple constructions of place that form with and upon their bodies in response to and along side the text, acting neither to contradict or to affirm, but rather to provide some other, sensory point of entry into a layered process of meaning-making for both audience and makers. For me, meanings extra to the myth, created metonymically on the bodies of the dancers begin to infiltrate the performance as the performers respond creatively to their own place in the landscape, and the colonial metaphors contained in Lawson’s text, begin to unravel. I propose that a dramaturgical focus on the different ways in which place can be captured with the body opens an imaginative and performative space in which

\textsuperscript{81} Merleau-Ponty specifically activates ideas of embodiment and the relationship between consciousness and what he terms ‘flesh’. Keith Ansell Pearson quotes him saying that the “body proper embraces a philosophy of the flesh as the visibility of the invisible” (in Pearson, 1999: 72). Pearson continues to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty:

It is not ‘consciousness’ that perceives nature but the human body that also inhabits it. The ‘animation’ and ‘animality’ of the body are always caught up in ‘a metamorphosis of life’. The principle insight of Merleau-Ponty’s ‘philosophy of nature’ can be expressed in the following terms: life involves a ‘global and universal power of incorporation’ in the particular sense that corporeality is the search for the external in the internal and the internal in the external. (Pearson, 1999:72)

I argue that the making of place on the body not only in this production, but in theatre in general, involves similar convolutions between ‘the external in the internal and the internal in the external’ in search of some kind of ‘metamorphosis of life’ (or as Merleau-Ponty might have it, making the invisible, visible in flesh). Even intended actions and rehearsed choices can in this way, reach toward the unknown or invisible, in the hope that the performance will in some way, add up to more than the sum of all its parts, be more than its surfaces, and more than its intentions.
alternative stories can be constituted by the bodies of those who chose to create and live
their own myth.82

The place of The Drover’s Wife

Lawson’s ‘white man’s dreaming’ of domestic life and womanhood in the bush has
been much loved by settler society, and continues to be drawn upon as a poetical and
wryly humorous acknowledgement of women’s strength in difficult circumstances. The
original story of *The Drover’s Wife*, first published in 1892, works to make sense of the
‘natural’ world as newcomers to Australia have found it and connects that world to the
place they make in it. Lawson’s short story, reputedly modelled on the author’s own
aunt, charts the emergence of the quintessential Australian ‘bush wife’.83 It is a tale of
frontier domesticity that records a day in the life of a woman in the bush and her
children. Just as the story of the battle of Gallipoli offers a unifying, ‘coming of age’
narrative for Australia that focuses on the heroics of young men, *The Drover’s Wife*

---

82 In her analysis of the post-dramatic theatre, Margaret Hamilton follows a similar interplay between
modes of representation in the work of Julia Kristeva. She identifies that in
psycho-linguistic theory of language *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva posits the
dialectical interplay of two modalities, the ‘semiotic’ and ‘symbolic’ within the signifying
process and argues the type of discourse that emerges is dependent upon the interaction
between the two modes of articulation. (2005: 23)

In this study of the metaphors and metonymies of place in theatre, the creative field is also open to
something *other* than a dialectical movement between the two approaches. Such movement could, in fact,
be a field of open ‘becoming’ into something entirely different, and as yet, unthought of.
It should also be noted that although Kristeva comments on poetry within written texts not theatre, in
many ways the groupings, ‘semiotic and the symbolic’, ‘metaphor and metonymy’ and ‘mimesis and
methexis’ all test the boundaries of Western concepts of representation. It could be said that all these
theorisations, offer versions of Penelope working body and soul together. I choose not to pursue such
comparisons in this study of *The Drover’s Wives*, believing that each approach is best offered within a
particular context. For example, I do not want to apply ideas of methexis to a performance such as *The
Drover’s Wives* and thereby align Indigenous cultural positioning within Australia with that of a feminist
reading of the place women within patriarchy. This would be inappropriate I think because, as Anne
McCIntock points out, white woman have been entirely implicated in the colonial project, working to
secure the borders of territory and flows of material goods and of labour in the new economies of colonial

83 Lawson’s own mother Louisa Lawson published an article called “The Australian Bushwoman” in the
*Englishwoman’s Review* in 1889, documenting similar conditions of life, three years before her son’s
story was published.
applauds colonial women for their resilience, courage, fortitude in the face of grinding hardship. It produces (or perhaps, metaphorically speaking, reproduces), both a claim of ownership of the land, and a sense of belonging in a harsh Australian environment, as it expresses the loneliness and difficulties of life in the bush for a woman with her children. For contemporary Australian women who have struggled alone with children in a comparably hostile, modern environment in the suburbs, the story also offers a distant role model and some consolation.

Less nostalgically and more politically, it has been noted that within the colonial project to which Lawson’s tale belongs, women can be seen to play a vital role, securing the borders of Empire. This occurs both through actual physical settlement and through the ‘civilising’ process of cultural colonisation of the land, such as that undertaken by the woman in this story. Acting as domestic boundary markers, white women became what Anne McClintock describes as the “the ambiguous mediators of what appeared to be – at least superficially – the predominantly male agon of empire” (1995: 24).\(^{84}\)

McClintock suggests that these women were not “the hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting” (1995: 6). Her reading of such figures (as The Drover’s Wife) in the over-arching story of Empire, suggests that there is always more to a tale than meets the eye.

Feminists and Indigenous artists, amongst others, eager to add alternative perspectives to an understanding of a more complex past and present, have reworked this bush tradition, showing that it is no longer possible to view our history through the singular lens of an idealised colonial dreaming. Barbara Baynton’s short story, “The Chosen Vessel” published in 1902, is one of the earliest and most famous of these revisions. It

\(^{84}\) The opening sequence, (discussed above and more fully, below) of The Drover’s Wives, it must be admitted, could also be read in this light.
describes the depredations visited on a lone woman by a ‘sundowner’, a vagrant of the bush. Her story does not dwell on the still beauty of the bush or on humorous interludes that make such a life bearable, as Lawson’s story does, but rather focuses on the chill horror of an isolated existence, and ends with the implied rape and murder of the young mother, far from the security of civilisation and the safety of numbers. Baynton’s Wife is found eventually, down by the creek, her small child still clinging to her cold, dead body.

Throughout the twentieth century, Lawson’s story has been pursued and rendered in different mediums, driven by both artistic and political agendas. In 1946, Russell Drysdale immortalised the forbearance and fortitude of the solitary woman of the bush in his painting *Drover’s Wife*. His picture sits comfortably within a modernist frame, with the massive proportions of the lumpy and inelegant figure dominating a graceless landscape out of which she must eek a living. This woman’s life is not idealised or sentimentalised in any way. She is the focus of a painting in which the landscape operates as background, foil to her proletarian perseverance. Composer, Jonathan Mills and poet, Dorothy Porter’s opera *The Ghost Wife* has had seasons in Adelaide, Sydney, London and Singapore. Their version of this story draws again on Baynton’s, as it explores uncanny, gothic intimations of the ‘unheimlich’ and visions of the unknown and unknowable in the Australian bush. Feminist historian Kay Schaffer suggests that the ubiquitous presence of “the figure of the drover’s wife has in fact, become something of a national joke” (1993: 205). She also points to contemporary interpretations of Lawson’s story that recontextualise the work.

---

85 This opera was co-commissioned by the 1999 Melbourne, 2000 Adelaide and 2001 Sydney Festivals and seasons abroad including Singapore and London (Barbican Centre) in 2002. It was composed by Jonathan Mills, with libretto by Dorothy Porter and musical direction by Richard Gill.

Richardson collapses Lawson and Baynton’s story and adds her multiple Drover’s Wives to this Australian tradition. In this group devised, multi-media production, each of the five female dancers, all choreographers in their own right, works a version of a Wife into the structure that Richardson provides. According to Richardson there are five movements within the piece, which trace a single day from dawn till dawn. Each phase of the day also suggests a different season, indicated by a different landscape from drought farmland, salt lake to a forest. This in turn is indicative of the stages of a woman’s life from child, bride and mother, with all that this entails. (Richardson in Campbell, 2006)

The performers approach the material from personal, even idiosyncratic connections, using fragments of text, images and memories of their own experience in different Australian landscapes.

Framed by Lawson’s story, the performers create and inhabit a theatrical landscape into which their bodies merge and emerge. They do not aim for a literal or realistic reconstruction of the story and the myth that surrounds it. Instead, they work within a dramaturgical structure and creative process that actively explores a triple capture of place in phrases, images and movement. This process is designed to create a performance for an audience, that in Australia at least, is familiar with the Lawson’s original Wife, and who shares the experience of living an Australian, twenty-first century reality.

**Inside and Out**

A single light appears beyond the scrim, behind the projection. It tracks across the rear of the stage space. Another light appears to mirror this at the back of the auditorium; a hurricane lamp is carried by a dancer through the audience and up to the stage. All the
dancers arrive with light. They are grouped together in front and behind the scrim, presenting both shadowed silhouette and real presence. Trees appear on the projected landscape. The trees are overlayed with grouped images of women and overlayed again with images of women walking through changing landscapes of desert and forest, through grassland, salt pans and across creeks. The women perform a walking action on stage and through the audience. They are ghosted by the video images of themselves and the landscape.

The beauty of image holds me as light intercepts the flow of their movement, lifts across their bodies and onto the screen. It rolls over their dancers’ bodies, evoking the first cool rays of morning sun. The outlines of their dresses merge into the projected shapes that surround them, colours bleeding ochre to gold to azure. The women move, sending waves of energy, one body to another, across surfaces of flesh, across surfaces of projected landscape.

*The Drover’s Wives*, Steamworks Arts/PIAF. Cast as above, photo Ashley de Prazer
The layered interplay of projected image and corporeality suggests that these bodies, like those that have come before, and those yet to come, play a continuing role in the construction of place within this country. Richardson states that her intention in this project is to break open Lawson’s story. Following a symbolic progression somewhat like Mallarmé’s poem, from outside into something deeper and less accessible, she wants to find an abstracted, interior terrain. She states:

I wanted the idea of this enormous vastness and color that the Australian landscape offers as a palette. I wanted the sense of a living painting, that you are watching a painting. This is an inhabited world of inside and outside. (Richardson in Campbell, 2006)

This relationship between the ‘inside and out’, for me in the audience, is played between Lawson’s story of a drover’s wife caught within her representational frame and another vision of the landscape as ‘palette’ created with the bodies of the dancers with movement, music and video.

To facilitate the movement and connection between performative elements, the stage is built with a ramp that runs into a cyclorama, blending the horizontal floor space with the vertical space of the backdrop. The floor is painted in areas of ochre, azure, yellow, pink and green. These colours blend into each other and correspond with the graded colouring of each of the five dancer’s long skirts and ruffled petticoats. As they move across the stage, they are either highlighted or camouflaged. The cyclorama is in fact a huge floor to ceiling projection scrim behind which the three male musicians perform. The musicians are often hidden in darkness or only partly revealed by the projected images.  

Landscapes and illustrations of life in colonial Australia appear and disappear, projected onto the scrim. They create a collage of a particular time and place with representations.

---

87 The production was re-worked for far larger venues in the China tour and this ramp was deleted. Also in China the musicians were placed on stage and were visible throughout the performance.
of forests, rising and setting moons, trees, shadowy figures that emerge but never quite come into focus, cartoon images from nineteenth century newspapers, mail order catalogues, ladies fashions, abstract shapes and colours. Together, these elements form an imagistic foil for the dancers’ actions; they overlap, directing the audience’s focus between descriptions of the bush and nostalgic images of colonial culture. The set and performers interact within this conceit, showing the dancers and musicians to be alternatively merging into landscape and then being caught within cultural circumstance. Just as the stage physically continues into the projected images on the scrim, so too do the dancers and musicians blend into their surroundings, or as it sometimes plays out, stand in contrast, colour against colour, flesh against projected image.

**The place of the myth in culture**

Like *The Odyssey*, *The Drover’s Wives* retrieves iconic moments of Australia’s past to explore issues of identity and belonging in modern Australia. While *The Odyssey* activates the story of Gallipoli as it maps the trajectory of its lone masculine protagonist, *The Drover’s Wives* works with the idea of the ‘lone woman in the bush’ creating multiple, feminine versions of settler inhabitation across the landscape of early Australian life. Although the two productions look and feel very different, they are in many ways, strikingly similar. Both reach into mythic constructions of Australia’s colonial origins to create tightly choreographed scenic pictures and fragmented narratives across an imagistic, post-dramatic, choric space. Both productions work around the fundamental trope of ‘home’. While *The Odyssey* creates a spectacle of masculine ‘derring-do’ following Odysseus on his return journey home through colonial
Empire, *The Drover’s Wives* focuses on the woman who has been left behind in this colonial adventure. These five wives could be seen, (after Caverero) as versions of a nineteenth century, Australian Penelope, left in sole charge of the home front, to weave and unweave body and soul together, and to create a place for herself and her dependents within her own myth while her husband is away.88

Although *The Drover’s Wives* is produced on a smaller scale and with fewer resources than *The Odyssey*, there are amid major differences, many notable connections between the two productions other than their billing within the same 2006 Perth International Arts Festival. Richardson, the writer, director and producer of *The Drover’s Wives* is also the Associate Director of *The Odyssey*. Zoe Atkinson who designed costumes for *The Odyssey* is also the costume designer for *The Drover’s Wives*, Iain Grandage is the composer for both productions and also plays a number of instruments live in *The Drover’s Wives*. Although both works were produced independently of each other, both received funding from the Perth International Festival and from Black Swan Theatre Company (and of course, from many other sources as well). These logistical connections between the two productions are very much an articulation of place within the realities of making theatre in Australian and are also reflective of a particular artistic and cultural milieu. It might also be argued, that the genesis and development of these

88 Although *The Drover’s Wives* is produced on a smaller scale and with fewer resources than *The Odyssey*, there are amid major differences, many notable connections between the two productions other than their billing within the same 2006 Perth International Arts Festival. Richardson, the writer, director and producer of *The Drover’s Wives* is also the Associate Director of *The Odyssey*. Zoe Atkinson who designed costumes for *The Odyssey* is also the costume designer for *The Drover’s Wives*, Iain Grandage is the composer for both productions and also plays a number of instruments live in *The Drover’s Wives*. Although both works were produced independently of each other, both received funding from the Perth International Festival and from Black Swan Theatre Company (and of course, from many other sources as well). These logistical connections between the two productions are very much an articulation of place within the realities of making theatre in Australian and are also reflective of a particular artistic and cultural milieu. It might also be argued, that the genesis and development of these works engage critically with these themes, (though a case might be made that the critique that they offer remains caught within the cultural imperatives of the day).
two works, both of which research and revisit myths of Australia’s colonial past, reflects a political and social environment encouraged by the conservative government that had, over the previous ten years, been keen to promote a nostalgic version of Australian history and to validate the place of settler society within that history. Both these works engage critically with these themes, (though a case might be made that the critique that they offer remains caught within the cultural imperatives of the day).

The notion of ‘home’ is the central discourse around which Una Chaudhuri writes her book, *Staging Place: The Geographies of Modern Drama* (1995). She posits that in modern drama, beginning with naturalism

the dramatic discourse of home is articulated through two main principles, which structure the plot as well as the plays’ accounts of subjectivity and identity: a *victimage of location* and a *heroism of departure*. The former principle defines place as the protagonist’s fundamental problem, leading her or him to a recognition of the need for (if not an actual enactment of) the latter. (1995: xii, original italics)

Chaudhuri, characterises place, ‘the home’ in this context, as a problem; a “geopathology” (1995: xii). Place is something against which the characters must struggle and pit themselves. The journey of modern drama, Chaudhuri argues, is one that moves “from the experience of place as one-dimensional and fully determining, to the experience of place as multidimensional and creative”, this “on-going experiment with place [is] (reflected in – though not mechanically parallel to – the ongoing experimentation with stage space)” (Chaudhuri, 1995: xii).

Although neither *The Odyssey* nor *The Drover’s Wives* are dramatic works of the tradition that Chaudhuri explores, I believe similar questions concerning the parameters of place are raised in both productions. Place as ‘geopathology’, in the form of isolation ‘at home’ in the inhospitable Australian bush, provides the dramaturgical interest in Richardson’s version of this story. She renders Lawson’s Wife very much as a victim of location, and then something else again. In her multiple incarnations in this multi-
media, dance based narrative, these Wives have many opportunities to explore the nuances of place and to pit themselves against the sublime and prosaic of a life alone in the bush. Unlike Odysseus or her absent droving husband, the heroism these Wives exhibit does not involve departure, “And a dreadful death/Against the rocks, into legend” (though a violent death is in fact, the end of one of the Wives) but rather requires them to endure being in place (Torozzi in Cavarero, 1995: 20). The journey of this production becomes one of contemplation of these women’s lives and the ways that they might negotiate place without having to leave it. I suggest that this is a journey that also explores the ways in which women’s lives might be represented, or implaced, on the contemporary stage.

Whereas *The Odyssey* re-writes a mythical history following the singular experience of its extra-ordinary central character, this theatrical version of place in Australia is created around the more ordinary. Similar to Mallarmé’s poem, it is created as a series of suggested reveals and possible scenarios. In *The Drover’s Wives*, these reveals leave much to be imagined. Chaudhuri argues that interest in naturalism in the nineteenth century gave rise to a theatrical aesthetic that promised “total visibility, total knowledge” in order “to dispel the enigmas of the past and future from a firmly drawn present” (1995: 29). It is against this promise of total knowledge that the theatrical morphology of *The Drover’s Wives* pitches itself. *The Drover’s Wives* creates a theatrical frame through which the nature of ‘home’ or implacement on the stage takes on what I believe to be, and what Chaudhuri names, a “postgeopathic” (1995: xii) form. This is a form of theatre where the “solid state” (1995: xiii) world of naturalism, as well as its logic of total visibility is replaced by an understanding that notions of ‘home’ and
one’s place in the world are always negotiable and cannot always be accessed by the eye.89

In medias res

According to Richardson, the process of creating this work began with the dancers’ response to the text, and also to their own memories of place. The women live and work in different parts of Australia and the rehearsal process included trips into the bush and desert not just in Western Australia, where the piece was to be performed, but also visits to rainforests and rural areas of Queensland and New South Wales. These trips were taken in order to work in situ, in different environments, to shoot video and still images of varying landscapes and the dancers within those landscapes. They also provided an embodied, first hand experience of emersion within different aspects of country. The performers could then draw upon this experience, later, in their rehearsals.

The choreography works in this way, in combination with Lawson’s primary narrative, directly upon the body of not one Drover’s Wife, but on the experience of five dancers as they inhabited the landscapes of a number of potential Drover’s Wives. As Richardson states

there is sense of the past, but also a sense of the present, and the emotional connections we make to who and what we are. It’s a felt thing, it’s not a kind of fixed thing in an historical light. (Richardson in Campbell, 2006)

In such a process, the bodies of the performers not only inhabit the narrative, but also work to produce meaning in and of themselves, differently, according to their own lived experience of their place in the country. According to Richardson:

89 I find it interesting that while The Odyssey does not aim at the total visibility of naturalism, it nevertheless seeks to capture its audience in a thrall of spectacle and visual theatrics in its dystopic journey toward ‘home’.
I asked [the dancers] to chose the bit in the piece that resonated personally to them. We identify with certain parts of the story, and start to build a relationship and via that a choreographic form. As they are different women, they all responded to different things. The mothers responded to bits with children in them. One dancer really responded to bushfire, the imagery, the smoke, the smell, the intensity. For another, the swaggy, the rape, the threat. Another said she didn’t respond to any at all. We found a different way in. (Richardson in Campbell, 2006)

Ideally, this process sets in train a proliferation of meanings for the performers that will, eventually, resonate within the audience. Such an approach works to broaden a collective, cultural understanding of the original text, and of the varied nuances that might be felt (or not felt) encountering such texts. This then allows a layering of alternate meanings, between the situation described in Lawson’s story, and a lived experience of inhabiting this country.

This dramaturgical movement between the bodily experience and encultured story-telling highlights a political and personal dimension in the work that might be read, following Merleau-Ponty, as

> as anterior to the ideas of subject and object, the fact of my subjectivity and the nascent object, that primordial layer at which both things and ideas come into being. (1962: 219-220)

I suggest that what is “anterior” could also be something like the Body without Organs mentioned in the previous chapter; “the unthought set of presuppositions we utilise to compose our thoughts and feelings without them ever being intelligible to us,” the thing that “falls back on (il se rabat sur) all production” (Buchanan, 2005-6: 27). I propose that this thing that falls back upon all production, the ‘unthought set of presuppositions’ that *The Drover’s Wives* interrogates in its dramaturgical movement between metaphor and metonymy, is the cultural construction of gender, and, for me, most importantly, gender as it applies to the construction of place. Unlike Kantor and Wright’s Odysseus, who works to assert his cultural hegemony in his design-driven journey across supermodernity, these Wives attempt to interrogate their own place in the landscape, in
performance. They do this, I suggest, by constructing place in Lawson’s text across their bodies, using both metaphor and metonymy.

This play creates what I believe to be, an auto-reproductive sense of place, a place that is both visible and invisible, or perhaps, overt and suggested (made in the convolutions between the interior and exterior). In *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan discusses notions of visibility and invisibility in performance and argues that metaphors of gender ‘disappears’ women and their sexual difference into a hierarchical position of subservience to the phallus. She believes that “[b]y valuing one gender and marking it (with the phallus) culture reproduces one sex and one gender, the hommo-sexual” (1993: 151). Within this metaphorically induced, reproductive hierarchy, real women and their experience are necessarily made invisible for the sake of the visibility of the phallus. Phelan asks how women can possibly survive under such conditions:

What aspects of the bodies and languages of women remain outside metaphor and inside the historical real? Or to put is somewhat differently, how do women reproduce and represent themselves within the figures and metaphors of hommo-sexual representation and culture? Are they perhaps surviving in another (auto)reproductive system?” (1993, 151)

Some answers to Phelan’s questions can be in found, I think, in the play of metonymy against metaphor in *The Drover’s Wives*. Thinking again of Penelope’s philosophical task that weaves together body and soul, I suggest the sense of place in *The Drover’s Wives* is woven together across the bodies of the dancers. This is not necessarily visible on stage, but rather, exists in the interplay between metaphor and metonymy (creating a gap or a third space) that allows these women (and also the audience) to occupy their own ‘(auto)reproductive’ place in a cultural text that for the most part, supports a (visible) patriarchal status quo.

---

90 As I have argued in the previous chapter, this mechanism that disappears women’s experience (for the sake of the phallus) operates throughout *The Odyssey*. As noted, Tom Wright is clear about the political “minefield that you find yourself treading through, the extent to which you objectify bodies, the extent to which you deny personality and agency and so on” (Wright in Campbell, 2005b).
This performative shift between metonymy and metaphor is set up early in the production when the almost elemental emergence of the Drover’s Wives within video footage of different aspects Australian landscape is interrupted by the musicians coming slowly into focus behind the scrim. The musicians are three men dressed in costume and hats of a contemporary (or is it a faux- traditional?) bush band. The other-worldly echoes of sustained strings and harmonium that reverberate through this ghostly stage environment in the opening sequence is broken by a shift to transitional sounds of birdsong. At this point, the performance moves from what I perceive, in the audience, as a preverbal, metonymic, immersive, bodily experience, to something that is caught within the familiar tropes of a figurative, narrative, metaphorical frame. These men are like men in a traditional bush band and these women are like the women that dance to its music. These people are like the people that I, sitting in the audience, might imagine, from what I already know about the figures that exist in Lawson’s story. But they are not the same bodies that I have just experienced in the landscape. There is a gap or a space between the two representations. In the audience I begin to wonder what might lie (invisibly) in the difference.

Night has receded and the day has begun. With the change in representational frame, the music switches again to violin and double bass, and chases out a jolly period tune, blurring in an entirely more prosaic way, the ‘then and now’ eternal time frame that has played throughout the opening sequences.

**Becoming-landscape**

The tie, the knot, between body and place is so thickly Gordian that it cannot be neatly severed at any one point. Merleau-Ponty … shows that the lived body is itself a place. Its very movement, instead of effecting a mere change of position, constitutes place, brings it into being. (Casey, 1997: 235)
Richardson states that “in the work, the women look ever outward, down the road, into the distance, staring, watching and waiting” (Richardson in Campbell, 2006). A woman sits on edge of stage on a candle box and begins the spoken text. She is a young bride from an earlier century arriving from the city to her new life in the bush. The other women run to edge of stage. They wait impatiently for the arrival of the Drover and for their new life to begin. They flip their coloured underskirts, and as they wait they enter the rhythm of the country music and begin to kick up their heels. The dancers look over the audience toward an imagined horizon. They gaze into the distance, they fantasize. It seems to me (in the audience, caught within the circularity of this gaze as my own kind of self-conscious spectator) that they know, that we know, that they know, that they are looking into nothing, into a gap. Images appear behind them of other women. These images are artists’ impressions of objects of elegance and sophistication; hats, faces, articles of consumer desire, ideal representations of life as it should be lived in the nineteenth century Australia. The dancers’ ‘real’ hats blow away on stage. They are retrieved time and time again, dusted off and pushed back into shape. A crack has opened in my experience of the performance, between metaphor and metonymy. There is an anomaly here, between what I have just experienced of the place of the women in the landscape and the place they occupy within this vision of society. There is an absence, something about the experience presented on stage that is unspoken, unacknowledged. I already know that this myth does not last the distance.
I already know the end of this story of hats and waiting for something good to arrive over the edge of an endless horizon, I have seen and heard it a thousand times before. Even though this scene is titled “Glory Box” and is presented as a scene of arrival and hope, to my mind, these women are already doomed; I know their fictional lives are never going to shape up to the ideal and that something far more complex and compromised is their destined reality. The dancers continue to tip-toe to the music. They stare past the audience and the imagined horizon, to an imagined future. They continue to wait, with misplaced hope for their man to arrive.

Observing this dynamic between metaphor and metonymy as an audience member requires active participation in the creation of place-focussed meanings. As these performing women stare out into the audience, waiting for life as they had been promised to begin, a metaphoric trope that has been used again and again on stage, in literature, in film and visual art, what they are really looking at here, what is in fact
returning is not their fictional husband or lover, but the audience’s gaze. A similar mechanism of recognition to the (again familiar) trope of a woman within patriarchy looking to the Other for a reflection of herself. In this context however, their gaze moves through the audience, continues on past what we have all just experienced of landscape, memory and presence and comes back around to hit us all, ever so gently on the back of the head.91

The theatrical space that has opened up between what I have just seen of landscape, the bodies that inhabit it, and the narrative of the Lawson/Baynton story, is part of, and at the same time, outside of the story’s ‘white man’s dreaming’. It is, I believe, an imperceptibly, subtle place of ‘becoming’ between the performers and the audience. Returning the gaze back, (in the dance of ‘you know that I know that you know’) towards the face of patriarchy as it were, unsettles the hold of Lawson’s narrative, releasing the dancer’s body to inhabit an alternative space and thereby allowing the audience, if they will, to consider that there might just be other places to be found in alternative narratives, elsewhere. Just as Penelope weaves for herself her own place in Odysseus’ myth by tying together body and soul on her own terms, the potential for change, or at least, the inherent vitality in this multidimensional method of meaning-making in place, (that weaves together metaphor and metonym), lies outside of the closed confines of the dominant narrative of Lawson’s story. It resides, instead, within the bodily presence of the performers and the effects this presence has on the audience. The body in this construction of place becomes a destabilising, vital instrument of minoritarian-becoming. It is a place upon which other meanings can be construed.

Phelan suggests that in its bodily immediacy, performance is in a prime position to resist the reproduction of deeply entrenched cultural metaphors and that “the grammar

91 A similar idea of light bending and continuing around the world only to hit the original viewer on the back of the head, is an interpretation of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity explained by Eleanor, a character in a novel by Nicholas Mosely (Oswald’s son) called Hopeful Monsters.
of the body” (expressed here in a performance situation as metonymy) can in fact, override “the grammar of language” (understood here as metaphor) (1993: 150).

According to Phelan:

Metaphor works to secure a vertical hierarchy of value and is reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and negating difference; it turns two into one. Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement. (1993: 150)

Caught, or rather shifting between these modalities, The Drover’s Wives underscores the force of the real living bodies, or as Phelan would have it “the agonizingly relevant bodies of the performers” (1993: 150) as they interact with music and multimedia images of landscape. It also highlights, for me at least, the inadequacy of the narration and enactments of Lawson’s story. By honouring bodily experience in this way, almost by negative pressure, potential places and absent bodies are implied as the dancers and musicians range across the fractures and disjunctions of what seems to be a genuine, integrated sense of ‘belonging’ in the landscape, in a lived, metonymic sense (along a horizontal axis) and an awkward sense of ‘not belonging’, within the bush tradition, and of living (on the vertical axis) on the surface of a contested colonial landscape.

It is not surprising that the trope of ‘living uncomfortably on the surface of land’ is deeply rooted in the white settler mythology of Australia. An embodied, additive approach that re-imagines settler occupation of the land, metonymically, is, I suggest, timely. Even so, such an approach does not necessarily lead to a celebration of Australian culture and womanhood. The uneven traces and silhouettes of colonial women shaped by Richardson and her creative team in this particular version of woman in the landscape, falls notably short of the steadfast endurance idealised by Lawson. Instead, and perhaps more potently, the woman that emerges from the shadows in The Drover’s Wives, I believe, carries a mute and angry, dark night of the colonial soul at her core.
Zoe Atkinson, the set and costume designer works with keen awareness of traditional processes of signification and their limitations. Research for her design concept began with the popular paintings of the day and their highly realistic and detailed observation both of the domestic and natural environments. She notes that given the detailed description of their environments, the women depicted in these representations were strangely un-drawn, unobserved, un-real. She relates how there was a great painting “Home Again.” It was quite narrative, it described a drover coming home and his wife was the young wife and she has a baby and is dressed in widow’s clothes and she is clearly in mourning having given up hope of her husband returning, having given him up for dead. And the shape of her body, she is standing there at the ironing table and it’s really a Victorian peg doll shape. It’s so classic and two dimensional. There is no crease in that fabric, there is no stain from where she has wiped her hand and yet everything else in that painting is so naturalistic in its detail. It’s almost hyper-naturalism and yet the woman’s body is just this blank shape. (Atkinson in Campbell, 2006b)92

Although this woman is depicted at ‘home’ revealed in her domestic milieu for close observation, her garments don’t work as real garments and neither does her body, it seems, represent the actual workings of a real woman’s body. It is this disjuncture, this unfilled-in outline, this question of what the woman actually is, beyond the signification, that remains hanging (like “Lace Passes into Nothingness”) as a tantalising void waiting to be filled. Atkinson found working from these ‘blank shapes’ that serviced other people’s (that is, patriarchy’s) stories intriguing. After studying works from the Heidelberg School she admitted to being really unsatisfied, and I thought, these men are really inept at describing detail. I inherently already knew far more about the costume that women wore in that time than any of these paintings were describing. It occurred to me that this was a really quite superficial view of women at this time. There was a woman’s body shape but there was no description of how those clothes worked. There were no buttons … I was looking and there were no descriptions of female life, women were part of someone else’s story. (Atkinson in Campbell, 2006b)

92 The hyper-naturalism that Atkinson refers to echoes Chaudhuri’s observation about naturalism in Modernist drama and the place of ‘home’ within this cultural imaginary.
I suggest that the process this production embarks upon, offers an opportunity for further exploration and development into what such a woman’s life might actually be, as it creates a pathway across an unmarked territory of the Drover’s Wife. Atkinson states that she really like[d] the idea of using that as the silhouette to start from. Throughout the performance we look[ed] beneath that silhouette to find something that was far more textured and detailed and that a woman could actually touch and move and that would describe her life. (Atkinson in Campbell, 2006b).

In *The Drover’s Wives* this pathway is drawn across the literary original and also across the dancers’ bodies with texture, movement and detail. It requires that the audience reach their own understanding of the silhouettes that mark other people’s stories and that perhaps shadow the boundaries of their own lived experience.

Interestingly, Atkinson speaks of her teacher and mentor, renowned Polish designer Josef Svoboda and his use of ‘black light’ as an inspiration to this way of thinking, this way of reaching not for what is obvious, but for what might be revealed behind or in spite of the obvious. In Svoboda’s example, such an approach requires that the invisible be made visible by encouraging light to behave in surprising ways, through innovative techniques and tricks of refraction.

I include here a segment of my interview with Atkinson as she recounts her experience with Svoboda, in order to underline the ways conceptual ideas and accidents of lived experience, in place, are captured within some artists’ practice. Atkinson, who studied design in the Czech Republic, recounts that

Josef Svoboda began his work as an architect and, in the twentieth century, and is one of the big three, along with Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. He was the one who took Appia’s ideas on light and Craig’s ideas on space and really joined the two together. He was inspired by military search lights in World War Two as well, to shoot beams of light back against themselves using parallel reflectors and that way he managed to create ‘black light’ or ‘invisible light.’ That way of using
light gave rise to theatres like Phillipe Genty where there are corridors of light that are invisible until something steps into it. (Atkinson in Campbell, 2006b)\textsuperscript{93}

As Atkinson describes it, Svoboda works in refracted, complex ways with his medium. He creates meanings that cannot be accessed in the full glare of ordinary white light. His inspiration comes from knowing and observing the shifting and changing qualities of light in real life and understanding that there are different ways of seeing.

Phelan also considers the intriguing potential of similar states of invisibility and visibility, and the impossibility of revealing the whole truth of a situation in the glare of ordinary white light (or through naturalism, or theatrical spectacle for that matter). She states that

possibly, through the impossibility of saying a wholly material truth, we might see what the possibility of the immaterial is (which is perhaps to see how to say it) … I am calling this immateriality the unmarked; it shows itself through the negative and through disappearance. (1993: 19)

So in this sense, in observing the metaphorical outline or silhouette offered by Lawson in his Drover’s Wife, as it is embodied by the five contemporary performers, we in the

\textsuperscript{93} Atkinson describes how Svoboda uses ‘black light’ in a working situation, at the premiere season of Carmen at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, that I find fascinating because it illustrates how artists work, ‘in place’ in their practice and how this is a challenge that requires responsive and imaginative ‘on the ground’ thinking:

> If you lit a stage in a Josef Svoboda way, you could have a whole architecture of light but when you turned on all the lights, [nothing might happen] … this actually happened to him when he worked with Bernstein at the Met, in the 50s with the opera Carmen. He created this entire lighting design using thousands of lamps and when they were turned on the stage remained absolutely black and that’s because you can’t see light unless it is illuminating something or reflected off something. He had so diligently and precisely turned beams of light back into themselves that when he lit this stage with all the lights masked from view, you could see nothing. His intention had been that you would see walls and beams and corridors of light, and of course that is because he always worked at the Prague National Theatre. He was the head designer. And it was a very old theatre and he would create these amazing architectures of light. Every time an actor walked across the stage, dust would rise up so he was actually lighting particles of dust. Because Carmen was the premiere season in the Met, there was no dust anywhere, so he said to Bernstein, “well, we’ll just have to put flour on the stage” and Bernstein had a fit and said, “you can’t do that to my singers, their throats would die” and that’s where the hazer was invented. So the hazer produces very fine droplets of water suspended in air and that’s what light is reflected off. And they invented that in two weeks. We worked with him for a semester. He was 85 and it was the last teaching that he did and we were really lucky. Working with him is like working with God really. (Atkinson in Campbell, 2006b)

Hazers are now commonly used in both opera and theatre to control both atmospheric moisture and to create visual effects of smoke and fog.
audience are left with the difference, existing somewhere in that hazy place between the ideal and the material. My gaze in the audience is caught in a strange, looping Mobius strip, between what might be and what we are told actually is. It is left to my own imagination, intuition and bodily experience to fill the gap.

Phelan commenting more recently on her study of visibility and invisibility in theatre and its attempt to formulate an “ethics of the invisible” based on the “failure to see oneself fully,” suggests that this failure is “optical, psychoanalytical, and ethical” (2003: 269). She suggests that this

central failure, instead of being constantly repressed by culture, might be something we could acknowledge and even embrace. If this were possible, I thought perhaps a different ethics, a richer encounter between self and other might become actual and actual-izable. (2003: 269)

Such an encounter is possible I suggest, within the formulation of visibility and invisibility that operates in The Drover’s Wives. Opening up this unstable interstice requires a different type of attention in performance and in criticism. It certainly does not require the overwhelming force of spectacle such as is created in The Odyssey. By contrast, Phelan emphasises that

opening up the “not all” of vision requires patience with blanks, with blindness, and with the non-reproductive. To take the humility and blindness inscribed within the gaze seriously, one must accept the radical impotency of the gaze. (1993: 18)

This process requires the audience to split the mind’s eye, as it were, and to concentrate on what is other to the main narrative, giving peripheral focus to what might be happening beyond, or between the different media; in this case, between the Lawson story and bodily presence in the landscape and also, in the dramaturgical play between the different media within the performance.

Behind the dancerly version of Lawson’s story of a young wife, and later, the more Baynton-inflected narrative of a woman and her children alone in the bush, lies the
undeniable presence of the bodies of the dancers and the effects the Australian landscape has upon those bodies. This dreaming is, I suggest, at its most interesting when played out in medias res, in between the prosaic representation of the bush wife of Lawson’s story and the experience of the landscape, as it is (more or less) faithfully imprinted on and within the bodies of the five dancers in performance.94 Just as the text under-represents and flattens out, cages in, delimits the experience of the bodies playing Lawson’s ‘Wife’, the elemental and eternal landscape within which those bodies are placed, exceeds the frame, refusing to be captured. There is a negative tension between the text and the bodies in the landscape at this point, something pointing more toward a proliferating, material excess than a mere failure of representation. The choice to have multiple wives reinforces this burgeoning potential and intensity. The inadequacy of the story to fully represent the lives of such women, in this way, highlights a complimentary awareness that the landscape upon which their story unfolds is hugely, impossibly, more than significant.

It is from out of this ‘black light’ or ‘inbetweeness’ that something might yet begin to emerge. In Mallarmé’s poem, this potential is a song yet unsung, a child yet to be born. In Lawson’s original story The Drover’s Wife, this uneasy absence is marked in the figure of the Drover. In the case of The Drover’s Wives’ a person who is attuned to the ‘not all’ of vision, does not wait for the Drover, but rather waits for something that is just forming behind the text, unarticulated, before thought, held silently on the body of the performers and by way of recognition, within the body of the audience. It is the awareness that meaning attached to one’s own bodily presence within this landscape is and always has been a work in progress, a material becoming, following, if it will, its own process, in spite of entrenched, more visible patriarchal structures. I suggest that

94 Niall Lucy discusses what happens in medias res, or in between. He writes of Derrida’s threshold figure of the hymen and Mallarmé’s lace as means of approaching an “ontology of the margin ‘itself’ ” (2004: 47-48).
this yearning, desiring, ‘in betweenness’ of theatrical experience (between representation and the bodies upon which that representation adheres) exists both for the audience and the performers, as the silent knowledge that representations bound so tightly (unto death) within gendered (visible) cultural metaphors and the places that they create, are not and never will be enough.

**Becoming a wife**

In the course of their nominal day, these Drover’s Wives are in the process of multiple ‘becomings’. The performance is, in fact, most compelling during the times they are becoming-tree, becoming-fence post, becoming-snake, becoming-child, becoming part of the landscape at will. One of the most potent episodes of the performance is titled “Snake.” In this section, the five women sit quietly sewing, separated from each other but employed at their task with mirrored focus and intensity. There is an unexpected movement and a look, another movement, a sly twisting under a skirt. The sewing stops for a moment, another look. A leg moves, and moves again; this body part has a mind of its own. It is not a leg, it is a snake. The snake twists and turns, it is alive and powerful and has slipped inside the house, under the skirt, inside the body of this woman left alone for so long with nothing and nobody except her children. The snake is on the attack, so are the other women. The unnamed threat has a shape and something can be done to subdue it. One of the dancers becomes the snake, her body liberated at last from the confines of the nineteenth century petticoats, slithers and writhes as the other Wives confront their worst fears and finally combine to subdue and kill the deadly intruder.
At points such as this, the production seductively, suggestively, almost by stealth, reproduces on the bodies of the performers what Rachel Fensham has called in another context, “a prehistory of the present” (2005, 300). As Fensham puts it;

in watching performance as a prehistory of the present, I am suggesting that the female body has become a minor pocket of signification and subjectivity. Minority is the potential within literature, language and theatre of a subordinate register, of a movement away from dominant cultures and traditions. Minor bodies are accordingly textured and not text, writing and not written, moving and not moved. Fragmented and reassembled, female bodies in performance connect to other minor bodies and a-signifying forces in order to transform the dramaturgies and choreographies of the twenty-first century. (2005: 300)

In *The Drover’s Wives* the bodies of the dancers, even though they are writing themselves into the old hackneyed plot of *The Drover’s Wife*, show by the dint of their bodily presence and the force of their interaction with the music and elements of landscape into which they can and do disappear at will, that their story is in fact, not a closed narrative written by a colonial patriarchy, or something diametrically opposed to it and equally closed, but potentially, something quite different. These becomings, I suggest, are most evident in *The Drover’s Wives* when we in the audience begin to understand and experience, through the body, the things a dominant narrative does not know or will not tell about its subaltern, minor subjects.95

When this strategy operates during the performance, the embodied answer that the production provides is both satisfying and original. The episode of “Snake” for example, reveals something deeply powerful, hidden and restrained within the bodies of the women. They engage with the snake. They configure a woman becoming-snake.

95 Reaching for what seems to me to be a similarly open approach, McClintock sees the sense in holding off from prejudged, polemical positions toward entrenched constructions of power. For her the whole questions of “binaries, colonizer-colonized, dominance-resistance, metropolis-colony, colonial-post”, is part of the same false (Imperial) legacy “drawn historically from the metaphysical Manichaeism of the imperial enlightenment itself” (1995: 15). She wishes to open notions of power and resistance to a more diverse politics of agency, involving the dense web of relation between coercion, negotiation, complicity, refusal, dissembling, mimicry, compromise, affiliation and revolt, (1995: 15) in order to discover how power succeeds or fails. Such strategies sit comfortably within the poetics of place that I propose, leaving the way open in performance, for creative synergies and hybrid forms to appear and to develop along minoritarian pathways of becoming.
The snake is both dangerous and powerful. *The Drover’s Wives*, in this way, performs an act of “positive deterritorialisaton” allowing the dancers to take possession and revitalise their Wives’ story (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 508). In doing taking this action, they invite a similarly embodied response from their audience.

**Becoming imperceptible**

Preserving patriarchal constructions of women’s place in colonial and by implication, contemporary Australia, through performance such as *The Drover’s Wife* without overt critique could also, in many ways, be seen as deeply conservative. But if one knowingly risks political subordination from this molar level of organisation, and attempts to *interrogate* from within, rather than *resist* the processes of power, if one looks passed this first threshold in order to understand how power succeeds or fails, questions are raised about what else might be experienced – unexpectedly. Deleuze and Guattari warn that “it is as deplorable to miniaturize, internalize the binary machine as it is to exacerbate it; it does not extricate us from it” (1987: 276). Instead, they suggest that it is necessary “to conceive of a molecular women’s politics that slips into molar confrontations, and passes under or through them” (1987: 276). Such a strategy or politics of writing should

---

96 Deleuze and Guattari understand that it is, of course indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: “we as women…” makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. (1987: 276)

Feminist philosophers such as Elizabeth Grosz consider with caution the wholesale adoption of such a Deleuzian methodology without first taking into account the very real risks such an approach might involve. Grosz cites Alice Jardine, Luce Irigaray and Rosi Braidotti, all of whom hold reservations over Deleuze and Guattari’s jettisoning of hard won ontological concepts such as identity politics and sexual difference in favour of notions of “planes, intensities, flows, becomings [and] linkages” (1994: 161). Jardine for example, warns that
produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men of sweeping them up in that becoming. Very soft particles – but also very hard and obstinate, irreducible, indomitable. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 276)

Rachel Fensham discusses the process of “imperceptibly” slipping through patriarchal structures via performance. She states

if I were to particularize the performing body during the twentieth century, to take ‘history as quotation’ as theatre director Heiner Müller did, I would suggest we have seen the ‘becoming-woman’ of theatre and dance. That is, a series of movement away from the signification and power of masculinity toward a signification of the feminine and the realization of women’s subjectivity of the stage. (2005: 284)

It is possible that by participating in patriarchal structures, by subjecting oneself bodily to this type of ‘foundational’ myth, reconstructing it for a mainstream audience in a high profile Arts festival, by travelling over well-known historical ground, feeling or intuiting the contours of that journey, with one eye returning the gaze of the audience, that this performance might be in some way, slipping into, passing under and through the molar organisation of Australian society that has for so long, subordinated women to men within an all-encompassing binary machine? Amidst their multiple becomings and through the absences that they reveal, it is possible that the bodies of The Drover’s Wives before our very eyes, are “becoming imperceptible” (Fensham, 2005: 285), not through the obvious tropes of death and suicide, that are eventually played out in the narrative, but by inhabiting the landscape, consciously. This type of inhabitation does
to the extent that women must “become woman” first … might that not mean that she must also be the first to disappear? Is it not possible that the process of “becoming woman” is but a new variation of an old allegory of the process of women becoming obsolete? There would remain only her simulacrum: a female figure caught in a whirling sea of male configuration. A silent, mutable, head-less, desireless spatial surface necessary only for his metamorphosis? (Jardine 1985: 217) (in Grosz, 1994: 161)

Braidotti wonders whether or not feminists can at this point in their history of collective struggles aimed at redefining female subjectivity actually afford to let go of their sex-specific forms of political agency? Is the bypassing of gender in favour of a dispersed polysexuality not a very masculine move? (in Grosz, 1994: 162-3)

I have considered these arguments and believe that a strategic approach to such matters is advisable.
not exist merely on the surface of the land but resides within and across of the ‘lie of the land’.

Fensham asks “what kind of choreographies or dramaturgies are constituted by artists in which the texture of a female body is only one of many corporeal substances to conjure with?” (2005: 288) She mobilises Grosz’s work on corporeal feminism, and suggests that “bodies are changing their shapes and genders because their particles are remoulded by new forms that determine what is human and what is not, as much as what is a woman and what is a man” (2005: 291). Using performance as “heuristic devices” (2005: 286) she plots the course whereby a ‘becoming-woman’ might enter the social order and begin a processual revolution ‘imperceptibly’. Following this methodology, *The Drover’s Wives* can also be used as ‘a heuristic device’ applied to the workings of patriarchal myth-making in order to constitute a version of a minoritarian-becoming across a triple capture of place, both in the theatre and in the context in which the work in shown. In an accessible, mainstream festival work such as *Drovers Wives*, it could be argued that this process of becoming is supported in the implacement of the performance within its broader cultural context.

As Penelope works within her own project of minoritarian-becoming, so *The Drover’s Wives*, particularly in its opening sequences, and in sequences such as ‘Snake’ weaves and then unweaves metaphors and metonymies across the bodies of the dancers to create a movement in stillness, detail and dimensionality in shadows and silhouette. In this sense, the place the performance creates on stage and as it is embedded within mainstream culture, works ‘imperceptibly’, toward change.
The Drover’s Wives, Steamworks Arts/PIAF. Cast as above, photo Ashley de Prazer

The bitter end

Like Penelope’s missing Odysseus in The Odyssey, without the Drover or rather with only fantasies, daydreams surrounding him, the idealised, absent man himself becomes a spectre; a disembodied idea, a lace curtain framing another yawning gap in the lives of these multiple protagonists. Within this production, this curtained off space hovers in between the performers and the audience. It presents itself as the focus of the Wives’ yearning. Their need for this missing Drover to return and set things aright, provides the centre, the unifying point of view from which they themselves can be made, appropriately, visible. The experience of waiting in this story is coupled with an awareness that of course, he never does return. Instead what is left (always) is the inherently unstable figure of the woman (all five of them in this production, creating one ultimately uncontainable Wife), the lived reality of her children, the animals, the
parcel of land she struggles to domesticate and the danger from other men that she is forced to face, in the end, by herself.

If in the opening sequences of the piece the narrative of a women waiting for her man is resisted by the weaving of choreography and multimedia effects, and in the interplay of metaphor and metonymy across the bodies of the performers, (thereby creating a place for herself within the landscape, despite the absence of her man,) by the end of the work, the five Wives, I believe, become increasingly locked in what reasserts itself as the ‘geopathology’ of their domesticity. The choreography at this point tends more toward the descriptive and takes on an episodic, linear quality as it acts out versions of housewifely chores. This retreat into domesticity is heightened because there are five Wives, all of them busily living their lives at the same time, side by side on the stage. Under such circumstances, the trope of loneliness and the sense that there is some deeper dimension of place, yet to explore, is overwhelmed in a flurry of daily routine and detail.

The murdering Swaggy appears from Baynton’s version of the story. He is indicated by a large pair of men’s working boots manipulated on the arms of one of the dancers. This solution to a staging problem presents this violent masculine presence as something slightly ridiculous, but to my mind, the Wives do not fully exploit the buffon element introduced with this image. They do not seem, to me, to enter the full embodied horror of such an event, nor do they provide much resistance to his murdering ways. Instead, they seem ready to follow what has become a very narrow pathway to a bitter end. The journey finishes for two of the wives in the ultimate negation of suicide and death. It is as though, for these Wives, in this particular story, there is nowhere else to go.

As Richardson notes
by the last piece they are actually merging into the land. And part of what that was trying to say was that by death we will belong. Our mothers were buried here, we have a place and connection to this landscape, even if it is only by death. And that is where resolution comes, we are resolved in death. (Richardson in Campbell, 2006)

To my way of thinking, the Romanticism of this dying fall hardly offers a (visible or for that matter, invisible), workable alternative to patriarchal representation.\(^\text{97}\) The yearning, invisible presence, that reaches toward some unfulfilled desire of ‘the first cause’ that seems to play in the shadows between metaphor and metonymy early in the production, does not move toward survival, but rather like the sleeping mandola of Mallarmé’s poem, leans in an “ultimate Gamble” between light and dark, toward death, or in this case, a life still hidden in the shadows of patriarchy’s stories.

**The imperceptible difference**

Like the intricate lace filigree of Mallarmé’s curtains, the patterning of different media in *The Drover’s Wives* shadow and trace fragments of Lawson’s story along side criss-crossing images of country, to create a theatrical landscape from which the Wives can emerge and retreat. The vitality of the production exists in this complex interplay of choreography, video footage, music and light, across the live bodies of the performers, and the stage, in the projections, and throughout the auditorium. This elusive, dreamlike quality is for me, a key element within the production. As Richardson states:

> It was hybrid, it was deliberately and self-consciously suggestive … everything was in its own way abstract and at the same time recognisable and I think that’s what a dreaming is. (Richardson in Campbell, 2006)

---

\(^{97}\) In a lecture given at Melbourne University and broadcast by ABC Radio National, on *Hindsight* (15.06.08) historian Michael Cathcart identifies a trope that valorises and embraces death within the Australian imaginary. He calls it “necro-nationalism” and claims that it plays a part in the popularity of the ANZAC myth. I would argue that this ‘necro-nationalism’ echoes throughout Kantor and Wright’s *The Odyssey* and is also working in Richardson’s appeal to death that brings belonging in the landscape.
At its best, this layered, fractured approach reveals through the cracks, as it were, the latent power behind prosaic formulations of identity, intimating what might yet be possible. This type of meaning-making, can as Grosz suggests, produce a more dynamic and affirming representation [that] understand[s] identity in terms of bodily practices: one is what one does; the history of what one has done and what has been done to one constitutes one’s character; and what one can or will do is that which is unpredictable and open. (2005: 88)

The complicated, gaze-returning dance of ‘you know that I know that you know, that this narrative is not enough’ that plays out between metaphor and metonym, the landscape, and the bodies of the performers in The Drover’s Wives offers a glimpse, for this audience member at least, of how theatre creators and audiences alike, might salvage something out of the historical debris that helps define who we are and how our lives evolve and unfold in this country. Grosz posits that such traces are dormant, yet potential futures, waiting to be activated and trans/formed, given the right conditions, the appropriate action, and ultimately, the will. She writes;

in a sense, then, life is always politics; it is always about the perseverance of one or many groups at the cost of others. But what has been victorious, that is, prevails at a particular period, does not wipe out the traces of all others, even those rendered extinct. The movement of evolution does not supersede that which is victorious and leave the rest to oblivion. The rest, the remainder, left out by dominant individuals, groups, species, are not simply the dead ends of history, its loses, what is left behind. What was once may still affect what will be, even though it may play no role in the force of what presently is. (2005: 256)

Such a project in the theatre, might imperceptibly allow for the revival of alternative, as yet unsung histories and possible futures that lie dormant in and around the places in which we live and in the bodies that experience those places. In Orchids and Insects, my own creative work that follows, I attempt to tease out such potential in a script for performance.
Chapter Five

Bridging Essay: The Place in Between

In theory, theories exist. In practice, they do not. (Bruno Latour)
The entry point into *Orchids and Insects* is the moment of Emelia’s death. Even though death is the inciting incident (to use a term from the film world) I aim to activate a poetics of place that incorporates death by foregrounding the on-going pulse, or the force of life that binds disparate people together in place over time, regardless of death. One of the recurring, in this sense, death-defying figures in Emelia’s life (or death) is Georgiana Molloy, who also appears in the lecture in the Prologue. Two other separate stories in the play are woven together with Emelia’s, in a way that I hope highlights for the audience (or reader), the interdependent, permeable state of human existence that operates within the play’s poetics of place.

I explore different aspects of place and implacement through each character. Emelia’s journey begins in a profound state of displacement. She is out of touch with who she is and where she is. I wanted her story in East Timor to mirror the extremity of Georgiana’s colonial experience, in its strangeness and danger. The story explores, in a neo-colonial setting, the unthinking sense of entitlement that Westerners can claim over other people’s country, even with the best of intentions. Emelia is a modern force that in this story, meets her match. In the moment of her death she must account for her failure. Joel, her partner is thoroughly entitled and feels at home anywhere, or rather, his home is the corporation and the corporation is everywhere. He is persuaded (against his better judgment, because he loves her) to moonlight with Emelia, and he too discovers that the world is a more complex and indeterminate place than might be expected.

I aim for a plot driven shorthand style of storytelling in order to interrogate a contemporary version of modernity that fails. As Latour says:

> is it not astounding that the modernists managed to wage war all over the planet without ever coming into conflict, with anyone, without ever declaring war?

Quite the contrary! All they did was to spread, by force of arms, profound peace, indisputable civilization, uninterrupted progress. They had no adversaries or
enemies in the proper sense – just bad pupils. Yes, their wars, their conquests, were educational! (in Muecke, 2004: 46 - 47)

Place, as (I hope) I have written it here, in this scenario, can answer back.

Nina and Nancy are created not to mirror each other, but rather, to contrast with one another (and with the Emelia/Joel layer of narrative). Nancy is thoroughly at home on the patch of dirt she calls her own and within the confines of the domestic space she has built upon it. She is the inheritor and beneficiary of Georgiana’s colonialism. Nina, on the other hand, is a displaced person, a victim of political unrest in her home country, forced to abandon an old life and make her way in an alien environment. In her own right, she is a fine specimen of a woman but with no support, no nurture and little joy in her life, in adversity, in this ungenerous environment, she does not survive. Both women are, in effect, imports and in the struggle for survival, one thrives, the other does not.

Following a trope of the cultural archaeological dig, I reference a style of modernist drama of the mid twentieth century in this layer of the play, to resonate with the era when the scenario is set. I aim for an intimate, character driven study of two very different people, sharing the same domestic space. I examine how this particular ‘home’ can be experienced as both a setting of implacement and displacement.

I follow post-dramatic strategies that fragment time and place in writing the play. Events that occur in the past, present and future are linked by narrative fault lines that exist across what Plato has described (and I describe after Lehmann 1997: 56) as choric space. While the characters do not inhabit the same (notional) geographic place or historical time frame in the play, they are nevertheless connected by loose threads of lived experience that tie them together in choric space. In this space, the actual accident of their connection is not so important. What is important is that they connect thematically, rhythmically, through images and movement, repeated and overlaid actions, by their desire to find a place where they belong and a related sense of
themselves in place. Importantly, I also want to explore aspects of place that are not evident at first view, to create an envelope for performance, out of which the unexpected might arise, be noticed and be included.

Gay McAuley claims that

playwriting is a particular form of writing in that most plays are not intended primarily as works to be read, but as the verbal component of a performance which is itself the primary means of communication. It's a form of writing designed to generate a spatial practice, or at the very least to lend itself to exploitation within a spatial practice … it is writing that exists not as an end in itself but in order to make possible a performance. (1999: 219 - 220)

This is very much the case in this play. In the theatrical space of Orchids and Insects the drama that happens between the characters, works alongside other performative practices, to create a text for performance. This does not negate my input as a writer, but rather, opens the writing up to the input of others. It is an additive procedure. The writing provides a map towards a performance that is embodied by the skills and input of a group of people. To be successful, this process requires the living bodies and commitment of the actors, designers and director, of a creative team. It also needs to catch the audience, to entice them to become actively engaged in meaning-making as they puzzle through the connections that are suggested in the written text and played out on the stage. Lehmann points out that this style of theatre

rediscover...
were laid flat and extended across the stage, in time, as a performance. It is a site that
connects moments of lived experience, piece by piece, with the history of those who
have gone before in order to tell a story about the making of place, not just in one place,
but throughout the varied lives of the characters and throughout layers of history.
The disjointed, dream-like quality of the combined narrative is by a synthesis of
meaning, found not only in the text but also (though not as yet actually created) in
movement, dance and theatrical gesture, music and digital projections that (will
eventually) work together to express and develop a post-dramatic vision of a poetics of
place in performance.
The text is offered here, as a beginning point, with the dimension of actual, embodied
performance-making yet to be developed. Such performative composition works with
energy and impulse on the floor and across mediums as the actors, dancers and the
creative team that support them use text, movement, music, light, sound and objects in
the space to work through representational scenarios, choreographed movement
sequences, sensory states of being and impulse driven improvisational frameworks. A
dramaturgical environment such as this can only be found in an actual theatrical space
with real bodies, real objects, and a range of artists with specific sets of skills. As such,
what is included within this thesis must remain as a singular capture of place, in text.

My dramaturg asks me …

My dramaturg, Louise Gough, is puzzled. She asks me: “What’s the dramatic question
here?” I tell her about post-dramatic theatre, she nods and says, “What’s your dramatic
question?”
A good dramatic question (she informs me) is generative and focusing; it is a creative catalyst, it is formed by the desire to know something, find something, to discover something. It is the means whereby ideas, feelings, affects, go forth, follow their own directions and take on a life of their own, often in spite of their author’s best intention. Like a good thesis question, a good dramatic question resonates, it is well conceived, it is robust, it leads somewhere. I suggest to her that a dramatic question need not be about contradiction, conflict and resolution. It could also begin with a field of action or a proposition, an area of inquiry, that might be explored via a dramatic (or I would argue, sometimes post-dramatic) interplay of text and action on stage (or as a beginning at least, on the page of the script).

My dramatic question is about ‘place’, the making of ‘place’, how people make sense and meaning of their lives when they are displaced, re-placed, when they are implaced somewhere entirely different and foreign to all they have known before. I am asking how people make sense of the places in their lives. I am trying to find a theatrical answer to this line of enquiry. I begin with the simple proposition; what happens when people come to a new place, to a new country? How do they make that country their own? How do they make their way? I realise very soon, that this is not just about regeneration and growth, but also about loss, grief, and leaving things behind. It is also, as it seems to pan out, about violence, the violence of wrenching oneself away and of taking a place to be one’s own. In undertaking such relocations, we are compelled, somehow, to make sense of the layers of ourselves that no longer reside comfortably in the physical locations, social relationships and material circumstances that have made us who we are. We are no longer who we once knew ourselves to be. In moving on, we have to re-orient and re-invent identities that have been set adrift amongst an entirely new set of environmental triggers. How do we navigate this journey, how do we adapt in meaningful and, sustainable and ethical ways?
Each of the three case studies of other people’s work that I have included in the thesis tackles the idea of place-making in the theatre from different stand points. I found that the prism of place has allowed me a thematic portal of entry into the work and has given me access to entirely different dramaturgical experiences of place and place-making. In all three experiences, I could consider my own place, my own embodied position in relation to the work. I could ask what aspects of the work come alive for me and why, what kind of a place is being created in their work, is it ethical, useful, interesting, inclusive, exclusive, does it move me, what does it tell me about the experience of the theatre-maker, of the characters on stage, what does it tell me about the actors, the writer, about myself and the people that surround me? Can I apply what I am seeing, what I am experiencing to my own work, do I want to? In *Yandy* I sat in the audience and realised that what was happening around me was actually my story. In *The Odyssey*, I realised the opposite. In *Drover’s Wives*, I wondered what else there might be for me here. The different approaches to place in all three works have given me an opportunity to research place both as a poetics and as an applied dramaturgical practice.

My point of departure in *Orchids and Insects* concerns Georgiana Molloy. As I have mentioned Molloy arrived on the West coast of Australia in 1830. She disembarks at the nascent port of Fremantle, in Western Australia, and in the early days of her colonial life, camps with other settlers, their families and livestock in the dunes along the beach front. Weakened by the long sea journey, she gives birth to her first child with only her husband at her side. Without the help of family and friends, the baby dies after only ten days. She doesn’t know how to feed it and no one can tell her. Over the next twelve years until her own early death at her settler’s home on the Vasse River, and under great physical and emotional hardship, she maintains her dignity and resolve, and manages to find joy in life. With a keen eye and a mindfulness of the beauty and worth about her, Georgiana becomes ever more attuned to the natural world. She has an active and
enquiring mind which she focuses on her project of collecting and recording indigenous plant life for Kew Botanical Gardens (a scientific arena that clamours for information about the new colony). As the years go by, she also becomes more and more attached to Dr Mangles, the botanist from Kew Gardens who sponsors her work, a man she never meets in the flesh.

Her story had personal resonance for me. I too had just moved to Fremantle from the other side of the country, bringing with me a young family. Researching Georgiana’s story inspired me with a resolve not to ignore the differences I found in my new environment, but instead, to immerse myself in the particularity of Western Australia. On my daily walks along the often wild stretch of beach skirting the Indian Ocean across which Georgiana had sailed, and onto which she had, without ceremony, been dumped, I imagined how it might have been for her in those early days. The huge, nineteenth century, sandstone edifice at the end of my street which now is the Fremantle Arts Centre but had originally been built as the Women’s Insane Asylum, stood as a silent monument and daily reminder of the many unfortunates with less resolve, fewer resources and greater fragility than Georgiana, who did not make it.

I asked myself, how is it that Georgiana’s spirit survived while others did not? What could her story tell me about making a viable place for oneself in an unknown environment? And what happens to the environment itself in these times of change? The more I researched Georgiana’s life, the more I came across people living around me who had found points of deep personal connection with her experience as wife and mother, as working woman, as artisan, emigrant, scientist, as seeker after meaning. What is the abstract machine that operates so potently throughout her story that keeps it reverberating? My dramaturg asks, what is the dramatic question?
In *Georgiana Molloy and the Code of Modernity* I developed this single layer of what then became the more complex text of *Orchids and Insects*. I worked a reading of Georgiana’s story into a short performance piece in order to test whether the idea on the page would actually work in performance. Using excerpts from Georgiana’s letters, verbatim, in dialogue with my own research, I developed the piece as a ‘proof of concept’. This concept was that the body inhabits different cultural inscriptions to make place and that these cultural inscriptions make up a culture. Having performed it a couple times I proved (to my own satisfaction at least) that the idea could work. I then went on to develop the text for *Orchids and Insects*.

Then something extraordinary happened. Very late in my research, almost too late, an anthropologist I know, Howard Pederson, suggested that a Captain Molloy, the resident magistrate from the Blackwood area, was the leader of one of the worst massacres of Indigenous people in the early colonial era of West Australia. Georgiana’s husband, he said, was a mass-murderer.

I was astounded, what did he mean mass-murderer? In my research I had heard mention of the isolated incidents and growing discord between Indigenous and settler communities, but I had come across nothing to suggest anything of this magnitude. In the historical archives that I had been working from, in conversations and contacts with scholars and artists who had travelled to London and Vienna to view Georgiana’s specimens (that have been carefully kept for close to a hundred and sixty years at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Natural History Museum of Vienna), in my association with documentary makers,98 film-makers, the subject specialist librarian at the Battye Library, in the biographies of Georgiana, in other people’s PhDs, I had not heard about any incident of orchestrated mass-murder.

---

98 I contributed to a 60 minute radio documentary produced by Jennifer Bowen for *Hindsight*, part of the social history unit on ABC Radio National, called “Botany and the Bush: Georgiana Molloy and her Passion for Flowers”.
I drove the three hours from Fremantle to Augusta to visit the local historian, again, at the Augusta Historical Museum. I asked him whether he had heard of this. He had heard nothing (though he did look at me strangely).99

I went back to Pederson and he suggested I look up a book he remembered. I was (again) surprised to find the book catalogued, (not secret, not hidden, not lost), on the data base and waiting for the appropriate question, at the Murdoch University Library. It is a fragile, over-sized leather bound book written in 1897 by W. Kimberly called *A History of West Australia: A Narrative of her Past Together with Biographies of her Leading Men*. On page 115, Kimberly relates how Molloy had led a party of soldiers and settlers to hunt and kill any Indigenous man they could find who was living in the district. And, if Kimberly is to be believed, they hunted and killed dozens.

I began to realise that I had not really been listening to the ground beneath my feet. Instead, I had been guided by my own passion for Georgiana and her flowers, and had blithely looked at the (research) landscape, arranged in lines and grids, through my whitefella eyes, and to my own ends. If Kimberly’s account was accurate, I had been part of a machine of silence.

Why had no one mentioned that Georgiana’s husband might be a mass-murderer? Surely it was relevant? Surely this devastating spate of systematic killing deserves special mention? Even to refute it? Or is a dozen people (or a multiple of dozens) not mass-murder? Is this something less than mass-murder? Or is it perhaps, something more, part of the aeonicide that Bird Rose talks about? Is that what this silence is about? Sometimes, it seems, it is not the awful, hidden truth, but the banality of omission that resonates and compounds damage that has already been done.

99 He admitted it was unusual that there were no Indigenous people living in the area, but he understood that they didn’t like it because they thought that there were bad spirits around.
William Lines’ biography of Georgiana Molloy does, in fact, describe the circumstances leading to the event documented by Kimberly, in some detail. Lines, however, indicates that only seven Aborigines were killed in a single incident (1994: 305-308). He makes the point though, that the men involved were hailed at the time by the Perth Gazette as heroes and quotes the editorial of 12 March, 1841: “There cannot be a question that the salutary chastisement thus inflicted will be the means of saving much bloodshed and that the supremacy of power must be upheld, is equally indisputable” (1994: 307). Lines also points out, with great perspicacity, that “throughout the violence and killings of early 1841, Georgiana Molloy kept watch on the *Nuytsia*” (1994: 308).

It was confirmed for me that the making of place in Australia is, as it has always been, intensely selective. Although some stories might lie a long time dormant, it takes an active commitment on the part of the living to keep them current. In such an environment, some things survive and flourish, and some do not. It is, it seems, up to each of us to make a choice about what kind of a place we wish to live in.  

---

100 The range of accounts of this incident opens an entirely different research focus for me. Although this account of Molloy and the people he is reported to have killed was obviously alive and well in anthropological circles (and among the Indigenous people who were avoiding the ‘bad spirits’), it was not the focus of my research. Of course, had I been an historian looking for information on Indigenous massacres in the South-West, I would no doubt, have come across Kimberly’s version of this event, and many others, but I was not. Instead, I, and many other researchers into Georgiana’s life, had focussed on her collection of flowers. I was guilty of the single minded process of ‘observation’ that I had been critiquing in my own performative lecture. I had seen “what, in the rather confused wealth of representation, can be analyzed, recognized by all, and thus given a name that everyone will be able to understand” (Foucault in Sartiliot, 1993: 41) or rather, I had seen what was most palatable for me to see in this story. This selective ‘form of attention’ (criticised by Fred Chaney and Doris Eaton in my Yandy chapter) works to create reassuring cultural myths for white settler society and maintains a state of denial about the poisonous effect settler society continues to have on Indigenous people of Australia. I asked Pederson why he thought this story was so little known in West Australia, whether Kimberly’s account had, perhaps, been discredited. He suggested that

I think the difference between New South Wales and Tasmania where there are monuments to commemorate massacres of blacks and West Australia where there is strong resistance is because there are very unresolved issues of Indigenous/settler conflict in this state. I don't think Kimberly's account was ever discredited. In fact what I have heard from other sources is that Kimberly down-played the massacre. There are many well known massacre sites in WA that have never been formally recognised.  

(Personal correspondence, 08.06.2008)

In one of those strange co-incidences of timing, the *West Australian* newspaper contacted Pederson later that day, wanting information about Indigenous massacres. The newspaper was researching a story in response to an initiative of the Rudd Government, reported in the Sunday Telegraph and on the web:
I include the story, as Kimberly wrote it, in *Orchids and Insects*.

**The dramatic question**

We have to ask the right questions or we will end up with false or illusional solutions. (Grosz, 2005a: 161)

My dramaturg tells me that in a piece of theatre a dramatic question offers a focus. It provides the journey, the plot-points (even if these are post-dramatic), the stakes, the coherence, the force, the stickiness, the glue, the internal logic (finding the genius loci, the abstract machine) that ties diverse elements together. My dramatic question had just become a lot trickier. A dramatic question can be driven by character, by plot or by a theme (a thesis), an idea.

The initial questions I have asked myself in *Orchids and Insects* are:

- How do we know ourselves in the ways we inhabit the world?
- How do we know ourselves by the places we make?
- What do we see in the debris that follows in our wake?

These provocations or propositions do not provide answers, or even the right amount of focus for a real dramatic question, but what I have found is a place to start.

In the wake of the Stolen Generation apology, the Rudd Government is considering erecting an official memorial in Canberra commemorating indigenous Australians killed by white settlers in the so-called "Aboriginal Wars".  
The plan, which was immediately rejected by the RSL (Returned and Services League [shades of Odysseus, perhaps]) would see a memorial erected alongside existing statues and sculptures to Australia's war dead on Anzac Ave, leading to the Australian War memorial. It seems to me that there needs to be a psychic turnaround in this country, whereby we actively acknowledge this silent history for what was, and is.
The dramatic question carries a production across the lie of the land. Paul Carter mentions that (within the colonial project of Australia) enclosing a ground based on a “poetics of representation” be it in art or in the world, institutes one system of memorialisation at the expense of another. It was as if the colonists set out to erase the common ground where communication with the “Natives” might have occurred. To found the colony, to inaugurate linear history a puppet-theatre of marching soldiers and treadmills, was to embrace an environmental amnesia; it was actively to forget what wisdom the ground, and its people, might possess. (1996: 6)

In Orchids and Insects I aim to constitute a poetics of place that is mindful of what might lie hidden in stories and in the bodies of the performers as they enact those stories in the world of the play. I call for a ‘form of attention’ from the audience (and from the other people involved in bringing the project to performance), to things that do not reside on the surface, but might yet, hold great influence over a turn of events. This requires more than mere observation: it asks that people risk encountering what might possibly be revealed.

The text has begun in a particular environment, in a thesis, and it will hopefully move beyond its theoretical beginnings into practice. The practice then will inform a further theory (but that will be another thesis) as theory and practice walk a two-legged journey together. I believe that theory and practice are not separate and in competition, rather that they operate within a poetics of place-making in a dialogic relationship (as they move across the lie of the land) each responding to and affecting the other. The journey becomes a discursive formation, involving both practice and theory. I aim for a theatre theory and a theatre practice that breathes and listens to the silences.

In Orchids and Insects Georgiana is an Angel, a beatified figure from the colonial past. She is a paradoxical figure because although she is very much part of the colonising project and thereby allied to the destruction of an indigenous environment (and totally implicated in the triangulated theme of race, class and gender that the colonial project
exploits to its own ends) her example is nevertheless inspirational to many. She gives us the clue to the dramatic question of the play when she quotes Mallarmé, who says:

Every man has a secret in him, many die without finding it and will never find it because they are dead, it no longer exists, nor do they. I am dead and risen again with the jeweled key of my last spiritual casket. It is up to me now to open it in the absence of any borrowed impression, and its mystery will emanate in a sky of great beauty.

Question: If we find the key that opens our spiritual casket, what mystery will emanate?

Answer: We are what we do, we leave a wake.

This performance script unpacks the process of Emelia’s learning in the moment of her death. The stage is a spiritual clearing house. It showcases the moments of Emelia’s life (the contents of her spiritual casket) and their influence in the world. All the effects and affects of a life are floating around, still significant, but the threads tying things and their meanings together have been loosened. The knots that weave things and the things-in-the-world they represent together are unravelling, and in the unravelling some other things that have been denied, repressed, forgotten, overwhelmed, begin to emerge; the underlying mysteries that direct a life begin to speak. Places reveal different aspects of themselves, and in doing so, reveal the people who inhabit them.

I am most interested, dramaturgically, in the morphology of theatrical space, from choric space after Emelia has died, to the lived places of the people who have effected and affected her life, and back again.101 This does not mean that I aim for a definitive likeness of any of these places or spaces in my theatrical portrait, but rather, as Montaigne describes below, I grasp at the changeable nature of my subject. Following Montaigne, I do not wish to, and

I am unable to stabilise my subject: it staggers confusedly along with a natural drunkenness. I grasp it as it is now, at this moment when I am lingering over it. I am not portraying being but becoming: not the passage from one age to another

101 If a poetics is a form of content, then dramaturgy is a form of expression.
(or, as the folk put it, from one seven-year period to the next) but from day to day, from minute to minute. I must adapt this account of myself to the passing hour. I shall perhaps change soon, not accidentally but intentionally. This is a register of varied and changing occurrences, of ideas which are unresolved and, when needs be, contradictory … (in Carter, 1996: 178)

The play as it is written, and as it will, perhaps, come to be in performance, is similarly unresolved and contradictory (in terms of its content not, I hope, in terms of its expression which in performance would be choreographed to the finest detail). I take Massumi’s advice here, as mentioned in Chapter One, and focus on indeterminacy and on the potential of surplus value. The symbolic order in this configuration is continually in the process of becoming the symbolic disorder, thus confirming what Penelope knew all along; that meaning-making is a matter of good housekeeping, of weaving body and soul together and then pulling them apart again.

In redrafting the script, I have considered (and will again consider) a number of points that may best be dealt with in the next phase of development, with actors, a director and designers. For example, the theatrical process whereby Emelia morphs into her mother’s memories needs a clear physical set up, a gestural code, in order to be read by the audience. This code should indicate to the audience that the vessel of Emelia’s body is no longer stable, but liable to be snatched by other people’s memories. A gestural language that could carry this has already been introduced with the dancers and can extend across the performance to Emelia and her mother, and in other contexts as well.102

Additionally, Georgiana’s dramatic function has been radically altered with the new (old) information that has come to light concerning her husband and the massacre of

102 This is a specific example of the way that theatrical morphology that can make and unmake place in choric space. In this choric space (up in heaven as Emelia dies) meaning is fluid and smooth, and time is eternal. The places that emerge and the bodies that inhabit them are highlighted in their lived, in place, contingency. (If heaven is the time of Aeon, these places exist in the time of Kronos.) I think there is much scope for design, music and choreography and other, non-textual performative codes to articulate the morphologies and transitions from space to place, and for these elements to play with and to contradict each other (and a lot of potential pleasure for an audience in working out the different theatrical languages and their relationships to each other in such an environment).
Indigenous people. I need to consider again, and again, how this big story at the end of
the play alters the balance of the piece as a whole.\textsuperscript{103} (At the moment, I quite like the
blunt edge of surprise.) In order to do this, I will work with physical connections
between the letter read at the end concerning the massacre, the letter Emelia is writing
to Joel to account for what she has done, and the letter Emelia has received from her
mother. I hope that some unexpected connections and disconnections might emerge
when the work on the page encounters bodies in a theatrical space.

Emelia also has a significant off stage story occurring in Dili regarding the establishing
of her plantation, her involvement in gun running, and the ways in which she is
manipulated by the bandits, leading to her death. If the play is developed further I will
work, dramaturgically, to make it clear how she could get into this position, so that the
audience can concentrate not on the logistics of the plot or on her personal motivation
but on the politics behind it. I plan to explore ways in which the exposition of this plot
could be approached physically, through dance and/or through multi media, as well as
in the dramatic text. This could involve referencing filmic genres to create a frame of
recognition for the audience and a performance style for the actors. There is also some
scope for additional repetition of scenes that might be physically stylised and played out
slightly differently each time.

Having made these connections and alterations and any other that might occur during a
workshop period, I intend that the play might bring alive (for is duration) a vibrant
indeterminacy of place (without unravelling and losing its meaning altogether), and that
the audience can negotiate its changing topography across what will be, its eventual,
triple capture of place.

\textsuperscript{103} I think it is also interesting to consider John Molloy as a type of war-damaged Odysseus figure,
coming to Australia to begin a new life at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, but in fact, bringing a different
type of war with him.
Elinor Fuchs writes that “we are looking at the end of drama and at the emerging of a post-metaphysical form” (1996: 90). She suggests that no better medium can be found … than theatre, with its undecidable play of model and copy, presence and absence, to suggest the new post-metaphysical world … But theatre is not merely the model of that world, or the exemplary transition into that world … It is, with its perpetual mysterious mise-en-scene of emerging inscription, in itself that world. (1996: 149)

Within this ‘post-metaphysical’ world, where the world is itself a theatre, I hope that my understanding of a triple capture of place offers a model whereby the indeterminacy of place can be handled (even manipulated) in order to have an impact. Lehmann calls for an “aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)” in which the “mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images” (1996: 186-187, original emphasis) creates an ethical contract between those people. This requires that the focus of the work on stage remains between the bodies that are experiencing it, actors, designers, directors, technicians, administrators and audience. It is this dynamic interplay across the triple capture of place that I wish to activate in Orchids and Insects.

The final question then, in this thesis that asks what kind place contemporary theatre makers are making in Australia is one that I have attempted to address in my script (that will become a performance), and in the case studies. It is:

Question: In what ways are we responsible (or response-able) for each other in the places that we live?

Answer: In every way.
Orchids and Insects

*Angelus Novus (1920)*

Paul Klee.
Orchids and Insects

The more I study nature, the more I become impressed with ever-increasing force, that the contrivances and even beautiful adaptations slowly acquired through each part occasionally varying in a slight degree but in many ways with the preservation of these variations which were beneficial to the organism under complex and ever varying conditions of life, transcend in an incomparable manner the contrivances and adaptations which the most fertile imagination of man could invent.

(The Various Contrivances by which Orchids are Fertilized by Insects. Charles Darwin.)
This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Walter Benjamin)
Characters:

**Georgiana Molloy** 1805 – 1843. She arrives on the West coast of Australia in 1830, one of the first settlers of the new Swan River Colony. She is 24, pregnant and ready to colonise. In time, she plants out a flower garden with seeds she has brought with her on the ship. Under the encouragement of the distant and mysterious botanist, Dr Mangles, Georgiana collects native specimens, dries, presses and labels them and sends them back to Kew Gardens.

**Nina and Nancy**: 1960s. Nina is a displaced person. In a past life she was also an artist. She works as a cleaner for Nancy. Nancy lives in a rural town. She is the wife of the local banker manager. She has three children and a nice house. They are both in their early 30s.

**Emelia and Joel**: 2007. From Perth, based in Jakarta, currently in East Timor, Dili. He is on corporate (gas) business. She is trying to secure a deal to protect her fledgling fair trade, coffee plantation business in a time of political instability and discord. (They are aged in their late twenties, early thirties). Emelia is Nancy’s grand-daughter.

**Dancers; one male, one female.**

As mentioned in the Prologue, the material relating to Georgiana Molloy is taken from a range of sources, including Molloy’s own letters and diaries which are held and readily accessible in microfilm at the Battye Library, Western Australia (479A/1-2), the books by Lines and Hasluck listed in the bibliography, from the archives of the Western Australian Historical Society and from other unpublished and primary research. In the play, Georgiana’s dialogue is for the most part, taken verbatim from these letters and diaries but is edited by me and not necessarily presented chronologically. Similarly the poem she recites at the beginning of the monologue is edited from ‘A Voyager’s Dream of Land’, by William Cowper. This poem is published in the front of ‘Marshall’s Ladies Fashionable Repository for 1829’, a book is held at the Battye Library that is also Georgiana’s personal diary. It contains, along with the blank pages that became her diary, songs and poems, advertising material, shipping news and public notices. Georgiana’s dialogue also incorporates quotations from Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault that are noted in the Prologue. The extraordinary story of the massacre of Indigenous men by Georgiana’s husband, John Molloy, is recorded in W. B. Kimberly’s *History of West Australia: a Narrative of her Past, Together with Biographies of her Leading Men*. Melbourne: F.W. Niven. (1897) and is reproduced, exactly, in this play.
Space

This is a large bare space, a platform raised approximately 2 metres off the ground, approached by a staircase. Other props and furniture are brought on and taken off as needed by the performers.

Music

- The first section is performed to the music of Steve Reich. (Music for 18 Musicians: Amadinda Percussion Group Live in Budapest. Hungaroton Records. 2003.)

- Six, Four, five Eight, Six, Four, Seven, Eight. Dva. Lindsay Pollock, Tunji Beir

Performers

5 actors, (4 women, 1 man) 2 dancers, one male, one female.¹⁰⁴

Costume

They are in some basic white underwear costume. For the opening sequence, they all wear (male and female) the underneath framing of a crinoline and walk on tip toes.

¹⁰⁴ Dance is intended as a performance frame to be explored for theatrical possibilities in dialogue with the actors, text and other elements of performance. It reaches for a kind of primary libidinal energy held in and expressed by the body is an alternative, gestural language, a tool of theatrical morphology. Also, when appropriate, dance can be used as an ironic comment on the text. The possibilities for dance can be developed and physical/theatrical connections made across the whole piece. This layer would be choreographed as an integral part of a production design and narrative development.

This offer is also true for visual projections, sound and set elements. I have made some indications of these but would rely on the skills of designers to expand upon these elements. All are performance languages that ideally would be developed in dialogue with the text in a production situation. The use of sand for instance is an element that could be explored visually and metaphorically with a designer to great effect. As mentioned below, sand is brought in boxes. It could also be dropped from the lighting grid onto the performers and/or on to sections of the stage. Once sand is in the space there are a number of ways of integrating it into the performance. This of course could best be developed with actual sand, boxes, buckets and bodies.
Scene 1: An evolution in the space


Light begins to play across the empty space.

The performers emerge. They are in some basic white underwear costume. They all wear the white underneath frame of a crinoline. It stands out around their bodies like a cage or grid. As they move across the space, they walk on tip toes.

They bring in boxes. They also bring in metal buckets filled to the brim with water. They hold the weight of the water or boxes away from their bodies, arms held out. It sets them off balance. They hold their proximity to each other, drawn together but never touching. They bounce off the energy emanating from each other. They are the strange attractors and hopeful monsters of creation.

The buckets of water are seas between continents. The boxes hold an array of objects, specimens, both cultural and scientific. Some are filled with sand. They are grouped by the performer/dancers as continents, surrounded by oceans of swirling chaos. Each box is a time capsule full of matter or a ‘cabinet of interest’ as John Ruskin might call it. Each body is its own time capsule. The performers continue their movement. Sometimes they put a box or a bucket down and move on, sometimes they pick them up and take them off. It is an evolving improvisation on bodies and objects in space. They are making the earth and the seas, moving like tectonic plates with the oceans forming between them.

(This box/bucket dance follows the improvisation technique of Ann Bogart developing and codifying flows of energy.) It is an “evolution” in the space improvisation.

Images are projected onto the space and the bodies. These range from light playing and shaping the space, to images of the prehistoric and the modern. This signifies the movement of time and/or the contents of the boxes. There is play and interaction between performers, boxes and projections. It is possibly, both profound and light-hearted.
Scene 2

Emelia’s entrance

One performer emerges from the intense and concentrated flow of the group. She stands stock still in the space. She is carrying two buckets. LX change focus on her. She looks about her. The projections that have been moving about the space settle behind her as backdrop: a collage of texts merge from images of Georgiana’s letters, crossed as they are both horizontally and vertically across the page with close, neat copperplate writing. Maps, pictures of childhood, scenery, illustrations, diagrams etc. all appear and disappear. The dancers bringing and taking the buckets and boxes change their rhythm or stop and exit the space.

She puts the buckets down and begins to undo her crinoline frame. She looks about her.

Emelia

This is not an entry it’s an exit. I don’t know where it is, but it’s up in the sky, in the clouds, somewhere. *(The frame drops on the floor and she steps out of it. She looks around)* I’m standing here in this white robe. There is a scroll. *(Indicate backdrop projections.)* It’s what I’ve done in my life. The word comeuppance comes to mind, but maybe there is forgiveness, maybe there is a greater design, maybe God’s got a sense of humour after all.

She picks up the buckets of water again.

I’m holding on to Jesus with one hand and Mary with the other (a little bit each way, to be sure, to be sure).

She notices the weight of the buckets.

There’s a man in a white suit. He’s ushering me in. Could it be St Peter? Probably. Why am I feeling so hysterical?

I must remember, this isn’t a farce, it’s the real thing.

I’m being very brave I must admit. The angels are singing now and there’s tear on my cheek as I turn to go. The tears are on the outside. Perhaps you are wondering what’s going on, on the inside? I have always wondered.

My exit must be dignified, solemn. I walk up the steps, I turn and take a look behind me. This could be ‘days of our lives’ – (or is it just the day of my death?) – what happens when your life turns into a soap opera?

One has to go with the flow I guess, – especially when someone’s dying.

As she goes to move up the steps she sees Georgiana entering and stops.

Georgiana

Yes, that’s lovely. Moving on now, moving on …
Emelia  Who are you?

Emelia having been brushed off stands and watches.

**Georgiana’s entrance**

Georgiana checks the boxes, their position in the space. She opens the tops of one or two. She seems pleased with what she is seeing. She empties some sand from the boxes, setting the scene and arranging the space.

Georgiana  Can you turn that down a little bit? (Indicating music.) Yes, that’s better. (She walks forward to see the audience better)

_She begins to look in the boxes again. She is looking for something._

…So

… In these boxes we have … a collection …

(She opens a box). You see I open this up and … It’s time! There it goes! (She closes a box quickly.) In there, time!

_She opens a box again and gingerly begins to pull things out._

A dead fish … we’ll call him Moby Dick … he’s looking for Captain Ahab (like a puppeteer, she speaks as the whale)… Oh Ahab … what have you done? What have you done? I don’t think we’ll need him. (Throws him off-stage and goes to another box.) A crow, stuffed. An apple. Flowers. More flowers. A vase. A gun. What do they say? If there’s a gun on stage everyone knows it’s got to go off … sometime. What else, a box of … (she retrieves a small wooden box from the larger cardboard box, opens it and looks inside) Now we’re getting somewhere … (She puts it to one side.) A roll of masking tape … interesting …

Now where were we?

_She retrieves a ship’s figure head from another box._

Ahhh … this is what I have been looking for.

This speech is to the figure head, to Emelia and to the audience. By the end, Georgiana and the figurehead are speaking as one, they are an Angel. This is a moment of prophecy.

The poet Mallarme says:

Every man has a secret in him, many die without finding it and will never find it because they are dead, it no longer exists, nor do they. I am dead and risen again with the jewelled key of my last spiritual casket. It
is up to me now to open it in the absence of any borrowed impression, and its mystery will emanate in a sky of great beauty. (Mallarme, in a letter dated July 16, 1866)

Mallarme’s secret is a code.

The code describes reality, it also writes it. It is not the animating principle, but it animates. The code is the machine that connects desire and an outcome that is always contingent, never inevitable. If we can understand our code, we have, as they say, done the right thing.

*She wedges the ship’s head under her arm to indicate that she herself is a vessel. She rearranges some of the metal buckets and gets a few more from the side of the stage and stands either on a chair or on the platform. (There is also an option to use a fly with pulleys and ropes. She could be holding the ship’s head and be hoisted up like a sail perhaps by the other performers and give her speech while she is being flown ... she is an Angel.)*

*The music blends with SFX of crashing waves and wind. It gets louder and she has to start shouting.*
Scene 3

A Voyager's Dream of Land (1830)

Georgiana is standing at the fore of the ship.

There is a crash and roar of waves, the ship's head and Georgiana are thrown all about, she is panting and laughing and growling in the fierce wind. There are silver metal buckets on the stage full of water representing sea. The performers gather below, watching her. Someone splashes water on her, representing the splash of the waves. She speaks over the sound of lightening and waves. (The dancers move as if they are the ocean.)

Georgiana

The hollow dash of waves! The ceaseless roar!
Silence, ye bellows! Vex my soul no more.
The heavy-rolling surge! The rocking mast!
Hush! Give my dream’s deep music way, thou blast!

Shroud my green land no more, thou blinding spray!

Give way! –the booming surge, the tempest’s roar,
The sea-birds wail, shall vex my soul no more!

Molloy, look at this, come, look!

Her very heart athirst –
To gaze a Nature in her green array,
Upon the ship’s tall side she stand, possess’d
With visions prompted by intense desire;
Fair fields appear below, such as she left.
Far distant, such as she would die to find
She seeks them headlong -

’Tis there! – down the mountains I see the sweep
Of the chestnut forest, the rich and deep!
With the burden and glory of flowers they wear,
Floating upborne on the blue summer air,
And the light pouring through them in tender gleams
And the flashing forth of a thousand streams!

Molloy! It’s land! It’s land John, I’m sure it is.

The waves quiet down. She gets down from the figurehead looks out to sea again and runs from side to side of the ship. She gets a small towel and dries herself off. (Stuffs cloth under her belly – the unborn baby is bigger?) It appears that she is pregnant, she holds her belly. She smooths her clothes.

John, it’s land! The Swan River Settlement! I can see it! It is … Molloy look! We’ve arrived! Just look!
Georgiana (with help from the dancers and performers) constructs a gang plank out of planks of wood. She places them across the buckets. In order to get to the other side she has to get first one plank, place it carefully, and then get the next plank, walk back to the ship and construct in this way. As she is doing this the baby in her belly or the stuffing signifying baby, begins to fall out. She stuffs it back in as she constructs a very dodgy gang plank. Finally she gets to the edge of the buckets. She runs back and gets a parasol. She stands on the edge of the gang plank and noticing the hot sun, puts up the parasol. Facing the audience, she contemplates her new home.

Molloy, just look how strange it is…

Projections of first contact and lithographs of indigenous flora sweep across the space and across her body.

Emelia emerges from the projections.

Emelia  That’s what I thought too.
Georgiana  I beg your pardon?
Emelia  I mean when I first got to Jakarta, I thought …It was strange. I mean … I don’t know. Then it just got stranger …
Georgiana  Yes.
Emelia  And now I’m …
Georgiana  Yes.
Emelia  You too?
Georgiana  Yes.
Emelia  What happened to you?
Georgiana  I made the best of it.
Emelia  Ah. And what happened to me?
Georgiana  Look in the boxes.
Emelia  What?
Georgiana  The boxes.
Emelia  I’m sorry?
Georgiana  Material remains.
Emelia  Oh. Of what?
Georgiana  What you’ve done.
Emelia  Oh.

*Georgiana moves off. Emelia remains. She surveys the boxes and tentatively lifts the lid of one and takes out a pair of high heels. She puts them on.*

**Nina’s Entrance.**

One of the performers, (Nina) a woman in her late thirties, rides a bike into the space. It has a box on the back (like the boxes on stage). She rides around the boxes as they are moved around by the dancers. She stops and refreshes herself at one of the buckets in her journey, wipes her face, takes a drink. The boxes start to form the lines of a street. They are houses.

The houses become office blocks...

Nina gets a doll/child out of the box on her bike. She takes a scarf puts it over her hair and ties it under her chin. The box becomes a child’s seat on the bike. She rearranges the child. She speaks to the child in Czech. She rides the bike off.

*Emelia has been standing on stage. She has been watching. She calls after Nina.*

Emelia  Hello! Hello? Excuse me?

*Runs after her.*

Nina! It’s me! Emelia? Nancy’s grand-daughter, remember? Nina, hello!

*Her shoe breaks and she stumbles.*

Damn! Ouch!

She hobbles and rubs her ankle. She stands awkwardly not knowing what to do with her shoe.

*To the audience...*  

What can you do when someone is dying?
Scene 4

Georgiana returns, she carries a round white lace tablecloth over one arm. She takes up the small wooden box and the masking tape. Emelia’s crinoline frame is still on the stage. She places the frame and the table cloth on one side of the stage and the box and masking tape on the other. She kneels and marks out a grid with the white masking tape on the floor. She opens the small wooden box. She gets different bottles of seeds from the box and begins to empty them into each square on the grid. As she does this she speaks to the audience and also to Emelia who is watching her.

Georgiana concentrates on the seeds. As she speaks a projection of images of indigenous WA plants drawn by artist Gregory Pryor (examples included) cover the space. Lines created by light begin to cross the space, repeating the grid taped out on the floor.

Georgiana In time, I plant out a flower garden with seeds I have brought with me on the ship. Under the encouragement of the distant, yet mysterious botanist, Dr Mangles, I begin to collect native seeds and specimens. I dry, press and label them and send them back to Dr Mangles at Kew Botanical Gardens where they are placed within the Linnaean botanical system. As they are held within the confines of my own proto-Darwinian culture, their previous life in an Indigenous environment is uprooted, and for the most part, discarded.

Finishes the task and shuts the lid of the box. Stands and speaks to audience and to Emelia.

Over the next twelve years, I give birth to seven children. I die in 1842 at the age of 37 and am buried in the soil of my new country. My five surviving daughters thrive and prosper in the new colony.

But is this not, you ask, another story of struggle for survival in a land that is not one’s own? Is this not the first of many of such stories about to happen? If you look a little closer you will see in the traces of my passing (my letters to Dr Mangles at Kew Gardens sent along with the specimens of indigenous flora) an entirely more subtle transformation. Imperceptibly, like grass growing perhaps, the virgin bush works its own way upon this body, this mind, this spirit. I believe that on close inspection, my encounter with the natural world offers a strangely paradoxical example, of what I call, a hopeful-becoming.

Goes to projection screen and inspects the images. She begins to move her body in to the shape of a flower. The dancer comes beside her and takes the same shape. The dancer continues to expand on this flower-becoming dance. This dance develops a life of its own. Emelia stands there waiting, watching, and at some point the focus changes to her. Music, sound and lighting change. Different rhythm.
Broken Shoe; Emelia and Joel.

A Dance.

Emelia is in front of an office building. She is watching the dancer. (Intimations of the scene before, up in heaven i.e. same flight of stairs.) It is possible here that the dancer comes and stands beside her. That there is a morphing of the two on stage for a while, the dancer expresses overtly, physically the inner state of Emelia as she waits for Joel and then sees him approaching.

She waits. A hot wind blows bits of paper. Someone’s lunch lies rotting at her feet. She doesn’t really notice it, she only notices not to step in it. It’s a negative observation.

She holds her shoe. The heel has come off. Her foot is raised on tip-toe. It touches the ground delicately disguising the unevenness of her feet. She is waiting. Her hair is blowing against her cheek. She is fighting her desire to remain invisible with an equal and matching desire to impress. Whoever – it doesn’t matter.

He approaches. (Joel could also have morphed into a male dancer at this point.)

She looks at him. His clothes. His shirt. His suit.

She imagines herself inside, hidden against the warmth of his chest, next to his chest, rising and falling with the rhythm of his breath. His breathing chest.

She can almost smell him. She can imagine the skin on his chest, the curly dark hairs, the shirt touching the skin and then the suit coat.

She thinks about running her hand across the bare skin of his chest.

She looks at his pants. Smooth and grey and flannel and expensive. Encasing his legs. Moving up and down as he walks towards her. Sliding up and down his thigh as he walks. Muscle and bone, gravity, flesh and footpath, propelling him toward her. His feet are even, his feet walk across the smooth flat concrete toward her.

She thinks about putting her hand into his pocket.

She sees him and waves.

Another performer steps forward. He is (almost) the same person as the dancer.

Emelia Joel, here! I’ve been waiting for you.

Joel Sorry. It took longer than I thought. You look good.

Kisses her.

Emelia My shoe’s broken.

Joel Hand it over. I’ll see if I can bang it in.
She gives him the heel and then the shoe. She stands there uncomfortable. Looking at who’s looking.

Emelia: People are looking at us. *(Indicating audience.)*

Joel: Don’t you want me to fix it?

Emelia: Yeah, sure.

He bangs the shoe a few times. He gives her back the shoe tacked together temporarily. She puts it on.

Joel: I got the job.

Emelia: I knew you would.

Joel: Yep. They’re ready to sign. Now.

Emelia: They are?

Joel: You sure you want to do this?

Emelia: That’s why we’re here.

Joel: Yeah.

Emelia: I said I would.

Joel: Yeah.

Emelia: It’s good. You’ll be great.

Joel: Yeah.

Emelia: The next step.

Joel: Yeah.

Emelia: Jakarta?

Joel: No she went of her own accord.

Emelia: Shut up. Anyway, it’s Jamaica.

Joel: Yeah.

She pats his breast pocket. He turns to go inside. She holds him back. She looks around her. This time she is looking at the set and the sand and all the objects.

Emelia: Wait.
She looks around to see if anyone is watching and then stands on tip toe to smooth his hair and stroke his collar. She kisses him on the mouth.

Thanks.

Joel What for?

Emelia Everything.

He looks at the sky.

Joel Can you smell that? It’s going to rain.

She looks up

Emelia Joel?

Joel Yeah?

Emelia Let’s go.

Transition … more bikes. As they go to exit Emelia sees Nina ride on. She stops to ‘observe’ as Joel exits.
Scene 5

(1950s - 60s)

The Hope Waltz.

Nina rides her bicycle. On the back of the bike is a box with the small child in it. There is also a silver bucket attached to the bike and some cleaning implements. She gets off the bike and rearranges the child, neatens her hair.

Nina (to the child in Czech) You need something? We’re here, you be good now. Sit quiet, like a mouse.

Lights up on another woman sitting at a table, the two women are roughly the same age.

Nina enters taking off her scarf and overcoat. She leaves them with her bag in the corner. She places the child in the corner also.

The wind! So strong! It blows from the south today. I push, push, push on my bicycle.

Nancy Yes, it gets terribly cold here in winter.

Nina I come early, I don’t want to be late.

Nancy The grass is still white. Sometimes its 10 o’clock before the frost melts.

Nina Yes, cold. But… not so cold…

Pause.

Nancy Would you like a cup of tea before you start?

Nina No, I… ready.

Nancy To warm you up. A glass of water? How about your little girl? What’s her name?

Nina goes to unbble the bucket. She carries the bucket to where all the other buckets are placed and gets a scrubbing brush from the bicycle.

Nina Sophie. No, she’s good, she’s quiet. Like a mouse. We here for to work. The floor. You want me to start? I scrub very clean. Then maybe I do the rest, the carpets, upstairs? Bathrooms, I clean, so clean, you no have worry to your childrens’ health. Get sick, no, no worries. I clean, very good. I make beds, do dusting. You want nice clothes? I good to iron too. Electric Iron? I can.

Nancy Ironing? Yes, I have some sheets there that are still damp. Nancy goes to get the basket of ironing.
Nina Sheets, shirts, dresses, clothes for the children’s? Yes. I do last when finished. Last job. First job, what, what you want? You want me to … scrub?

_Nina holds a bucket full of water up and empties it into her own bucket._

Nancy The floors? Yes, perhaps.

_Nina gets a bucket of water and begins to scrub._

Oh, Nina, not on your hands and knees.

Nina Yes, missus, of course. With my fingernail, I scrape from the corner. See? No dirt now, very clean. See.

_Nina holds up her finger and wipes the dirt off with a rag._

Nancy You’ll ruin your stockings.

Nina No stockings. Sorry Missus. Just … nothing …

Nancy But your knees. It’s so cold on the floor.

_Nancy turns away and finds a thick rubber mat from one of the boxes._

Here, take this.


_Emelia comes in at some point during this scene, she watches Nina scrubbing, it is a scene from childhood, but it is not her childhood, it is her mother’s. She sees the doll/child in the corner, it is Sophie. She begins to play with her. There is a box next to her. It is full of toy cars._

Emelia (to Doll). Look Sophie, cars!

_She pulls them out and lines them up._

Nancy Look at those two playing! Like peas in a pod. I hope you two aren’t making a mess.

_Nancy (to the audience). As she is talking, she watches Nina scrubbing. She also watches Emelia play with Nina’s little girl._

Nancy My house is very nice. It’s painted white and has enough bedrooms. This is important because the children each like to have their own room and we feel it is best for them to have somewhere quite separate from the general life of the household. And there’s an awful lot of life about with the three children, the youngest only two and a half and yes, there is another one on the way, but that is definitely the last one.
(As Nina scrubs she thinks and voices her thoughts.) I sit in the white morning light. For once the heating is working, and in this top floor apartment it is warm. It is very warm. Even though I am naked and there is snow on the streets outside, I am too warm. I say

“I’m hot!”

I try not to move. My eyes slide over the shape of my body, over the textures of my skin. I look through the window, at the snow flakes, as they fall outside. I watch a cat who is asleep in the corner of the room, its breath moving in and out, so quiet. I breathe in time with the cat. I play with the sound of my breath coming in … going out ... I say

“Nicky, it’s so hot in here, perhaps we could open the window?”

He does not hear me.

Nina comes in to help. Without Nina I don’t know what I would do. She has her own little girl you know, who plays so beautifully with my little girl and the other children just adore her too even though her English so not so good. So we all try to teach them how to do things like tell the time, which is good fun. But if Nina could go and buy the groceries, that would be a huge help.

His eyes move backward and forward from me to his paper. He is working fast, first in charcoal. The blackness stains his fingers. The heat of the room makes him sweat. He takes off his shirt. His singlet is white underneath. With the black coal of the charcoal, the sweat and the singlet he looks more like a worker than an artist. This is good, it fits with his political opinions.

His eyes and fingers are moving. I can’t see what he draws but I see him. It’s more than his fingers; his arms, his whole body moves. He strikes wild, fierce lines, page after page. When he’s finished, he pins the drawing on the wall. At the end of an hour I am surrounded by myself, yet not myself, in shapes and lines. My face, my hands, my feet, my breasts and buttocks, arms, legs, my … everything … are all watching me from the walls of this top floor apartment.

She came out here for political reasons, because of trouble with her husband. He had opinions or some such thing, something about the government. I don’t like to ask. She’s Roman Catholic of course, with a gold cross on a chain around her neck. The cross has got Jesus on it, crucified, and you can even see his face. It’s very gruesome. The children think it fascinating and much more interesting than our church and they say they’d like to go with her one Sunday to her church, but I tell them that everyone is different and people who come from other countries are just … And anyway, it’s best not to notice. I tell them, they’ve got their own church.
Nina: I watch him too. As he works … It is a frenzy of watching, working, heat … between us. Next it will be my turn to draw him. But first, I will open the window …

(She looks up from her scrubbing and tells the children to go out and play in Czech.)

I tell them to go outside and play. (To the children.) Outside now.
Scene 6

European Car #1

Playing with the toy cars, at some point she stands up.

Emelia I like our car. I like its compact European shape. I like its blackness. … I think it’s worth paying a bit more for fuel efficiency and emission controls. Even in a third world country. Those kinds of things are important.

Joel?

She is now talking to some extent, not only to the audience but also to Georgiana. She’s also keeping her eye out for Joel.

The other ex-pats think I make too much of a fuss about these things. And what can you do when you are living so far away from home, in another climate, with so many people, with so much poverty? But I tell them, just because you happen to have help in the house, and a gardener outside doesn’t mean you can’t contribute. Opportunities are everywhere. It’s a state of mind really. I think we can all contribute, in some way.

I tap my coat pockets for my keys.

Joel?

I think it’s good to have a plan. Some sort of a plan anyway.

Really good.

I should hear the keys rattle. Should feel their weight against my hand. But I don’t, the keys are not there.

Joel?

Nothing. The wallet but no keys. Where are they? Where are the fucking keys!

Joel!

She is looking in her bag. She looking but not finding. Her phone starts to ring. (What’s the call tone?) She can’t find her phone either. She squats on ground. Looking more frantically she spreads things about. (This is the same action as when she is shot, later in the play.) The phone keeps ringing. Joel approaches from behind her. He has the phone in his hand. He passes it to her.

Joel It’s for you.
She takes the phone and walks to the back, again with Georgiana. He picks up her stuff. Reaches into his pocket, gets some keys (points them toward the audience, beep, LX change, dance interlude?)

**European Car #2**

Emelia walks down from the back. Georgiana walks beside her. This is both a repeat and advancement of the previous conversation.

Emelia You have to live in a gated community. That’s what the company pays for and that’s what the company expects. And Joel doesn’t like to draw attention to himself, not for the wrong reasons anyway. You can see the difference can’t you? On this side of the gate there’s rubbish and rice paddies and it smells. On the other side there are four gardeners and a pool in every compound. It’s disgusting really. So that’s where we live when we’re in Jakarta. It’s nice to have some company during the day. The other wives I mean. Joel is always at work. I tell him he’s a slave to the corporation. He just laughs and says I have authority issues. That’s why he doesn’t really approve of my business venture. He says we don’t need the extra money. I say it’s not just about the money, it’s about social equity. Not everything is about money, not all the time.

Georgiana stands next to her.

I search my coat pocket for the key card.

I should feel its outline against my hand. I should reach into the pocket, pull out my key card and open the gate. I should hear the expensive mechanism of the gate as the door opens. I should smell the frangipani and wave to the garden boy as I drive through. As I drive down the driveway, my mind elsewhere, I should hear the gentle clunk as the gate closes behind me.

But I don’t. The keycard is not there. I shake my jacket. Nothing. I go through the pockets. Nothing. The wallet but no keycard. Where are my keys? Where are the fucking keys!

She is looking in her bag. She looking but not finding. Her phone starts to ring. She can’t find her phone either. She squats on ground. Looking more frantically she spreads things about. The phone keeps ringing. Joel approaches from behind her. He has the phone in his hand. He passes it to her.

Joel It’s for you.

She takes the phone and walks to the back. Georgiana walks back with her. He picks up her stuff. Reaches into his pocket, gets some keys (points them toward the audience, beep, LX change?)

Georgiana takes Emelia over to where she has left the lace table cloth folded. She spreads out the lace tablecloth at her feet. Emelia sits at the edge of the tablecloth watching her. It is as though she is doing a little show especially for Emelia.
Georgiana: This is certainly a very beautiful place; but were it not for domestic charms, the eye of the emigrant would soon weary of the unbounded limits of thickly clothed, dark green forests. I am sitting on the verandah surrounded by my little flower garden of British and Australian flowers pouring forth their odour. (Gets up, goes to centre of table cloth.) Can you see, how I am observing?

Emelia: Yes.

Georgiana: Are you observing me?

Emelia: Yes.

Georgiana: A variety of beautiful little birds most brilliant in plumage sport around me. There is a small bird called the Australian robin, with the breast of a very bright scarlet; (puts hand up as though bird is perching on it) also a little bird of a complete blue colour resembling cobalt, with short green wings (puts other hand up).\(^{105}\)

She observes the birds on her hands.

Georgiana: Now, remember what I said about Mallarme? The secret?

Emelia: Yes. Something about a box, a casket … a spiritual casket.

Georgiana: That’s right. Every man has a secret in him. You need to find the key.

On this mention of keys, Emelia begins to search her pocket for her key. She starts looking on the ground and around about her.

A short note about the act of observation; to observe is to be content with seeing; with seeing a few things systematically, with seeing what is merely before ones eyes, amid the vast array of what is possible to see. To observe then is to be satisfied with seeing what can at first glance, be recognized, analyzed and given a name that everybody will understand.

Tip toes around the edge of the cloth looking at the tiny flowers.

A remarkable feature in the botany of S.W. Australia is the numerous kinds of leaves with the identical flower. I know one purple pea flower with three different kinds of leaves, one of which is a creeper, and called … the blue vine; the other an erect shrub with no smell and leaves like … holly; the third is also erect, with leaves like … the privet, and in shady places the blossoms emit a scent about three in the afternoon like allspice or cloves.

Are you observing all of this?

Emelia: (Distracted, looking for something.) I think so.

\(^{105}\) This gesture prefigures Georgiana’s movements later in the piece when she (becomes) takes on the shape of the projected flower images.
Georgiana: Yes, good, because there is another thing. Unlike mere observation, something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of observation, not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter.

Emelia: Encounter?

*Georgiana goes over to the grid and picks up box of seeds. She begins to put the seeds into small packages.*

Georgiana: The encounter challenges and disrupts our habitual way of seeing.

You understand where I am going with this?

Emelia: No, I’m sorry. I don’t know what you are talking about …

Georgiana: The encounter transforms us.

Emelia: Oh. (*She begins to look about her, in boxes, under things.*)

Georgiana: What are you doing?

Emelia: I’m looking for something.

Georgiana: What?

Emelia: Some paper. I’m going to write a letter.

Georgiana: Oh. Who to?

Emelia: To Joel. (*Pause.*) I saw him. Back there. He should be here soon.

Georgiana: Then why write?

Emelia: I want … I need … I feel …

Georgiana: What?

Emelia: It was my fault.

Georgiana: What was?

Emelia: He didn’t want to come. I made him.

Georgiana: Come where?

Emelia: Where we were when … It was my idea. The plantation, the coffee, all of it. The business deal. My idea. He didn’t want to do it. Any of it. But I got, I just felt, I couldn’t just …
Georgiana        What?

Emelia           I’d see these little children playing in the kampongs, on the canals, on the banks of these open sewers, right? And I’d think, it doesn’t have to be that way. They could be like us. All of them. If they wanted. The dirt, the poverty. I thought I could help. Set up a few systems, connect them to the outside world. I just didn’t realize …

Georgiana        What?

Emelia           It already was the outside world. They were waiting for me, Joel, both of us. We were just cherries waiting to be picked.

*The phone begins to ring.*

Georgiana        Excuse me. *(She finds the phone, she gives it to Emelia.)*
Scene 7

Phone heat (Emelia)

Emelia has the phone in her hand. She looks at it ringing. 9.30 -10 at night.

Emelia: Hello? Hello! (The phone is dead.) It’s dead. The line’s gone.

Joel: What?

She stands, outside on a verandah. She and Joel are in Dili. It’s hot, very hot. Tropical smell of sweet flowers and rotting vegetables sit heavily in the air. It is humid, the dust from the nearby road turns to grime on their skins. (Another dance?) Their skins glisten in the heat. Sound of motorbikes passing. Horns in the distance.

Emelia: The line’s gone dead again.

Joel comes from inside, He is getting her a scotch.

Joel: It’s scotch. I put lots of soda in it. To keep the fluids up.

She holds the phone and is trying to hear through the static. She takes the drink and mouths, “Thankyou.”

Emelia: Hello? Hello? (To Joel). Here, me. Fan me. I need some air. (He does as she asks, but in a desultory manner.) This connection keeps dropping out. It’s driving me nuts.

Joel: Do you want some more ice? (He goes inside to get it. Calls from inside…)

In town it’s hopeless. I couldn’t get anything all afternoon.

It’s not frozen yet. I think the fridge has given up. I’ve been speaking to the office. They called to say they want me back. Pause. She doesn’t respond. In Jakarta.

Emelia: I thought you just said you couldn’t get a line.

Joel: (He comes back outside, onto the balcony.) Yeah, well…

Emelia: I need to be here. (he doesn’t respond) In Dili.

Joel: I’ve got nothing left to do in Dili. I’ve been out to the rig twice now. I’ve got to get back to the office.

Emelia: Go again.
Joel  I can’t keep going out there. It’s my job to be … I’m supposed to be…
I’m a systems analyst, I’m meant to be efficient.

Emelia  Well, that’s a problem because I’ve got to go and check the trees, I’ve
told you that. They say they’ve started pruning but I’m not so sure. They
might be saying that just to please me, you know?

Joel  The roads are terrible…

*No response.*

I’d back off a bit…

Emelia  You would?

Joel  Those people you’ve got working for you, they’re …

Emelia  What?

Joel  I don’t know.

Emelia  …go on?

Joel  They don’t seem to trust you.

Emelia  Who doesn’t?

Joel  The locals.

Emelia  I don’t trust them either. But I pay them and that seems to make all the
difference.

Joel  … I’m just saying, go in softly. Give it a bit more time.

Emelia  You’re the one who wants to rush back to Jakarta. I just want to help.
Those trees are eighty years old. They need to be replaced. At the very
least they need to be pruned.

Joel  Yeah, but they’re not your plants.

Emelia  Don’t.

Joel  Don’t what?

Emelia  Don’t say you’re going to help me one day and then turn around and be
shitty the next. You’re either part of the solution or part of the problem.

Joel  Now whose being shitty.

Emelia  I’m not being shitty.
Joel I’m just saying the plantation belongs to the families, to the villages. According to them you’ve appropriated it.

Emelia I haven’t. I’m trying to help. And not all of them think that. Some of them think there is a future for East Timor. Some of them want education and health care.

Joel Let them sort it out.

Emelia You want me to let that cherry rot on the vine?

Joel Coffee beans grow on trees. It’s a tree. Or a bush.

Emelia I know.

Joel Come back to Jakarta with me.

Emelia It’s better for me here.

Joel You being here isn’t going to make any difference.

Emelia Yes it is. Look. *(She shows him the papers)* Once I get this supply line going it’ll run itself. They can run it. I don’t care. And I’ve got seedlings. I’ll take them up, get them planted and then I’ll come back. Believe me. It’s important.

Joel You call me a capitalist.

Emelia You are a capitalist.

Joel Yeah, I know.

Emelia You should be happy. I’m just making the system work.

Joel I’m as happy as the day is long. I just thought, well, you might feel a bit embarrassed.

Emelia About what?

Joel It’s a bit dodgy…

Emelia What is?

Joel What you’re trying to do.

*Music starts from a distance. It’s Frank Sinatra. A soft, quiet song.*

Emelia What’s that?

Joel What?

Emelia Music. They must be having a party down the road.
Joel  
*(He looks out over the balcony.*) Yeah, all the lights are on. Those guys you signed with …

Emelia Yeah?

Joel They’re crooks.

Emelia It’s nice. Listen.

Joel Yeah, nice.

Emelia Come here. *(She stands up and takes him in her arms. They begin to dance.)* I’m just trying to help. I just want to… It’s going to be OK. *(She rubs her eyes.)*

*Insert of Georgiana about birds (1832). There could be dance accompanying all these flower observations.*

Georgiana The honey eaters are so minutely beautiful I cannot describe them. They have a long curved beak, which they insert into the calyx of the different flowers, and the symmetry of their form, which is perfect, accords with the elegance of their acts. You see them perch on the most slender flower stem, and apply the beak to the blossoms, every moment expecting the flower to drop off, but their light weight does not in the least affect this.

Emelia *(Still dancing…)* Making a bit of money, for the good of everyone, out of something that is just sitting there anyway, doesn’t necessarily mean I’m exploiting people.

Joel Of course not …

Emelia I’ve worked this out. In six months it’ll be running smoothly. Trust me.

Joel Especially if the non-exploitation aspect is part of the marketing framework. That way the cost of the ideology is factored into the overall cost of the product.

Emelia Yeah.

Joel It’s … self-sustaining.

Emelia That’s one way of putting it.

Joel Emelia …

Emelia They say they don’t want to prune the trees because they won’t get a harvest for three years. And they’re right, they won’t. I just want them to take a more long term view. Oxfam’s given them the money, if they just take the money and don’t do the pruning, they might not get any help next time. And the quality of the coffee is compromised. Old trees and
second rate processing make second grade product. Timor used to produce the best coffee in the world. There is no reason it can’t do that again.

Joel Those plants aren’t even proper organic, they’re organic by neglect.

Emelia So?

Joel So, nothing.

Emelia Look, this is a synergy … All they have to do is pick the coffee. All I have to do is sell it. It’s growing wild … if it wasn’t for me it would be left rotting on the …

Joel On the tree …

*Georgiana insert about flowers. (1832)*

Georgiana Another sort of flower is in yellow and straw colour, of which there are five with leaves utterly distinct, but I fear this last page may be somewhat tedious, as you are not likely to behold all these aborigines.

Emelia Joel, this is good. This is a good thing. It’s good for us, for them, for everyone. It’s fair trade, for goodness sake! What more do you want! … There’s marketing strategy, there’s a business plan … I’ve just got to get this … problem ... with these bloody thugs … sorted.

Joel Come back to Jakarta.

Emelia It’s hopeless in Jakarta. They just ignore me. Or they lie. Bare face bloody lie. You know that.

Joel You’ll get into trouble.

Emelia I won’t.

Joel You will.

Emelia You bend rules all the time. The difference is you make the rules so no one gets to complain. And if they do you sack them.

Joel I’m worried.

Emelia You’re worried that if I get caught, you’ll look bad.

Joel Yeah.

Emelia Then go back to Jakarta

Joel I could talk to someone I suppose.

Emelia Who?
Joel: One of our agents. He knows a few people. In town. I think he might … know someone.

Emelia: He knows people?

Joel: Yeah.

Emelia: Good. When?

Joel: Tomorrow maybe. I’ll mention that you need, that you want …

Emelia: I want them off. I want those thugs out of there. I’m not going to pay them off … I want them away from my workers. You tell him that. And I’m willing to pay to get it fixed.

Georgiana. First letter to Dr. Mangles. (1837) Georgiana examines the seeds on the ground in her grid. Nina is also busy. She is sweeping out the fireplace. With a brush and pan she sweeps the ash from the old fire into a pile and shovels it into some newspaper. This ash could be sand. (During this sequence Emelia comes over and watches.)

Georgiana pulls a box toward her as if it is a new discovery. She kneels at the grid and with a tiny wooden scoop carefully begins to put a selection of a few seeds into small plastic bags.

Georgiana: My Dear Dr Mangles – Much to my surprise in December last, I received a particularly choice box of seeds, and your polite note requesting a return of the native seeds of Augusta. In truth, my dear Sir, I much fear you have bestowed your liberality on one whose chief pleasure is her garden, but who does not enter the lists as a florist, much less a botanist. If we were nearer I should much hesitate to accept so magnificent a present of so many long wished for seeds, and as all my former pursuits have necessarily been thrown aside (by the preemptory demand of my personal attention to my children and domestic drudgery), (She looks toward Nina who is busy working.) I feel that it will be long ere I can make any adequate return in Australian products.

Emelia: I am watching you know, watching what you are doing. What are you doing that is any different to me? This isn’t your country, these aren’t yours seeds.

Georgiana: That’s it then, isn’t it? That’s what you have to work out.

Emelia: What do I have to work out?

Georgiana: … what the difference is.

Emelia: Can you give me a clue at least?

Georgiana: But I have already.
Emelia  There was this moment back there … in the kitchen. That’s not my life, that’s not my childhood. That was my mother. She was that little girl playing with Sophie, wasn’t she? Things are getting mixed up. What, is it something to do with my mother? I don’t get it. She’s back in Perth playing bridge. I left home when I was seventeen. Before that I went to boarding school. My mother’s got nothing to do with me.

Georgiana  Begin by observing then. Just observe.
Scene 8

Nina painting

Nina is working. She is clearing the fireplace. She wraps the ash into newspaper and puts it to one side. She begins to set a new fire. Nancy enters.

Nancy Nina, I was looking in a book last week and saw …
Nina What?
Nancy Something …
Nina What you see?
Nancy Pictures, paintings. Like you do, used to do.
Nina Nice.
Nancy Well, I thought that perhaps you might like to paint something.
Nina I think, no.
Nancy … in the house?
Nina I here for to clean.
Nancy We can go always go outside, en plein air if you like, but I thought perhaps you might want to keep it … just between us? Private? I mean, you seem … you say you don’t like to do it anymore, but I thought … well, we could keep it within these four walls, between you, me and the furniture.
Nina You want for me to paint furniture?
Nancy No, of course not. I was thinking along the lines of … a still life. A collection of significant objects, things that make up a home? Perhaps. A vase of flowers? A bowl of fruit?
Nancy No-one needs to know. What does it matter anyway? … In the kitchen. Come on. I’ve got everything ready, come and see.
Nina (laughing) What you got?
Nancy Everything.
Nina
Look here. To paint I need, I want (searching for the word) … for to see.

Nancy
Light, you need light. It’s light in the kitchen.

Nina
Yes, perhaps, but … to see, I need … shapes (says the word, shapes in Czech).

Nancy repeats the word in Czech while pushing Nina into the kitchen.
Nina grabs the ash wrapped in newspaper on her way through.

Nancy
… while the children are out. Something just for me.

Nina
For you? For you I do already.

Nancy
Please, Nina

Nina
But … for to start, I need shape and … (she draws a line in the air with her finger).

Nancy
A pencil?

Nina
Yes pencil, of course, but for to … (Indicates drawing lines.) So. Many … lines (says lines in Czech). I need to see. Something.

Nancy
Right. (Not understanding.)

Nancy makes Nina sit at the kitchen table. She pulls a bowl of fruit in front of Nina. Nina places the wrapped up ash on the table and picks up an apple, then a lemon. She sniffs the lemon then puts it down.

You don’t like the lemon? That’s perfectly fine. Really, you don’t have to like it because I did have another idea. It was more to do with the flowers actually.

She gets a pre-prepared vase of hydrangeas and places it on the table. She then gets an elaborately worked set of silver brushes and hand mirror and places them in front of Nina.

These were my grandmother’s. They’re silver. They were made in England. It’s a dressing set. And I have this very fine linen handkerchief worked with Brussels lace. I thought we could arrange them all together, the flowers, the brushes, the mirror and the lace. Silver and blue and white you see. (She arranges them.)

And light, if you need light, here, look.

She raises the blind a little and an oblique yellow light falls across the artfully arranged objects.
See, it’s beautiful isn’t it? Things that make up a home. Beautiful things. Much better than a bowl of fruit. You’re quite right.

*She removes the bowl of fruit.*

Nina Yes, is beautiful …yes, but … I … I paint … people.

Nancy People?

Nina Yes.

Nancy Oh! People. Portraits?

Nina Well, what do you call … yes, lines, of course … shapes. The faces of the people, I like to … to turn into lines, shapes. To see what, what is … Under. Under … the skin. Things … you can see things in the lines.

Nancy Oh … the children, perhaps. Though that will be difficult. They won’t sit still and if I made them sit together for any length of time like that they’d squabble like a bunch of monkeys.

Nina No.

*She gets up and places the flowers to one side, and also the brushes.*

Wait. You stay. (*She goes outside with the bundle of ash.*) I put this … Ash from fireplace, is finish … I put outside.

Nancy (*Calls out to her*) Then I don’t know what we can do. I really hadn’t thought of people. It does become difficult, doesn’t it? Maybe you can imagine someone. Think of someone you know, or used to know … I just thought you would be more interested in beautiful things, you know, objects or … scenes from the outdoors or … well, not people anyway …

As Nancy is talking Nina re-enters and pulls up the blind. *She pulls Nancy into the light.* *She sits her in a chair at the edge of it.* *She looks at her not as a person but as a series of lines and shapes.*

What are you doing? Nina, no! No, not me. You can’t draw me.

*Nina looks at the lines of Nancy’s body.*

No, not me. You don’t want to paint me …


*Nina takes Nancy by the hand and makes her sit.* *The light falls in shadows across her face.*

Yes. Good. I see (*Czech for lines*) lines, shapes.
She gets her sketch pad and pencil. She goes to start her drawing.

Nancy doesn’t know what to do with her hands and so puts them neatly in her lap.

Nina adjusts the angle of the chair and the light. She takes a step back to look at the effect.

One thing to do. Last thing.

She undoes the clip holding Nancy’s hair.

Yes?

As she says this she undoes the hair. Nancy instinctively holds it back.

Is good. You keep to hold. You look, to me.

Nancy Nina? What …?

Nina For me? You are … A flower.

Nina lifts Nancy’s head to the right angle in the light.

Keep still.

Nina goes and picks up her pencil and begins to sketch.

Nancy Nina, I …

Nina (Concentrating now) What?

Nancy Nina?

Nina Yes?

Nancy What is flower in Czech?

Nina (Says the word)

Nancy (Repeats the word.) That’s nice.

Georgiana (She has been listening and making the packages of seeds.) In the limited society of south western Australia … very few bestow a thought on flowers … grubbing, hoes, beef, auctions and anchorage, whaling, harpooning, potatoes an onions are the chief topics of conversation, therefore I am well persuaded any observation affecting a flower garden would be ill timed and not agreeable to the generality of my guests. [But] … I have no hesitation in declaring that, were I to accompany the box of seeds to England, knowing as I do their situation, time of flowering, soil and degree of moisture required with the fresh powers of fructification they each possess, I should have a very extensive conservatory, of no
plants but from Augusta. I do not say this vauntingly, but to inspire you with that ardour and interest with which the collection leaves me
Scene 9

Rotten apple.

Emelia emerges from the shadows at the back. She’s got the child/doll Sophie in her hand. She’s talking to it. They are playing together. This is her mother’s memory.

Emelia has got an apple in her hands. She’s tossing it up and catching it, weighing it up. Throws it off stage and laughs, picks up another apple out of a box and does it again. Again, there is a sound of smashing.

Emelia  Again? Another one? You dare me?

Emelia walks towards the audience. She is throwing the apple in the air and catching it.

Sophie and I are playing in the orchard. There are apples lying all about on the ground. They’ve fallen out of that tree, there … some of them are rotting … in the sun. We’re not meant to be here. We’ve been chucking them at the shed and watching them splatter. I chuck one at the window and it splatters too. The window, that is. Glass and apples, all over the place.

I’m glad Sophie’s here because … She wanted to come here. She wanted to see if the apples were ripe.

I tell her to stop crying. She’s crying. She thinks we’ll get into trouble. I tell her not to worry. It’s only a window.

(Sound of a crow squawking)

A crow lands on an upturned bucket by the door of the shed. It wants to eat the splattered apple but it will have to wait. I can’t make Sophie stop crying. It’s not your fault I say. It was both of us.

To Georgiana.

That’s not my memory is it?

Georgiana  I don’t suppose it is.

Emelia  Sophie was my mother’s friend, wasn’t she? It’s all getting mixed up!

Georgiana  Well, what can you do, when someone is dying?

She is slow moving through space, through the bodies which are placed strategically.

Joel is there, she approaches him. She goes to put her arms around him. His phone rings. Joel pulls himself away from her and answers.
Joel Hello! *(aside to Emelia)* It’s your mother!

Emelia *(She mouths to Joel)* I’m not here! I don’t want to talk to her.

Joel *(Into the phone.)* Yes, she’s just here.

Emelia *(Mouthing)* No! No! I’m not here! Don’t tell her I’m here! She won’t like it. I’ll never hear the end of it.

Joel It’s lucky you caught us together. Everything alright? Great, I’ll just put her on … *(Emelia is backing away refusing to take the phone.)* Here she is … she’s just coming.

*She takes the phone. She answers cheerfully.*

Emelia Mum! Hi! *(She walks away and talks with her back to Joel.)*

*Georgiana’s letter to Mangles resumed. (1837)*

Georgiana We have already collected some seeds, as your box just arrived at the proper season. I am not even acquainted with the names of the native plants. I will, however, enclose a leaf and description of the flower in each paper. I had some dried plants by me from the Vasse – a country apparently possessing some exquisite floral beauties, which I feel most happy in being able to send you and when I obtain a sufficiency to make up a small box, I will dispatch it and retain the large one until I am blessed with more leisure than at present.

*A phone starts ringing.*

Excuse me …

*She goes to look for it in the boxes. She begins unloading boxes. This box business can double the unloading of boxes off the truck and the guns. (See later.)* *She finds a box full of bones and lays them out on the floor next to her seeds. She treats them like they are like a museum exhibit and she is a curator.*

*Nina is searching in the boxes as well … She goes from box to box, looking. She is in the grip of dreadful anxiety. Finally she finds something. She pulls it out of the box, it is a blanket. She wraps it up carefully and cradles it like a child. She begins to coo and laugh and sing quietly to the child. Nancy has been watching. She looks about at the boxes. The phone stops.*
Scene 10

Death of Georgiana’s baby.

Georgiana is looking at Nina and her baby. She stops what she is doing, closes the lid of the box and picks it up. She puts it down stage centre. She picks up the lace table cloth from the floor and gently wraps it up. As she speaks, she folds the cloth carefully, never taking her eyes from the box. She places the table cloth on top of a box. It is like a small coffin.

Georgiana Forgive me Dear Sir, … using towards a stranger, the freedom and minute detail that friendship warrants and desires …

Under the afflicting decree … recently been overwhelmed … loss of our darling infant, … drowning!!

… been playing with him and … frolicsome mood just after breakfast, … preparing to bake and churn … left dear little Johnny … seen him with Mary, and near his Papa, … had his bell on (a little bell he wore around his waist … straying in the bush.) … not finding him, “Have you been to the Well?” … “Do not frighten yourself, he never goes there!!

… going to the Well. The fatal truth …“here’s the Boy” … his flaxen curls all dripping, his little countenance so … we knew not what to do.

… that lively, healthy child … all mirth and joyousness … beautiful and lovely even in death.

Puts folded cloth on top of box.

I now enclose your box and letter. So many of its contents were collected under the extremes of joy and acute sorrow. It has beguiled many a moment, and I hope you will receive most success and satisfaction in sowing your seed. Any particular seed you desire and those I have imperfectly been able to transmit, I shall feel happy against another season to repair.

P. S. If the box you send me is large enough, a watering pot would be of the greatest use to us as ours are worn and destroyed after eight years service.

With every kind wish, I remain very sincerely yours. Georgiana Molloy.

Georgiana goes back to the grid. She inspects the grouping of seeds, touching each section. She also looks at the collection of bones that she has ordered.

Dear Dr Mangles. Words fail me when I attempt to return you my many many grateful thanks and acknowledgements for ‘your box’s’ useful, beautiful and handsome contents.

I shall with unfeigned pleasure attempt to gratify you in writing the Floral Calendar, I will glean all I can, and pray my health may be so
recruited as to permit of my making those much enjoyed Floral
excursions.

Finally she runs her hand through the seeds and bones, wantonly mixing them
across the squares of the grid.

Such flowers of imagination; I am now in raptures when I think on them.
When I sally forth on foot or Horseback, I feel quite elastic in mind and
step; I feel I am quite at my own work, the real cause that enticed me out
to Swan River.

Using the scoop, she begins packaging the seeds up into the little plastic bags
again. She works quickly and with concentrated intensity.
Scene 11

Emelia.

Joel is lying in bed. Emelia sits/lies next to him. They are both wrapped in a sheet. She is fanning herself.

Emelia That frangipani smells so strong at night!

Joel Yeah. Turn off the light.

Emelia The air con’s shut down. There’s no movement in the air at all.

Joel Yeah, it’s hot. (She fans him.)

Emelia The monsoon is due in from the North. It’ll be better when it comes. The good thing about a fan is that it keeps off mosquitoes.

Joel I’ll talk to the manager.

Emelia About the mosquitoes?

Joel About the air-con. Let’s turn off the light.

Emelia No, I’ve got to get up. I’ve got things to do.

She gets up. Begins to pack.

Joel Come to bed.

No response.

I don’t want you to go.

No response.

It’s not safe. The mountains are full of … Bandits.

Emelia Bandits! You’re funny.

Joel You don’t have to do this you know.

Emelia I know I don’t, I want to.

Joel It’s not a joke, it’s not play acting.

Emelia I know it’s not.

Joel It doesn’t make it any more real just because it’s dangerous.
Emelia  I know. It’s not about danger, it’s not about the money.

Joel  What is it about?

Emelia  I don’t know.

Joel  What?


Joel  Feeling something.


Joel  Right. (Pause.)

And what about me?

Emelia  I want to feel like I’m doing something in the world.

Joel  But you are doing something in the world.

Emelia  You don’t get it, do you?

Joel  Sure I do. Come to bed.

Georgiana  In this most uncultivated land and temperate climate, insects and reptiles have unrestrained license, and the seeds of each plant afford sustenance to some of the animal creation. Consequently, the seed vessels of each are generally inhabited by some worm or grub. This is particularly the case with those contained in a silique. I had several large quantities of number 67, 71, 73, 85, to gather and open before I could meet with the small packages I send to you. I have minutely examined every seed and know they are sound and fresh, as they have all been gathered from 15 December 1837 to the present day.

Joel  What did she want?

Emelia  Who?

Joel  Your mother. She called.

Emelia  So?

Joel  Earlier. When she rang. Did she want something?

Emelia  Oh. She called to say she’d written me a letter.

Joel  That’s nice.

Emelia  She’s sending some photos.
Joel  Nice.

Emelia  Of me. And her.

Georgiana  I have not sent you every flower we have worth sending, and many I fear you will consider worthless, but having obeyed the “Golden Rule” I have ventured to introduce some literal weeds. Often in hearing of foreign countries, I have wished to be acquainted with their most common plants, having more curiosity to see its weeds than the finer production.

Emelia  She says she found them in a box and thought I might want them. I wish she wouldn’t do that.

Joel  Why not?

Emelia  It’s creepy.

Joel  If we’re going up there tomorrow I want you to turn the light off now.

Emelia  So you’re coming?

Joel  Last time. Then we’re out of here. Now turn the light off.

Emelia  Joel?

Joel  Yeah?

Emelia  … Thanks.

Joel  What for?

Emelia  Nothing … just …

Joel  Turn the light out.

Emelia  OK, in a minute … (She looks at Georgiana, fascinated by what she is doing.)

*Georgiana stops her activity and stands to survey the grid now covered in a confusion of seed. She walks right around it and then moves toward the screen projected with images of flowers.*

Georgiana  I came on an open plain of many acres in extent with scarcely a tree on it, and those that grew, were large and fine. I discovered a plant I had been almost panting for.

*She moves in front of the projection screen, she observes the images closely. She puts her hands toward them and imitates the shapes of the tree and its flowers. She turns toward the audience still in the shape of the tree. She observes her body.*
I beheld a tree of great beauty, dark green and prickly. Its flowers gave character not only to the tree itself, but to the surrounding locality. They are of the purest white and fall in long trusses from the stem. Some of its pendulous blooms are from three to five fingers in length.

These wave in the breeze like snow wreaths and are of such a downy white appearance. They emit a most delicious perfume resembling the bitter almond;

… like all mortal delicacies, how quick these flowers fall from the stalk!

*Her movements slow to a stop. Her arms are outstretched in the flower shape. It is though she is in suspended animation, dried and pressed as a specimen.*

Emelia That’s beautiful.

Georgiana Thank you.

Emelia I thought my idea was beautiful too …

Georgiana Did you?

Emelia Yeah, I did. My idea! It was a great idea. The old coffee plantations are turning back into jungle, with no one to look after them and I thought I could just, you know, put a fence around a bit of jungle, draw a line on a map and say, that’s mine, or their’s anyway. Get them working, part of the cash economy. It’d be great. They could pick the coffee beans. Start something new. Salvage what’s left. I talked to people, in Dili, in Jakarta, they thought it was a good idea. All sorts of people. But then the workers wouldn’t go out because they were scared of the bandits, so I thought … if there’s no law and order up there, you know, you have to buy security. You have to help yourself. So I got some security. Some guns. Just what was necessary. Just to stop them mucking around. It wasn’t hard. But they set us up … they saw us coming. We were just a means to an end, and now … Joel and me …

So I thought I’d write a letter.

Georgiana To say sorry?

Emelia To set the record straight. For Joel.

Georgiana Ah!

Emelia I didn’t mean for this to happen. Not this.

*Nina looks for her baby.*

*The phone rings. Nina is searching in the boxes frantically, again. She goes from box to box. Looking. She picks up the tablecloth off the box and cradles it like a blanket with a baby inside. The phone stops. Nina cradles it, she begins to coo*
and laugh and sing quietly to the child. Georgiana watches. She looks about at the boxes. Nina watches the next scene too.

Scene 12

Boxes off the Truck (Emelia)

This sequence is done with the dancers/performers. Emelia is talking to workers.

Emelia

Unpack those boxes first, yes? All those plants, yes, take them off the truck first and put them in there OK? In the shade. This box, this and this, yes? All those little seedlings.

Go – put them over there, no not in the sun, they’ll dry out. No, take them inside – just go. Quick!

Hey, Huey, Chira! Over there. Have you got the keys? Good.

She approaches them and speaks quietly.

When these boxes are off, I want you two to get those three metal boxes at the back. The big ones. They’re heavy. They’re locked. I’ll send all the guys away so you can finish by yourselves. Just unload them. Put those three by the side of the road there. You can put a tarp over the top. OK? No fuss, just quietly. And then wait for me. Don’t draw attention. When I see you’re ready, I’ll come by with the car. OK? You can put them in the boot. I’ll take them with me.

Then that’s it, job done, job’s over. No sweat.

Come by the tall house tonight and I’ll give you the money. OK. Now go. No wait. Here’s some money now. The rest later. Go.
Scene 13

In the Lines (Nina and Nancy)

Nancy Nina, when you are drawing, what do you see?
Nina I told you.
Nancy You can’t just see lines and shapes.
Nina But … I do.
Nancy What else do you see?
Nina Just that.
Nancy There must be something else.
Nina You look. What you see?
Nancy In the lines?
Nina Yes.
Nancy Well a picture of course. A picture of me.
Nina Just that then, lines and shapes. You.
Nancy …that’s it… Nancy stares at her.
Nina yes…
Nancy What!
Nina … lines, yes and … Just …
Nancy Tell me …
Nina In the lines I also see… Perhaps …
Nancy What? What do you see? What else do you see?
Nina I don’t know. God, perhaps. Perhaps in the lines, I see God.
Nancy You do?
Nina Not all the time, but yes, sometimes I think.
Nancy You see God when you are looking at me?
Nina
I … I … I don’t know, maybe…

Pause for a moment then Nancy smiles and nods.

Nancy
Nina, but that’s … unless … perhaps it’s like …

Ummm …

Nina what’s it like when you are drawing, when you see … what you see?

Nina
Is like … how you say… happy … I feel … no, not me … my pencil is happy … my page is … happy … my flower (indicating Nina) is happy. Is all … happy.

Nancy
Yes, happy … I can see that, I can see that too … happy. I feel happy. I feel happy too. I certainly do. Yes, I think so …

The phone rings. She answers.

Whispers to Nina …I’m sorry …

Hello? No, you’re not interrupting … really? … no, nothing at all. Oh, of course … Is Thelma there too? Well if Nina can stay a bit later to feed and bath the children? (she indicates to Nina, questioning? Nina indicates back, yes) … then Thelma and I can have a sherry … (laughs) … We will if we want to … (laughs) I’ll set the fire in the lounge room for her. Yes, later, I’ll see you later.

She sets the phone down.

He’s going to be late … It’s Mr. Archer, some business and Mrs. Archer came in to town as well so she’s going to come over. I can make some biscuits, cheese biscuits. You can stay can’t you Nina?

Nina
Of course.

Nancy
Where are those two girls? They should be back by now. I don’t like it when they wander off. Nina, have you done the windows yet?

Nancy
Yes Missus. I just did.

Nancy
And the back of the fireplace. Nina, did you paint the back of the fire place this morning?

Nina
No, but I sweep.

Nancy
I love to watch the ochre burn off, the colours, you know?

Nina
Oh.
Nancy If you paint the bricks at the back of the fireplace with ochre paint before you set the fire, when the flames burn it off, it’s quite … beautiful.

Nina Yes, beautiful …

Nancy The brush and the ochre are in a jar in the cupboard under the sink. It’s a messy job, I’m afraid but I’m too busy to do it myself just at the moment.

Nina Don’t worry, I do, next thing.

Nancy And Nina, can you run some polish over the side board and have a look at the floor in the kitchen? Make sure it’s clean?

Nina The floor, of course.

Nancy Such a lot to do. Haven’t we Nina?

Nina Yes Missus.

Nancy Nina, when the girls come back I want you send Sophie home. I don’t like them running off and not telling me where they’ve gone.

Nina Yes Missus, I send. She sorry, very sorry. I don’t know why they … She good girl. She go … I send her.

Nancy It was naughty of them. I don’t know why they do that. They shouldn’t wander off like that. You tell Sophie next time she comes, she is welcome here but I won’t have her wandering off. Nina, where did you put the ash from this morning?

Nina I’m sorry?

Nancy When you cleaned the fireplace. The sweepings? The ash from the fire?

Nina In newspaper. In the rubbish.

Nancy Nina, on the roses, the ash goes on the roses.

Nina Yes, of course. I’m sorry Missus.

Georgiana Makes a Phone Call.

Georgiana makes a phone call. She looks up a number in her diary book and dials. As no one answers, she puts the phone down. There is an answering machine. It is Emelia’s. V/O (?) “Hi, this is Emelia’s phone. I’m sorry I’m not here right now, but if you leave a message I’ll get right back to you.” She puts the phone down and takes up a position on stage.

Georgiana (Her movements are intimating the shape of a flower. Emelia is watching too, copying her.) I must apologise for not pursuing your suggestions by tying in the specimens, but have fastened them, so that they may be
drawn out and at pleasure botanically arranged. The colour of the flowers is much more evanescent here than in England, but this, a botanist will excuse, as long as the character of the plants is exemplified.

Emelia What was it the poet said?

Georgiana Every man has a secret in him, many die without finding it.

Emelia That’s right. What’s your secret then?

Georgiana I have a passion.

Emelia A passion?

Georgiana Yes.

Emelia What for?

Georgiana For flowers.

Emelia You don’t say?

Georgiana I do.

(Emelia walks around her, observing as if she really is a specimen.) Flowers… You’re like a flower. That’s it is it? That’s what Nina said. About my grand-mother. Said she was a flower. I think she really meant a weed. That must make me a weed too.

Georgiana I may well be considered a flower, I might also be judged a weed, even so, the mysteries of my life of encounter continue to emanate. Where’s your husband?

Emelia I’m sorry?

Georgiana Your husband.

Emelia He’s right here, of course … (Emelia sees the road block up ahead.) Joel! … Damn! What the … What’s going on here?
**Scene 14**

**The Road Block  (Emelia and Joel)**

Joel is next to Emelia. They are in a car. There is a road block and Emelia has to stop the car. She gets out of the car. She talks to the official.

Emelia  
*(To the official)* Yep, what’s happening?

Up there. Five miles. The plantation.

Joel  
What does he want?

Emelia  
He wants to know where we’ve come from.

*(To the official)* Why is the road blocked? Has something happened?

Joel  
What’s going on?

Emelia  
His English isn’t very good. I think there’s a police check or something.

Joel  
I’ll talk to him.

Emelia  
No, don’t get out of the car. You stay there. I’ve got it under control.

*(To the official)* We’re going to see someone. Into town. To see someone.

Joel  
Let me do this.

Emelia  
Leong – You know him, yes? Mr Leong? (says “friend” in Indonesian.) You know who he is? He’s got friends, important man (again in Indonesian) yes? You known him? What’s your name, by the way? (Repeats “Your name” in Indonesian) Yeah. We have an appointment. He’ll be angry if we’re late. What did you say your name was by the way?

Joel  
What does he want?

Emelia  
He wants the keys. He wants to look in the boot.

Joel  
Get back in the car now … I’m talking to him.

**Nancy and the music.**

Nancy  
Nina, this is beautiful! And look you picked some flowers too, some roses! I can smell them from here. I can smell furniture polish, I can smell biscuits cooking and roses. How lovely! What could be nicer? I’m
going to put on some music! What shall we have? (Looks through a collection) Here we are. Frank Sinatra. I rather like Frank Sinatra, don’t you? I rather do … (She puts the record on a gramophone and the music begins soft and quite – it is the same Frank Sinatra music Joel and Emelia heard earlier.)

Georgiana (Still in the shape of a flower.) The sunny evening and perfect stillness which prevailed, with the total absence of other human beings besides ourselves and a single native who accompanied us, and the recollection that I was employed in the delightful service of so kind a friend, made me feel singularly happy and free from care.

Emelia Sitting in the car still, holding a letter. I found it!

Georgiana What did you find?

Emelia The letter. From my mother. She said she was sending it.

Georgiana Did she?

Emelia Yes. My mother said she was sending it to me with some photos, but it was here all along. I must have had it all the time. (She is reading it.) But it’s something she told me anyway. I knew this anyway. What she says in the letter. I don’t get it.

Georgiana What does she say?

Emelia reads the letter. As she reads she becomes her mother. There is a physical morphing, or gestural code to indicate this.

Emelia That morning, we’d been playing in the apple orchard. I’d smashed a window but it wasn’t just my fault, Sophie was there too. We were late and Nina sent Sophie home. It was hot I remember. She had to walk, by herself. It was after lunch, the hottest part of the day. She had to cross the river to get to her house, over the bridge. There were often people swimming in the river, teenagers mostly, on the weekends, and she must have gone for a swim, or a paddle, or something. The current wasn’t so very strong but the water was a pale muddy brown and always cold. Sometimes you could see fish come up to catch insects on the surface.

When Nina got home Sophie wasn’t there. Mrs. Archer had left and Nina went home and Sophie was meant to be there but she wasn’t. She wasn’t anywhere. Nina went out looking for her. Up and down the street. She went down to the river but she couldn’t find her and eventually the men were sent out. It was dark by then and they took torches under the bridge and up and down the banks of the river. They found her eventually a mile and a half down stream. Her body was hooked on a log. She’d drowned. She was eleven years old. It wasn’t my fault. It wasn’t.
She looks at the letter, turns it over and back again. She had become her mother during this sequence and is upset and angry and close to tears.

This isn’t my letter. This doesn’t belong to me. This has got nothing to do with me! This is my mother’s story.

Georgiana  Maybe she wanted you to have it anyway.
Scene 15

Death of Nina’s child.

Segue into Nina searching in the boxes frantically. This has a slightly heightened dream sequence feel. She goes from box to box. Looking. The phone begins to ring. She is in the grip of dreadful anxiety. Finally she finds something. She pulls it out of the box, it is a blanket. She wraps it up carefully and cradles it like a child. She begins to coo and laugh and sing quietly to the child in Czech. Nancy has been sitting there all the time. She watches Nina. The phone stops.

Nancy’s Train Ride

Nancy I often go into the city on the train. I like to do my shopping there and it’s good to get free of the children. For a little while. Nina can take them. She’s Czechoslovakian you know. She told me that there had been some trouble with her husband, with the government. He died and now she’s got someone else, but he’s not much good. But at least she’s got Sophie. Yes, Nina can take the children, while I’m out, I’m sure. I’ve given her my husband’s phone number at the bank so if anything goes wrong she could call him and if the older two are at school then she’s only got the baby.

Phone Scene. (Nina and Nancy)

Phone rings again. It’s in a box. Nina puts the baby down and looks for the phone. Finally she finds it. She keeps looking at the phone ringing. She holds it away from herself and speaks above the ringing.

Nina Hello? Hello? Is anyone there? Hello. In Czech … (Hello, hello? Is someone there? Nicky, is that you? Nicky, where are you? Speak to me …)

Nancy watches Nina for a moment, puzzled.

Nancy Nina, why don’t you answer?

Nina I’m sorry I … there is, I don’t know… I cannot say…you speak … hands her the phone.

Nancy Hello? Hello? Hello? Is anyone there? She looks into the receiver, expecting to see something, a clue perhaps … Hello? Nothing … there’s no answer …
Scene 16

Impounded car. Emelia and Joel.

Joel comes running in, Emelia is sitting there, playing with her shoe, burying it a pile of sand and pulling it out again. She’s thinking.

Joel They’ve gone. They’ve taken the car.
Emelia Where?
Joel I don’t know. It’s gone. They’ve taken it.
Emelia They can’t do that! They can’t just leave us here. What are we meant to do?
Joel I don’t know. … they opened the boot. They saw the guns. They knew already. They knew the boxes were there. They’ve just been waiting for us.
Emelia Do you think?
Joel Yeah.
Emelia It’s OK. We just have to find a way to … did you give them some money?
Joel They weren’t the police
Emelia What do you mean?
Joel They found the guns, they took them. They took the car. They don’t care about the money.
Emelia Well, if they were the police they might have just impounded the car. It might be OK.
Joel They’ve gone. They’ve stolen it. And they’ve taken the guns as well.
Emelia They can’t have just left us here! Why have they left us here? How are we going to get back? What are we meant to do?
Joel How the fuck should I know!
Emelia What are we going to do?
Joel I don’t know. How the fuck am I supposed to know! Fuck!

Joel walks off. Emelia scrabbles around in her bag for the phone. She can’t find it. She empties her bag out in the dust in frustration. She hunts around in the sand, looking for something…a phone? a key? A gun? A letter?
Nina’s nightmare.

Nina runs through the space with the ash (or sand) wrapped up in newspaper. The ash wrapped in newspaper could be a recurring theme for Nina. She holds it like a baby.

Nina (In Czech) … Nicky, is that you? Where are you? Nicky? Nicky where are you? Say something, anything. Nicky if that is you, where are you? Speak to me please, please …

Emelia’s Spider Nightmare

Sound of a clock ticking. Emelia emerges out of the shadows. She’s carrying a doll. Nina stops and stares at her.

Emelia (She is breathing heavily and fast.) I can hear Sophie crying. I’m a child. It’s the middle of the night. I’ve woken up and it’s three in the morning. I know the time because I can see it on the clock. It’s 10 past three actually. The house is so quiet. It’s awful to think I’m the only one awake. That clock keeps ticking in the darkness. I wonder why I can see the clock. There must be light coming from somewhere. I turn over toward the window. Light shines through, moonlight. The curtain is open. The night is shining through the window and no one else is awake. It’s just me and the night and no one else.

Joel? Joel! Where are you?

Joel (from a distance) I’m just trying to get a signal … oh, here we go …

Emelia Outside of the blankets the air is cold. Half of me is hot, the other half is cold, but I’m not sure which half. I turn my head and there is a dull sick throbbing at the base of my skull. I feel sick. I try not to breathe too hard because breathing makes it worse. Breathing makes it really bad. I feel really bad.

(Clock keeps ticking.)

There is something moving over by the curtain. Over by the curtain, the night is shining in and something is moving. It’s coming in through the curtain or around it or under. I can see the curtain moving as what ever it is starts to shift about. What is it? A wave of nausea hits me hard. I can’t sit up because of what ever is making the curtain move and I can’t move anyway because then I really will be sick. My neck is held tight and my head hurts. I lie there staring, I’m breathing hard now but I’m not getting any air.
And the creature is coming … coming out from behind the
curtain, huge and dark and hairy. The curtain moves again and I
can see it. It scuttles up the curtain and disappears – and then
another and another. The curtain is alive. (Sounds of clock
ticking morphs into phone ringing with maybe sounds of gun
shots as well.) Their eyes are red and I can smell a horrible sour
smell billowing out. There are thousands. They drop off the
curtain and onto the bookshelf and keep coming, more and more,
first one and then another, a stream, an army covering the wall,
the floor. I start to scream. I scream and scream. The vomit
follows the scream and the spiders enter the vomit. Spiders and
vomit and screaming, it won’t stop. I’m vomiting up spiders.

**Emelia and Joel Death Sequence.**

Emelia is kneeling in the sand. She is looking for something, amid the spiders and
the vomit and the sand. She is pulling things out of her bag, laying them out
around her. She is also sifting through the sand. She’s cursing under her breath.
Feverishly looking for something. Is it a phone, a key, a gun, a letter? Joel
comes up behind her. She has her back to him but she knows he’s there.

Emelia  Joel, Joel, where are you!

He tries ringing his mobile and turns away from her.

Joel  There’s no line. There’s no connection. Here it is … it’s ringing …
Hello! … it’s your mother …

Emelia keeps cursing under her breath. Keeps looking in her bag. Pulling things
out. Searching for something. He’s walking away from her.

How are you? You’re lucky you caught us together.

As he walks passed her, he is shot. He falls to the ground. She turns to look at
what is happening. She goes to get up to reach him. She is shot too, a number of
times. It is very violent, there is blood. They both lay there in the sand. This
sequence could happen in slow motion, and be repeated, be somehow
decomposed physically and then put together again. It could be quite technical
in this way. There could be opportunities replaying part of the spider/vomit
speech, to link the childhood memory that is exhumed in the moment of violent
death. There is the possibility to keep replaying it, as a traumatic return.

Nancy runs in and sees all the vomit/dead bodies.

She stops next to Nina.

Nancy  Oh my goodness. Oh, look at this. What a mess. What a dreadful sorry
mess. Oh dear. Dear, dear. A bucket. That’s what we need. We need a
bucket.

She runs off. Nina follows her.
Nina hangs herself.

Nina reappears with a rope. She is preparing to hang herself. Nancy enters with the bucket and watches her. It is like a ritual.

Nancy
Nina, what is it? Whatever is the matter?

Nina
The roses, I look. I can’t find. Someone took. I can’t find the roses. I call out the men, they look, up and down the river. Who took? Who could have? Where?

The performers/dancers in this sequence become like Angels of Death. They help hook Nina up to ropes attached to a pulley. She helps them put a noose around her neck. She gathers up the remaining ash and newspaper and sand and holds it to her body like a baby (intimations of the iconic Virgin Mary?). At some point she lets the paper unravel. Sand falls all over everyone. Still holding the paper, it looks like a scroll.

Georgiana
(Looking at the suspended Nina. She wrings her hands) Oh! I have gone through much and more than I would ever suffer anyone to do again. I fear … I need not say fear … I know I have not made the use of those afflictions that God designed. It was so hard. I could not see it was in love. It was wicked, and I am not fully reconciled even now.

Nancy
Nina?

Nina
Nancy, who could have taken them?

Nancy
Don’t worry about the roses. Don’t worry about the ash. It doesn’t matter, I shouldn’t have worried you about it. Really, it doesn’t matter where you put it.

Nina
I’m sorry. Is gone. Is … finish.

Nancy
Nina, really don’t worry. The roses don’t matter at all. We’ve got far too much to do to worry about the roses.

The other performers start to pull her up. Nina becomes like an angel on high. She is beatified.

Music. It is quite a romantic moment.

Nancy and Georgiana stand together. Nancy still holds the bucket. Georgiana is holding a phone.

Nina’s arms are held out. The music is still playing.

The performers return to the buckets and all do a bucket dance, under Nina who is still hanging from the rope.

At some point the dancers all stop. Focus resolves on Georgiana.
The music stops.

Georgiana and illness.

Georgiana takes up a position on stage, her body takes on the shape of a flower. She and Nina are in somewhat the same shape. The flower projections come into focus behind her. She is a specimen dried and pressed. Speaks to the audience but also to the performers and dancers on stage.

In all my illness and real suffering, I did not forget you. As Spring approached I lamented not being able to gather the flowers as they came out. Once Molloy in kangaroo hunting brought me a bouquet of beautiful scarlet flowers also dried and which please God I ever get about again I shall send and mark. I was surprised during my illness to receive a nosegay from a native who was aware of my floral passion. These too are under preparation for you.

Emelia’s exit.

Emelia walks in. She has exited during the dance and re-enters with a letter. She speaks to Georgiana. She is very angry.

Emelia How could you?

Georgiana I’m sorry?

Emelia I found it. I found the letter. The real letter!

Georgiana You did!

Emelia I found it. The letter from my mother, that wasn’t it, was it? That was just a … I don’t know, a clue or something.

Georgiana I don’t think anyone is making anything up.

Emelia This one’s the real one. This is the real story. I don’t know who this letter is from but it’s about you, isn’t it? I can’t believe it! How could you?

Georgiana How could I what?

Emelia (Emelia reads from the letter. Every one is listening.) On 2 February, 1841, George Layman, a settler at Wonnerup, whose supply of flour was limited, was greatly annoyed when a black named Quibean or Gawall obtained some damper from a servant by strategy. Mr. Layman seized Quibean by the beard and shoulders, and shook him severely. Quibean bided his time, approached Mr. Layman from the rear, and speared him through the back and heart.

You knew about this, didn’t you?

Georgiana Go on.
Emelia: The white men throughout Wonnerup, Capel, Vasse, and Blackwood banded together to take a dire revenge. They would no longer quietly bear these terrible murders after the liberal treatment extended towards the black men. Colonel (captain) Molloy ordered his soldiers to prepare to march, and he took command of them and the chief settlers in the south-western districts. He gave special instructions that no woman or child should be killed, but that no mercy should be offered the men. A strong and final lesson must be taught to the blacks. All were well armed.

So this is what I was meant to find out? This is it? This is what really happened? This is the secret?

Georgiana: Every man has a secret. He was my husband. What was I supposed to do?

Emelia: Right. Every man has a secret. Every woman too it seems. You’re not a flower, you and him both, you’re not even weeds, you’re …

Georgiana: I wanted you to have it. The letter …

Emelia: Is that all you’ve got to say? After what you’ve done?

Georgiana: Keep reading.

Emelia: You read it. Gives the letter to Georgiana.

Georgiana: She looks at it. I don’t like to. You read it. Passes it to Nancy.

Nancy: No, I couldn’t possibly. Here Nina, you take it.

Nina: But my English…

Georgiana, (and the others, encouraging her) That doesn’t matter. Go on …

Nina reluctantly comes down and takes the letter. She begins to read in faltering, heavily accented English. At some point she passes the letter on to someone else, who passes it on to someone else, including Joel and also maybe the dancers (breaking the ‘actorly’ frame, they may even ask someone in the audience if they would like to read?). It finishes up with Emelia.

Into the remote places this party went, bent on killing without mercy. Through the woods, among rocky hills and shaded valleys, they searched for the black men. When they saw them they shouldered their muskets, and shot them down. Isolated natives were killed during the first few days, and, so it is said, some women among them, but the main body had hidden from the terrible white men. A few parties fled from the threatened districts to the southern coast, and escaped. The majority hid in the thick bush around Lake Mininup.
Although several natives were killed, the settlers and soldiers were not satisfied. They redoubled their energy, determined to wreak vengeance on the main body. They rode from district to district, from hill to hill, and searched the bush and thickets. At last they traced the terrified fugitives to Lake Mininup. Here and there a native was killed, and the others seeing that their hiding place was discovered fled before the determined force.

They rushed to a sand patch beyond Lake Mininup. Colonel Molloy observed a boy forsaken by his parents. He rode up to him, and to save him took him on his saddle. The lad, whose name was Burnin, survived, and lived in the district until a short time ago. The soldiers pushed on, and surrounded the black men on the sand patch. There was now no escape for the fugitives, and their vacuous cries of terror mingled with the reports of the white men’s guns. Native after native was shot, and the survivors, knowing that orders had been given not to shoot the women, crouched on their knees, covered their bodies with their bokas, and cried, “Me yokah” (woman). The white men had no mercy. The back men were killed by dozens, and their corpses lined the route of march of the avengers. Then the latter went back satisfied.

On the sand patch near Mininup, skeletons and skulls of natives reported to have been killed in 1841 are still to be found. Mixed with them are the bones of dogs shot on the same day. Occasionally a sand drift covers them, and then again it discloses them to the sun. Surviving natives held the place in such terror that they would not go near to give the corpses burial. Even now natives refuse to disturb the bones.

*Emelia stands on top of a pile of sand. The projections scroll and play about her again as they did in the beginning. She holds the letter in her hands. She gets the other two letters, one from her mother, the other she herself has written to Joel, out of her pocket and buries all three of them in the sand.*

**Emelia**  
The poet Mallarme says:

Every man has a secret in him, many die without finding it and will never find it because they are dead, it no longer exists, nor do they. I am dead and risen again with the jeweled key of my last spiritual casket. It is up to me now to open it in the absence of any borrowed impression, and its mystery will emanate in a sky of great beauty. (Mallarme, in a letter dated July 16, 1866)

This is not an entry it’s an exit. I don’t know where it is, but it’s up in the sky, in the clouds, somewhere. There is a scroll. It’s what I’ve done in my life.

Why am I feeling so hysterical?

I must remember, this isn’t a farce, it’s the real thing.
I’m being very brave I must admit. The angel’s have been singing and there’s a tear on my cheek as I turn to go. The tears are on the outside. Perhaps you are wondering what’s going on, on the inside?

I have always wondered.

*She stands and picks up the buckets again and circles off. The other performers do the same.*

The End
Afterword

Following a dialogical movement, across the lie of the land between theatre practice and theatre theory, I write an afterword, here (and now), because there is no conclusion to the body in place. In fact, as Casey notes, “just as there is no place without body – without the physical or psychical traces of body – so there is no body without place.” He goes on, “although displaced bodies are frequently found, an unimplaced body is as difficult to conceive as is a bodiless place … we are bound by body to be in place” (1993: 104). This thesis, that poses that the body makes place (actively and consciously) in theatre, is therefore, not concluded, but rather, awaits the next step in its continuing journey across practice and theory.

Throughout the thesis, I have worked toward finding a more complete understanding of the body in place in theatre. I have suggested that stories in theatre are located in place and that these places are created within the political, aesthetic and ethical contexts occupied by the bodies and minds of theatre makers and the audience. I have argued that the moment of meaning making in theatre occurs across a triple capture of place; it not only takes into account the given circumstances the play text and mise-en-scene, but also, the given circumstances of the people who bring the work to life and the material and social contexts in which the work is performed. I suggest that this connection between body and mind, across a theatre space and in context, gives equal footing to the lived reality of the body and puts into relief the universalising and pre-determining ideologies of systematic thought. Such a connection in theatre, allows people to gather together and consider, for a time, the ties that bind them by their common humanity, and
without “foreclosure” (Casey, 1993: 314), to each other in art and in communities, in society, and in the world.

Casey reminds his readers that getting back into place, the homecoming that matters most, is an ongoing task that calls for continuing journeying between and among places. Just as there is no limit to the ways in which we may back into places, there is no effective end to how we may continue our ingression into their indefinite future. (1993: 314)

Theatre, of course, offers an infinite number of ways to ‘ingress’ into place. I have traced a topological analysis of three theatre works that journey into different Australian versions of place, and have created my own with the importance of placial relationships at the forefront of my mind.

I have suggested that a poetics and dramaturgical focus on place can be pursued to great effect in theatre. I have tried to uncover some of the cultural and theoretical pre-suppositions that might be operating in the making of place in Australia and highlighted these in my case studies, in the belief that such an awareness might facilitate greater freedom of thought and expression in the theatre, and greater understanding of the importance of making place outside of the theatre.

The play between methexis and mimesis in Yandy, for example, offers an opportunity to explore a particular dynamic between cultures that could be harnessed and developed in future work, not only in the theatre but in other place-making contexts as well. The understanding of the creation and flow of capital in social space, as presented in a Lefebvrian reading of place in this case study, also highlights how theatre can work to alter the place of a group of Indigenous people and, of course, non-Indigenous people, in the place that they all live, Western Australia.

The Odyssey, I believe, offers a fascinating insight into how Western ways of creating or rather re-creating place facilitate conditions of modernity (or supermodernity
following a reading of the creation of ‘non-place’ by Augé), that can only foster
displacement and dislocation into the place-making future of the Western world. The
ambivalence that is evident toward notions of ‘home’ throughout this theatrical mapping
of a colonial adventure, highlights for me, Australia’s own uncertain relationship with
the country that white settler’s have taken to be their own.

I refer to the theme of the ‘geopathology’ of home outlined by Una Chaudhuri (1995) in
my reading of The Drover’s Wives, and posit that the multiple Drover’s Wives of this
production can be understood as five versions of an Australian Penelope, each offering
her own embodied experience of being at ‘home’ in the bush, while her husband is
away. The dance-based, Australian dreaming of these five Wives, posits that knowledge
that is held by the body, might be able to answer and refute the cultural imperatives
imposed by myths that do not necessarily tell the whole story of people’s experience in
place.

My own creative work explores place-making from a number of perspectives. I have
written with a theoretical curiosity that aims to tap of the deep processes involved in
place-making. For example, in the Prologue, I trace different cultural inscriptions and
bodily incursions into place in order to explore the way in which the ‘Code of
Modernity’ might overtake an Indigenous environment. I have also tried to write with
an aesthetic awareness of place-making in theatre, creating place as a dramatic
proposition that engages with the audience though affect. I continue this process in the
play I have written. In Orchids and Insects, I have endeavoured to make a particular
place between each of the characters, and also between the characters and the situations
they find themselves in. My task in both creative pieces has been to combine theoretical
and dramatic approaches to making place in theatre and to work with an emerging
poetics and dramaturgy of place.
I have also tried to write with the knowledge that I occupy a place myself within society and have responsibilities to those around me. This was brought ‘home’ to me most forcefully in my discovery of the blind spots in my research (and in the research of others) concerning aspects of the character and history of both Georgiana and John Molloy. These glaring omissions once brought into focus underline, for me, the fact that places and the people who inhabit them are not always what we think them to be. Places, I have discovered during the course of my research, are dynamic and liable to change. Such omissions or lack of connection between different ways of knowing the world also suggest, to me, that compartmentalising knowledge into discreet disciplines is sometimes counterproductive.

The poetical themes and dramaturgical processes that come into focus through the prism of place in all these theatre works and in my research into them can be developed further and more systematically (and with continued affective involvement). Such an investigation could usefully mine the resources of other disciplines for precedents and paradigms. Architecture and landscape design, for example, are very much in the business of ‘hands-on’ place-making. Disciplines such as ethnology and anthropology, history, cultural geography, and of course, philosophy, seek to understand the fundamental ontological state of the body in place and also the political, social and physical contexts in which bodies in place exist. Theatre theory and theatre making have, I believe, much to gain from an interdisciplinary engagement with the body in

---

106 I have applied something of Massumi’s triple articulation of architecture within this thesis’ triple capture of place in theatre. And Casey, for example, mentions “what Husserl considered geometry of vagueness” (1993: 167) that I think could be a useful paradigm in theatre-making. Within a ‘geometry of vagueness’, both Cartesian and Euclidean universal notions of geometry are paired, or rather, form a participatory synergy with more topological aspects of nature. This synergy underscores the garden designs of William Kent and Capability Brown (1993: 161 - 68). I have worked with theatre directors that use spatial limitations such as restricting movement paths along diagonal lines, horizontal axes, etc, or have been instructed as part of a group to “form a clump” and then “form a line” in the space following impulse between the bodies in the space. These types of instructions work with energy of the body, or with the body as part of a stage architecture. Taken as a contextualised study from other disciplines, which could then applied to theatre, systematically, such practices could provide place-aware dramaturgies or approaches to performance making, which I think are well worth exploring.
place. These disciplines also have much to gain from an engagement with bodies in place in theatre.

Theatre can, I suggest, provide a proof of concept and working model, as well as an inspirational forum for (embodied) experimentation with ideas, hunches and flights of fancy about what it is, has been, or might yet come to be, human and in place.
Bibliography


Muecke, Stephen. 1997. *No Road (Bitumen All the Way)*. South Fremantle, W.A.: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.


Richardson, Sally. 2006. *The Drover’s Wives* Program Notes: Steamworks Arts Production.


