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EXAMINING ALCHEMY:

WRITING SOPH AND THE REAL WORLD

Susan Jane Modric BA, MLitt

A thesis submitted for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Creative Arts at James Cook University

August 2012

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Susan Jane Modric

Date:

Statement on the contribution of others

I, the author, would like to recognize that this thesis would not have been possible without the contribution of others.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution towards this work of the Australian Postgraduate Award in the form of the scholarship provided me from 2009 until 2012, in liaison with the Graduate Research School, and the intellectual contribution of my supervisory team: Associate Professor Michael Beresford, Professor Ryan Daniel and Associate Professor Stephen Torre.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of JUTE Theatre Company's *Enter stage write* program, and Peter Matheson's contribution towards the play in the form of dramaturgical guidance throughout the drafting process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Associate Professor Michael Beresford for his guidance throughout the research process. His sharp insights illuminated ways forward on those occasions I felt lost in the process.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Professor Ryan Daniel for his consistent support and availability, and my research monitor Associate Professor Stephen Torre for his input, and for urging me, all those years ago, to sparkle the words.

Much gratitude and love go to my family and friends, in particular my mother, Betty Modric, who has, variously and often, offered babysitting, food, tea and good counsel.

Thank you to my cousin Dr. Peter Wood, who was a year ahead of me in the PhD process and who, therefore, was a constant and edifying source of practical information as I negotiated the journey to becoming a researcher.

My thanks and love go to all the musicians I have played with, and especially to my dear friends Philip Rigg and Michael J. Kenny who invited me over to their place, and to Gary Ward who taught me that it's all about the song.

My most sincere thanks, too, to Bernd Seidl, for his insights into addiction, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the consequences and treatment of sexual abuse, and the therapeutic process.

I would like to acknowledge JUTE Theatre Company and the *Enter stage write* program for guidance through the playwriting process, and the other playwrights I met there for their honesty, wit and company along the way.

Thanks must go also to dramaturg Peter Matheson for his expert supervision throughout the drafting process, and his unerring and often startling ability to get inside my head.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my daughter, Juliette Solowiej, who was nine when I began this project and twelve when I finished, and who therefore has lived a quarter of her life with it. She has been stellar.

Abstract

This thesis comprises a creative work; a play entitled *Soph and the real world*, and an exegesis which examines the process by which this work was created. As the play is my first, the thesis demonstrates the active establishment of a playwriting praxis, utilising my existent musical skills with sound and rhythm and my bodily experience of the live performed moment. It illuminates a writing experience which is peculiarly musical and sensory, and one, also, which gives particular attention to dreams and the Unconscious as sources of inspiration.

Beginning with the question, ‘How will I, using my existing skills with music and prose, write a play, and in so doing, establish a new playwriting practice?’, I proposed that the writing would be a type of *alchemy*, in that a multitude of influences would combine in the *crucible* of my body where the creative process would occur; the transformation of the raw data of my every day, what I termed *trash*, into the *gold* of the play. My creative practice led the inquiry and consequently the exegesis is as much a study of practice-led research methodology as it is of the creative process itself.

As the play uses jazz to build atmospheres and features it as a significant influence in the back story of the main character, I drew specifically on my experiences of jazz throughout the writing, something which became clear upon reflection. Seeking a stance to unify the project, I then drew on these techniques of practice to develop a personal jazz-based methodology which applies to both the creative and exegetical elements. This thesis, in its entirety, aims to enhance understanding of creative processes and demonstrate a different way of inquiry for creative and research practice.

Table of Contents

EXAMINING ALCHEMY:	I
WRITING <i>SOPH AND THE REAL WORLD</i>	I
STATEMENT OF ACCESS	II
STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP	III
STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
ABSTRACT	VI
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VII
TABLE OF FIGURES	X
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	3
THE PROPOSAL: FORGETTING, REMEMBERING	3
INSPIRATION.....	5
SOME KIND OF VOODOO.....	6
DREAMING UP THE RESEARCH QUESTION	9
THE LOOSENING OF HOLDS, REVELATION	10
CLEAN STREETS AND THE STORY OF A SONG	12
FINDING <i>ALCHEMY</i>	14
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES (FORGOTTEN THINGS)	14
ARTEFACT AND EXEGESIS: INTEGRATION	15
AN ALCHEMY FOR THE STAGE: ARTAUD, BECKETT AND KANE.....	16
DREAMING UP THE PLAY.....	17
ANOTHER CINDERELLA STORY	18
PRACTICE TAKES THE LEAD	19
DOES IT <i>SWING</i> ?.....	19
EXAMINING THE EXAMINER: REFLECTION, INTUITION AND JAZZ.....	21
SHAPING UP: CONJURING, DENOTING AND INDICATING	21
STRUCTURE	22
CHAPTER TWO: SPINNING THE WEB	24
CREATIVE WRITERS AND PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH.....	24
OVERVIEW	26
SECTION 1: ON CREATIVE WRITING AND CURRENT ACADEMIC RESEARCH	27

A NOTE ON CREATIVE WRITING AS RESEARCH	33
SECTION 2: INFLUENCES.....	34
<i>On writing and the body</i>	36
<i>On memory and the body</i>	39
<i>On musicality and writing</i>	42
<i>On music and chills</i>	46
<i>On music, anticipation and reversals</i>	48
<i>On writing and constraint</i>	49
<i>Dada: An attitude</i>	50
<i>Surrealism and dreams</i>	51
<i>The Unconscious</i>	52
<i>Why the brain is like spaghetti</i>	54
<i>Nailing jelly to the wall</i>	55
<i>Antonin Artaud: Alchemy of the senses</i>	56
The blueprint	56
Process.....	57
<i>Manifesting Artaud: Beckett and Kane</i>	59
Samuel Beckett.....	59
Sarah Kane	60
CONCLUSION	62
CHAPTER THREE: CHIAROSCURO, TISSUE, EXEGESIS	63
UNSAYABLE, UNSPEAKABLE, UNWRITABLE	63
CLOSE UP: THE GRAIN	64
AND THE AGAIN, ONCE THE AGAIN (CUTTING UP)	67
THE 'I' EXEGETICAL.....	69
MY MY SPAGHETTI.....	70
ENOUGH ABOUT ME, WHAT DO YOU THINK (ABOUT ME)?	71
ENCOUNTERS ENCOUNTERS ENCOUNTERS.....	75
CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD	80
OVERVIEW	80
ESTABLISHING THE FRAMEWORK	82
<i>Creative choices and constraints</i>	82
<i>Enter stage write and dramaturgy</i>	83
<i>Peter Matheson</i>	84
PRACTICE TAKES THE LEAD: WRITING <i>SOPH</i> AND <i>THE REAL WORLD</i>	85
<i>The drafting process: Imagining Soph</i>	86
<i>Frankly Darkly and the unsayable</i>	88

<i>Just write</i>	91
REFLECTING ON THE PLAYWRITING PROCESS	92
<i>Jazz and writing: Feeling my way to integration</i>	93
<i>Intuition, rhythm and musicality</i>	95
<i>Coming alive to intuition, dreams and the Unconscious</i>	97
<i>Epiphanies: Action and reversals</i>	99
<i>The playwriting method unearthed: a summary</i>	100
JAZZ AND THE ART OF PLAYWRITING	100
<i>A jazz/swing stance</i>	101
REFLECTING ON REFLECTION: IMPROVISING METHODOLOGY	103
INTUITION: COMMON GROUND	104
<i>Research as intuitive inquiry</i>	106
JOURNALING: WHAT WENT IN THE TRASH.....	108
JAZZ/SWING METHOD: RESEARCH STRATEGIES.....	110
<i>Coming alive to the work: the body and sensory experience</i>	111
<i>Dreams and the unconscious: attending the inner world</i>	111
<i>Rhythm and musicality</i>	112
<i>Taking a stance</i>	112
CONCLUSION	113
CHAPTER FIVE: SOPH AND THE REAL WORLD.....	114
CHARACTERS	115
ACT ONE	116
ACT TWO	147
ACT THREE.....	177
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	193
THE (MY) MUSICAL BODY: CHILLS, THRILLS AND COMING ALIVE	196
DREAMS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS: ENGAGING THE MARVELLOUS	198
RHYTHM AND MUSICALITY: CHASING SWING	200
TAKING A STANCE TO THE WORK: JAZZ SWING.....	201
CONTRIBUTIONS TO CURRENT RESEARCH	203
IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION.....	204
VALUING CREATIVITY	207
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	208
CONCLUSION	209
WORKS CITED	210

Table of Figures

Figure 1 METRONOME.....	96
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While a complete mastery of life is mere illusion, the real secret of the game is to make life swing

(Ralph Ellison 1970)

sound

falls round me like rain on other folks

saxophones wet my face

cold as winter in st. louis

hot like peppers I rub on my lips

thinking they was lilies

I got fifteen trumpets where other women got hips

& a upright bass for both sides of my heart

I walk round in a piano like somebody else be walkin on the earth

I live in music

live in it

(Ntozake Shange cited in Pope 2005 p252)

Chapter one: Introduction

Soph Right, well, you know what? This is my place, and I will be as imaginative and, and ‘artistic’ as I want, okay?

(*Soph and the real world* p144)

The proposal: Forgetting, remembering

When I set out, in 2009, on a journey to explore my creative writing process through an examination of the writing of my first play, it was with the understanding that capturing and describing such a phenomenon would be challenging. I began, however, with that sense present at the beginning of all my creative endeavours; that anything was possible, and that a way would be found to describe the writing process as I experienced it. My writing experience to that point was as a songwriter and musician¹, and I had completed a Master of Letters in Creative Writing² in 2008 where I focused predominantly on the short story form.

I proposed initially, for the purposes of this project, that writing, for me, was a type of *alchemy*, and my body the *crucible* in which that alchemical process would occur, where various *elements* would combine and be transformed into the artefact. I asked ‘How will I, using my existing skills with music and prose, write a play, and in so doing, establish a new playwriting practice?’ Particularly drawn to Antonin Artaud’s theory (1970), I decided that his ideas about theatre as ‘poetry for the senses’ (p27) would provide a springboard for my playwriting.

My proposal and research question seemed reasonable, and broad enough to allow room for creativity in the answering. Writing this now, with the thesis (both play and exegesis) almost complete, it still seems so, however, for the most part of the research, I forgot these plans, or at least, after much frustration, relegated them to some unconscious corner of my mind where they wouldn’t trip me up, as they threatened to, while sitting at the centre of my consciousness. Methodologically, this flinging of the initial proposal into some dark corner represented the important step of allowing my creative practice to lead the research, an unavoidable move if the

¹ My fifteen years of practice as a professional musician include song writing, recording and touring live shows.

² At CQUniversity

work of playwriting was to flow, and flow it did, satisfyingly so, with the play (written under the guidance of dramaturg Peter Matheson as part of JUTE Theatre Company's *Enter stage write* program) now scheduled for production by JUTE Theatre in 2013.

With the creative component completed in this way, I turned once again to that dark corner, coaxed the question back to the centre of things, and began, like Donald Schon's 'reflective practitioner' (2011) to re-enter, via memory, that creative playwriting space in order to describe what had happened. Daunted, at first, I gradually, and using a method similar to Rosemarie Anderson's 'intuitive inquiry' (2000), discovered that my musical skills, and particularly my experiences with jazz, seemed to have been engaged as I wrote. In order to illuminate these intersections between my musicality and my burgeoning playwriting practice I began a literature search which spanned disciplines, and included psychological and neuroscientific perspectives (and specifically here, Daniel Levitin's research on the neuroscience of music 2008) as well as what writers themselves say about writing, to find a means to describe this creative space. What has resulted is a personal method for playwriting based on my musicality, which manifests specifically for this project as a jazz-based method.

As both dreams and my sensory experiences played a part in the writing, I looked to Breton's *Manifestoes of surrealism* (1972) with reference to Freud's notion of the Unconscious to describe and explain how I engage with dreams and other Unconscious material; creating a dynamic internal interplay reminiscent of the jazz player's improvisatory practice. I found Cixous' call to women to write their bodies (1976) an important tool, and one which prompted me to delve into and find ways to report the physical, sensory aspects of my creative writing practice, calling on Elizabeth Grosz' theories about the body as the source of art (1994, 2005) for illumination on this topic.

Having described the creative process I began to reflect, for the purposes of the exegesis, and in order to 'custom-buil[d]' (Clough and Nutbrown 2007 p29) a research methodology, on the process of reflection I had undergone to examine the creative space, finding it to be the same reflexive, intuitive, improvisatory and bodily experience as the creative process had been, that is, I found I had approached it with the same ethos that I'd engaged for my creative work. From here the project began to streamline and synthesise into an holistic investigation of the stance I take to my creative and research practices, a stance derived from a personal ethos which is, in effect, my way of being in and making meaning from the world.

In reporting this research I have been consistently aware of certain conflicting desires. Firstly my urge as a performer to entertain, to engage the reader, to allow my creative voice to flow where it will, seemed to be at cross-purposes with the requirements of reporting academic research. Rather than, for example, the more entertaining slow reveal of a piece of prose or a

play, I was required to state up front all that was to follow (and where's the suspense in that?). Secondly, the desire to describe the process as fully as possible came up against a dread of reducing the living breathing reality of it to mere words on a page. Sophie Nicholls writes,

If I approach the writing with the self-imposed rule that each word I write must be precisely representative of my thinking and can never be changed, I will be stopping the process. Instead, I begin tentatively, risk a little, find a rhythm (p65).

Like Nicholls, in risking, in finding a rhythm, I have approached these pages with all of my desires at play, seeking to engage, inform, persuade and report, and, much like Brad Haseman suggests, who, referring to a poem by Peter Abbs, describes creative writing researchers as 'tight rope walkers', I have walked the wire, and allowed intuition to guide me as often as intellect.

This chapter summarises the journey the research took from the initial dream-inspired proposal, through the development of the play and to the resulting reflection on, and definition of, a personal methodology for both my creative and research practices.

Inspiration

I can't sleep. There is a sort of burning in my gut. I get out of bed finally and pace the floor, trying to figure out what's wrong with me. I feel unsettled and physically uncomfortable. Am I sick? Eventually, instinctively, I reach for my guitar. To my amazement, a song comes flowing out, full and complete. I have written songs before but not like this. They came in fragments, this one just *pours* out. The hairs stand up on the back of my neck. Where did it come from? Me? Somewhere in me I am not conscious of? *Something else*? What? A muse? Divine inspiration?! I write the song³ in fifteen minutes. I fall straight to sleep after.

The next week I perform it to an audience. They listen, they sing along with the second, third and fourth chorus. The hairs stand up on the back of my neck as I sing. An audience member comes to me after. 'You know,' she says, 'when you sang that song, the hairs stood up on the back of my neck.' I have been in thrall to the creative process ever since.

³ 'Francine' (Modric 1996)

Some kind of voodoo

How do writers write? Like me at the outset of this study, many writers experience the creative process as a largely mysterious phenomenon. Playwright Edward Albee, still prolific in his eighties and, therefore, likely well acquainted with his own particular process, says of creativity, '[i]t's a concept I don't comprehend, and I don't think it can be discussed' (2009), referring to the process as 'black magic'. Paul Auster speaks of his desire to be 'less self-reflective, less philosophical, less worried . . . [about] . . . theoretical problems', and to 'just [slide] into these projects with [his] unconscious and [grope his] way through them (in Rabalais 2009, p20).'

Many writers also experience the creative process, as I do, in their bodies. For me, my neck-hairs are a good indication that what I am writing is true, that is, the real thing, and not something I have consciously contrived. In an article for *TEXT*, playwright Michael Beresford refers to his creative process as '*writerly* experience or *dreaming*' (2007). 'For me free writing means I write as in a trance, trying to access my unconscious,' he writes. He describes creative writing as an 'organic' process, stating that there are 'two fundamental conditions' pertaining to this process, 'the role of the unconscious mind as motor and initiator of unfolding material, and the engagement of the entire body in writing'. Poet Les Murray describes his experience similarly as an 'integration of the body-mind, and the dreaming-mind, and the daylight-conscious mind . . . all firing at once . . . all in concert' (2008).

These writers describe complex personal experiences but there exists, nevertheless, some obvious common ground. Many writers, when speaking of their writing, refer to a quality that may be described as *other*, the thing that is not 'I', not the conscious mind, from where the writing appears to arise. For Albee, it is 'black magic', for Auster and Beresford, the 'unconscious', and for others the source is a muse; something divine, as with, say, Milton, who invokes, as his muse, nothing less than the Holy Spirit, at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*: 'I thence/ Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,/ . . . Oh Spirit . . . Instruct me' (cited in Dyson and Lovelock 1973 p30).

A quick foray into the world of writers discussing writing could also leave the reader with the impression that writers are reluctant to delve too deeply into the workings of the process. When Albee refers to his creativity as some kind of 'voodoo' (2009) he makes plain that this is some kind of magic he is not prepared to mess with. Musician and artist Brian Eno referred to this notion when he commented, in interview, that 'artists are supposed to be sort of, passionate, inarticulate people who dredge things from the primitive centre of their beings', and that a boundary he wanted to question was the one between artistic work and intellectual work. He

called for articulacy from artists about their art stating that this primitive dredging process was not the 'whole story' (2009).

Writers and artists researching and recording their own processes are not, however, uncommon. In an article which traces the history of the creative doctorate in Australia, Nigel Krauth reminds the reader that artists like Paul Klee, and poet T.S. Eliot, amongst others, have taken time to analyse their own processes. He points out, though, that during the 1980s when the Creative Arts Doctorate was born in Australia, '(i)t was widely held . . . that creative artists were incapable of scholastic rigour or strategic thinking' (2011), echoing Brian Eno's frustration with the stereotyping of artists; dredging their own primitive depths, and having nothing at all to say about it.

Many writers have, in fact, had much to say about it. Theorists, for example, such as Roland Barthes (*The pleasure of the text* 1990) and Antonin Artaud (*Manifesto in clear language* 1976, p108) have written evocatively of the writing process as, amongst other things, a visceral experience. Barthes writes,

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas – for my body does not have the same ideas I do (1973 p17),

And Artaud:

This pain driven into me like a wedge . . . I have learned to distract myself from . . . by means of a false suggestion. . . For the space of that minute which is marked by the illumination of a lie, I concoct an idea of escape, I rush down a false trail prompted by my blood. I close the eyes of my intelligence and, giving voice to the unformulated within me, I offer myself the illusion of a system whose terms elude me. But this moment of error leaves me with the sense of having wrested from the unknown something real. I believe in spontaneous conjurations. On the paths along which my blood draws me it cannot be that one day I will not discover a truth (1973, p 91-2).

Writing, it seems, is *otherly*, visceral and mysterious, evoking both pleasure and pain. In the above quote, Artaud seems to be describing a sort of torture where pain is 'driven' into him, he 'rushes', 'wrests' with ideas, and concocts 'escape'. Reading his (creative) writings on process is, at times, difficult. The writing process intimidates. Perhaps, then, it is not that writers are afraid of delving, but that the subject matter, that is, the creative process, requires creative exploration and expression.

When contemplating topics for this exegesis, I knew that I would, considering my fascination with creative processes, be investigating, in some way, how I wrote; how I created a particular

work. This idea aligned with what were, according to Krauth, initial expectations for the creative doctorate in the 1990s that, ‘an exegesis should be a sort of critical journal, a reflective account of processes undertaken while creating the accompanying work, having a close umbilical relationship to it’ (2011).

A writer, stepping into the academic world, and preparing, as I intended, for a rigorous analysis of her own (complex, visceral, mysterious) creative processes encounters, unsurprisingly, a type of tension or anxiety in the space between the creative and the academic. Describing her encounter with this space Burr states ‘I found that being both the object and subject of my research was confronting’ (2007b p1). She suggests that ‘while guidelines exist, there are no absolutely right or wrong ways to produce a creative doctoral dissertation’ (2007a). Krauth reiterates this:

There’s a schizophrenia apparent in this situation. The researching writer, trying to be creative writer, is forced back to the role of critic distanced from the process, as opposed to being critic inside the process. The exegesis here wasn’t something home-grown in the Creative Writing discipline – it was an imposition from contextualising, ‘more authoritative’ disciplines (2011).

Further in the article, he encourages experimentation:

. . . radical writing and thinking, . . . breaking out beyond formal structures, will keep creative writing research vibrant and valid. There are many sites in the creative writing doctorate where experimentation can occur (2011).

Krauth’s article provides a point of departure, a launch pad, if you will, for writers such as myself, intent on investigating a process so obviously complex, of the body, so obviously *other*, a subject requiring more creative forms of expression.

I was not thinking of any of this, however, when I initially began pondering ideas for this project. I was sure of only two things. Firstly, I intended to write a play, and secondly, I wanted to explore the way in which I created that play. I knew that the exegesis would discuss process, and that that process involved my neck hairs. I thought perhaps my musicality would feature too. Beyond that, I knew nothing. I was, as is my writing way, relying on my unconscious for ideas, or as Gaylene Perry has described it, ‘*writing in the dark*’,

The words *writing in the dark* have multiple meanings for me as a writer of fiction working within a university. They have personal resonances, conjuring up my own environment of inspiration: waking at night, images and ideas flowing on in the dark. I waver between getting up, switching on

the light, and writing before the inspiration dissipates, distorted in sleep and dreams, or in lying still and letting the flow spend itself (1998).

It was just such a moment in the dark which began this journey. Flicking on the light and picking up my pen, I allowed my intuition to take the lead. After much meandering and looping back around, it has proven to be a suitable guide for an examination of this kind.

Dreaming up the research question

Soph There is *no way* that *you* came out of *my* unconscious.

FD Oh, you don't want to get into that.

Soph Into what?

FD Your unconscious. Talk about a mad woman's breakfast.

(Soph and the real world, p132).

I wake up full of a dream. To me, lying in the dark and still negotiating the edges of sleep, it seems to gleam, no, not gleam . . . flash . . . I need to catch it before it burns itself out, before I drop back into sleep. Is it worth capturing? It seems so, but by morning light how will it look? I sit up, my mind gets a firmer grip on the idea, and I begin to think.

I have dreamt of myself, the writer, walking along a path, collecting found objects and words, collecting rubbish, no, *trash*; the word feels more resonant, for the purpose of writing a play. I am reminded immediately of Dada, and Marcel Duchamp, whose work *Fountain* (1917), was a public urinal which he took from the street and placed in an art gallery, naming it art. I think about Surrealism and its focus on the importance of dreams as inspiration (Breton 1972). I think about the visual arts and the Found Object method. I decide I like the idea; that it's worth catching. In my dream, much like the Dadaists, I was taking found objects and, by transforming their context, was changing their nature, making *trash* into art. Awakened by the dream in the middle of the night I scribble my research proposal and the next week, submit it, just as it is.

The seed for this study came appropriately, then, coming as it did in a dream. Like Saint-Pol-Roux who, according to Breton, placed a placard on the door of his manor before he went to sleep which read: 'THE POET IS WORKING' (1972, p14), I began my research as I slept. The dream has been a potent symbol for the work, an image I continue to return to. It captures the essence of both the play itself and my creative process, and illuminates an important theme; that

creative thought, that is, the ability to follow these dream-like whims, to listen to peripheral thoughts and notice connections between disparate things, is as essential to my academic research as it is to my creative work.

The idea that scholarly research is creative is not, of course, new. Einstein refers to exactly this when he says,

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science (in Kaufman and Kaufman 1994 p191)

I was surprised therefore, when I encountered a dichotomy in thinking about these two areas within the culture of the university, as though the two were separate and distinct, one rational and methodical, the other emotional and wild. In an article entitled ‘The future of the doctorate in the arts’, Hilde Van Gelder and Jan Baetens describe this tension as ‘the battle of the faculties’, stating,

The Cartesian split between reason and emotion affects also the dominating educational structures in the West (2009 p100).

They go on further to say that this split is reflected, too, within the arts,

Art history and theory as well as musicology are hosted by university faculties, which emphasizes the rationality of their approach. The training in the practice of concrete arts and music, however, is located in specialized schools, which are separated by the theoretical environment. This ‘two cultures’ model within the arts has created a system in which one has to make a radical choice between two types of specializations: one has to become either an artist or a theoretician.

This split in the arts between theory and practice is currently being addressed through practice-led inquiry into artistic processes, as creative writers engaged in higher research, and experiencing this tension, find ways to examine and describe the theory/practice nexus through the academic investigation and analysis of their own creative processes. My research demonstrates how just such a tension led me eventually to the essential problem of my research; developing a means to resolve this tension via taking a stance to the work derived from my personal (musical) ethos, as much a study, then, of practice-led research methodology as it is of the creative writing process itself.

The loosening of holds, revelation

Einstein inspires too when it comes to the writing of this exegesis,

Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere
(cited in Hochfelder 2009 p6).

While it is not my intention to take the reader 'everywhere', I do intend something more imaginative than a logical A to B story; intend, even, to blur the boundary between the two. This is about writing, one writer's bid to mark the way she has walked. I have attempted to tie the rags of my unconscious to the trees along the way, to describe as best I can the landmarks I have passed, and to do it as logically or as creatively as was called for in each given section. It is a type of map rather than the usual trail of breadcrumbs; carried away by birds before anything can be made of them.

And now, you can see, I have slipped away from academic language, fallen already into (beloved) metaphor, into imagination. The words have an echo of fairy tale, a brush of whimsy, more than a splash of childhood. Should I warn you before I do this? Should I choose a **different font** to alert you to the change, to demonstrate that I know what it is I'm doing? Should I, perhaps, issue stage (page) directions?

(Writer suddenly falls into metaphor)

Writers will do what they do when describing what they do. Witness novelist Steven King on his muse,

There is indeed a half-wild beast that lives in the thickets of each writer's imagination. It gorges on a half-cooked stew of suppositions, superstitions and half-finished stories. It's drawn by the stink of the image-making stills writers paint in their heads. The place one calls one's study or writing room is really no more than a clearing in the woods where one trains the beast (insofar as it can be trained) to come. One doesn't call it; that doesn't work. One just goes there and picks up the handiest writing implement (or turns it on) and then waits. It usually comes, drawn by the entrancing odor of hopeful ideas. Some days it only comes as far as the edge of the clearing, relieves itself and disappears again. Other days it darts across to the waiting writer, bites him and then turns tail (2006).

This winding (slippery, imaginative) trail, the map of my writing journey, leads from songs to plays. The route is neither straight nor logical. It shows the movement, the slide, the spiral, the surfing of the wave, from the writing of one to the writing of the other. Swapping my guitar for the computer keyboard, and melody for words intended to be performed by actors has been intriguing. I have found, for example, that a play can be written as a type of musical manuscript; percussive, melodic even, that I can structure the silences and the spaces, that my inner metronome still holds sway over all other things, that experience of the performed moment is key. I have found that who I am constructs what I write, that defining this writerly self as a jazz-

like self has been the key to understanding the *how* of my process, and has therefore provided me with the means to answer that original (forgotten, remembered) question.

I have found, also, the words of William Butler Yeats to be true,

‘things fall apart, the centre cannot hold . . . surely some revelation is at hand’ (1993 p187).

Along the way; falling apart, the loosening of holds, disorientation, along the way too; revelation.

(Writer straightens her dress, pulls a leaf from her hair, smooths unruly locks)

(beat)

How, then, do *I* write?

Clean streets and the story of a song

Soph You see? . . . This. This is what happens. This ‘I love you but do this. Do that. *Change*’ (*Soph and the real world*, p184).

My initial idea was soon changing. The original (written in the dark) research proposal states,

I have long been a fan of Dada, the art movement which took found objects; the mundane, the utilitarian, the discarded, and by placing them in different contexts, for example, a urinal in a Parisian Gallery (Duchamp, 1917), made them over into art, challenging notions of what constitutes art and at the same time revolutionising the way we experience that art. This tradition of making art of found objects, of what we’d commonly refer to as *trash*, is a popular one in today’s atmosphere of recycling and reusing.

I propose to take up this idea and apply it to the writing of a play, to write that play inspired by and incorporating found text/words (the used, the mundane, the utilitarian); discarded notes, sales catalogues, overheard snippets of strangers’ conversations, newspaper headlines, graffiti, road rage and the like (2008).

I had, in the moment of writing the above, acknowledged that there would be more to the creation of my play than simply picking up *trash* and placing it on the stage, and so I looked to the visual arts and the Found Object method, seeking a methodological structure for the project. American visual artist Robert Rauschenberg, who constructed artworks from found objects sourced during daily walks around his studio (Feeney 2008), provided a blue print. I would take daily walks along specified routes and allow found objects to direct my creative journey. A

trash journal would be the receptacle for these discarded words, and for descriptions of these found objects. I imagined I would find a story in these random things, create meaning from chaos, and that my exegesis would describe not only the process by which I achieved this, but also answer various questions about meaning which, I expected, the process would provoke.

Two issues came to hinder these initial plans, the first a problem of practicality, and the second, described below, a sort of revelation. The practical issue became apparent at once. Cairns is a very clean city, or at least the pathways I had chosen to walk were. I walked for hours and my *trash* journal contained nothing more than a *Hubba Bubba* gum wrapper (the word 'hubba' was duly included in the play, p129) and a scrap of newspaper. I began to secretly urge graffiti artists to their business, to listen in to people's conversations, to watch how they moved and gestured. As I watched, I began to be aware of the stories that rose up in me to describe these people, of the memories, sensations, song lyrics, and myriad of other things that flitted through my head as I did. Like Mikhail Bakhtin, I heard 'voices in everything, and dialogic relations among them' (1986 p169). I realised, at last, that I was doing exactly as I always had – walking and daydreaming, and that a review of my methodology was required if I were to succeed.

Secondly, and more importantly, I reflected on the ways in which I had previously written and realised that, for me, like Albee, it seemed a bit like magic. I thought again about writing the song 'Francine'. I ran through the memory a number of times, and gradually began to understand the complexity of this 'pouring out'. I realised that this visceral (hair-raising) experience which has become integral to my writing practice, did not derive from the performance of an act of song writing magic, but was instead a means to gauge whether a song was working or not and was connected to my experience of the performed moment.

The song had, in fact, not sprung from thin air but from a number of traceable influences. The chord structure, for example, a classic Flamenco progression, was a result of the year I had just spent in Seville, Spain, the heartland of this genre, and the lyrics for the chorus, though changed via the context of the song I placed them in, had been uttered as a throw-away line the night before in conversation with a friend. The story of the song, it was clear, was an extension of personal life experience, that is, life experience plus imagination. My musical experience which included, at the time, a feel for rhythm and melody and the tacit physical knowledge of fingertips used to moving around a fret board provided the means to construct the song. My performance experience; a sense for how the song would feel on stage and how the audience would respond, was equally engaged as I wrote. Most intriguingly, I was unaware of all of these influences at the time of writing, so that the song had seemed to just 'pour out'.

Finding *Alchemy*

I realised that my body had acted as a kind of melting pot, a *crucible*, for a variety of influences. Was it possible to describe this particular process as, say, a chemical process is described, to find my own particular creative recipe, or map? I reapplied myself to the methodology with this in mind. The new methodology, I decided, would seek to use the *trash* journal as a receptacle for the stuff of both my Unconscious, and my senses. I would turn eyes and ears inward, turn my focus to the symbols, dreams, the music and rhythms, the surfacing memories, the nonsense, the seeming trivia of my every day (that which might usually be discarded like *trash*). I would describe bodily sensations as I experienced them. I imagined I would be aware enough of what had triggered, or inspired, the creative work, to catch the pertinent elements and dump them in the *trash*, so to speak.

It occurred to me at this point that writing really did, for me anyway, resemble an *alchemical* process. My mind conjured an image of a multitude of *elements* being poured into a *crucible*, where a sort of magic occurred, a transformation; a transmutation. Heat was involved, and neck hairs. The metaphor gleamed, no, flashed, appropriately. It seemed to capture the essence of the research.

I looked to my dictionary to define *alchemy*,

alchemy 1. The pseudoscientific predecessor of chemistry that sought a method of transmuting base metals into gold, an elixir to prolong life indefinitely, a panacea or universal remedy, and as alkahest or universal solvent. (*Collins English Dictionary Third Edition* 1991 p35).

This definition, including as it did, the notion that the *gold* produced by the process symbolised an ‘elixir to prolong life’, a ‘universal remedy’ and ‘solvent’ was suitable, perfect even. Art and art-making, I felt, could be all of these things.

At this point, I formulated a number of aims and objectives for the project, which were, as already described, soon relegated to somewhere outside my conscious awareness; forgotten.

Aims and objectives (forgotten things)

- To use my skills as a writer of song and prose to develop a different dimension with regard to stage work, and writing for the stage.
- To construct a performance text (a play) that demonstrates manifestations of Artaud’s theories.

- To interrogate the writerly process (the *alchemy*), the theoretical underpinnings of the proposed method and the resultant work in an exegesis.

In order to accomplish these aims I set a number of objectives for the project:

- To keep a *trash* journal including descriptions of personal thoughts, insights, sensations, images, dreams and editorial comment pertaining to the writing process
- To undergo a process of dramaturgical drafting (with regard to the performance text) via JUTE Theatre Company's *Enter Stage Write* program throughout 2009
- To conduct an ongoing review of selected theatre practitioners and their work in order to establish a sense of my own theoretical position
- To conduct an analysis of a selection of my songs and prose, that is, their style, form, content and voice, in order to establish personal connections and intersections between song writing and writing for theatre
- To work towards a professional reading of the play, or an excerpt of it, to be conducted at the National Regional Playwrights and Theatre Makers Conference, 1-4 October 2009 in Brisbane.

Artefact and exegesis: integration

As the above plans progressed, I was growing increasingly aware of the tension I was experiencing between my practice as a writer; which is, amongst other things, a dreamy, torturous and chaotic place, and as an academic involved in research of that writing, which required something else entirely; another language, other rules, transparency, structure and logic. In reading Burr, I found this tension reflected. I was spurred on by her suggestion that 'because creative projects are so intensely personal and subjective, each practitioner must find their own way in the world' (2007a)⁴.

Finding my 'own way' was clearly the way to proceed. I decided to see the project as a creative whole, much like Avieson who states,

When I began my Master's thesis I had a fair understanding of the differences in style and approach of creative and theoretical writing. Working on the two together, as part

⁴ In *TEXT* Vol 11 No 2 October 2007

of a unified whole, I developed a new appreciation of their similitude: that is, the similar dynamics that drive both (2008).

I decided, at this point, (and felt intuitively) that the shape and structure of the exegesis would develop organically alongside the play, and decided to once again trust my process, and that intuitive guide that was still flickering elusively somewhere up ahead.

An alchemy for the stage: Artaud, Beckett and Kane

Meanwhile, I had been familiarising myself with theatre theory. Upon encountering the work of Antonin Artaud, I felt I had found a theory to base my work on. His manifestos for a Theatre of Cruelty (1970) provoked a type of epiphany in me as I read; my body as gauge spoke up, neck hairs lifted. His call for a theatre which didn't privilege words but instead spoke to all of the senses, something which mirrored my musical performance experiences, and therefore spoke to my intuition and my body, became a map to work by.

Artaud's writings on theatre are integral to any contemplation of writing for the stage. First published in 1938, his seminal text, *The Theatre and its Double*, which outlines his manifestos for a Theatre of Cruelty, continues to be a major influence on contemporary theatre practitioners. For Artaud, words are ineffective and frustrating things with which to attempt expression, and his manifestos propose structures for a spectacular theatre which doesn't privilege words but comprises instead spectacular lighting, music, signs, symbols, gestures and sounds, disturbing atmospheres intended to evoke epic emotion in the audience and thereby bring about changes in the social space. He argues for a theatre founded and built on such gestures, sounds and symbols, stating that 'the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled, and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language' (1970 p27).

Artaud's manifesto for theatrical writing sat well alongside my burgeoning ideas about writing as *alchemy*. The recipe, map or blueprint he provides is for a type of theatrical *alchemy*, where a number of elements are combined in the crucible that is the theatre, to produce something *other*, a type of magical experience or transformation. I decided that his theories would form the basis for my thinking about playwriting, and that I would endeavour to incorporate his ideas into my writing.

I began next to look at practitioners and their work. I encountered Artaudian manifestations in the work of Samuel Beckett, whose works mesmerise for many reasons, not the least of which is their ability to mystify at the same time as being profoundly understandable experientially, that is, viscerally and at some *other* level, somewhere other than the conscious mind. Beckett creates a type of Artaudian *alchemy*, one which does not privilege words, and makes use of

gestures, sound and symbols succeeding in creating atmospheres which can disturb and enlighten audiences engaged at a number of levels.

In 1957, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was performed to an audience of convicts at the San Quentin prison (Esslin 1961 p. xv). The prisoners were captivated and had no problem understanding the play, turns of phrase from which became 'a permanent part of the private language, the institutional mythology of San Quentin' (p. xvii). In contrast to this are the outraged reactions of many critics when the play was performed in Britain for the first time. Similarly, Sarah Kane produces work that demonstrates Artaudian influences. Her plays create intense atmospheres and produce powerful reactions in audiences. When her first play *Blasted* (1990) opened, critics variously walked out, expressed disgust, and named her a visionary.

Beckett and Kane both create plays, too, that have their own unique rhythm and musicality, appealing directly to my musician's ear. I was encouraged by this to approach playwriting from a musician's perspective, using my sense for rhythm, feel and melody to compose the play as a sort of musical manuscript. Beckett himself was a musician; a pianist, and composed his plays like musical manuscripts, writing in a letter to friend Alan Schneider '(m)y work is a matter of fundamental sounds . . . made as fully as possible' (1976 pxiv).

As my study was as much involved with creative process as with product, with *trash* as with *gold*, and all that goes on in between, I soon found that I was increasingly curious about the processes and personalities which produced them, and in particular about the similarities and connections I found between them and my own process. I began to read as much *about* writers; their personalities, their histories, and their writings on process, as I was their creative works, with an eye especially to descriptions of writing as a visceral or dream-inspired process. I was interested, I realised, in something other than strategy or how-to's, something more sensory, more visceral, more *feeling*.

Dreaming up the play

Soph Okay. It's not real, obviously. Just some sort of . . . waking dream. A daydream, hallucination . . . happens all the time. Doesn't it? I mean, people don't go round vomiting things up, do they? Not unless they've . . . swallowed them first.
(*She drinks*)

(*Soph and the real world* p123)

I wake from a dream. I can see the words in my head, feel them. I speak them out loud,

(Writer I feel like a rubbish bin!)

There.

That can't be good, can it?

Suddenly, though, I imagine a character; a woman,

(Woman I dreamt I was a rubbish bin last night!)

I add a direction.

(She breathes into a paper bag)

The above dream began my thinking about the play. I was, at the time, still formulating the research proposal, reading plays and theory, and had decided to begin the playwriting in earnest once I had the Confirmation of Candidature milestone behind me. The image of a woman as a rubbish bin was, however, such a potent one for me that I began to give it my attention; a sort of preliminary to the playwriting which occurred on the edges of my consciousness as I focused on the scholarly requirements of the exegesis, and which nevertheless began to develop alongside and symbiotically with the research.

Another Cinderella story

Soph They're just fucking pipe-dreams, Nick. Who do you think I am? Cinderella? *(Soph and the real world p180)*

The story of the play, I decided, having allowed the rubbish bin metaphor space to develop, was a Cinderella story, rags to riches, *trash* into *gold*. It seemed appropriate that the main character would embody the spirit of the work, would enact a type of *alchemy*. She could somehow, I thought, perhaps spit out all the emotional *trash* she had swallowed in her past, in the process transforming it into metaphorical tools for survival (*gold*); that is, the ensuing revelations would provide her with strength and illumination.

The research plan began to cohere, an alchemical process to spark, a creative pathway to emerge, one which intersected with my established praxis, which would call on my skills with sound and rhythm, on my unconscious, on my physical experience of the performed moment, on the practice of writing for the voice on stage, and on my lived bodily experience.

Practice takes the lead

Early in 2009, my first year of candidature, I applied for and was admitted into JUTE Theatre Company's *Enter stage write* program. This program would provide me with guidance from dramaturg Peter Matheson⁵ as I began drafting the play. Once my Confirmation of Candidature was over, and with JUTE's first deadline looming, I sat down, *trash* journal at my side, to write the play, feeling, I admit, rather confident and pleased at the ease with which everything seemed to be coming together. It was rather smugly, then, that I walked straight into a wall. Sitting there at my computer with a head full of aims, objectives and theory, I found I couldn't write a thing. Where was my intuition, my writerly self?

I sat in this state for a number of weeks, writing scenes and deleting them, waiting on a real start. When nothing came, and in desperation, I realised I'd have to abandon everything I'd already thought and planned about the process, and somehow find my way back to that place I usually wrote from, the place Sue Woolfe refers to as 'not-knowing' (2007p10), if I were to get anything done at all. I determined to forget everything and *just write* as I always had. In effect, I had decided to allow my practice to lead the research rather than following my original plan; essentially a more traditional problem-led model. This move towards practice represents a key act of the thesis, allowing not only the creative work to flow, but allowing a new research problem to arise, one which focused less on the *elements* of the process and more on *how* the process was unfolding, a problem, therefore, of methodology.

Does it swing?

Casting aside any plans and beginning again in a place of 'not-knowing' had the desired effect and the writing began to flow. I wrote a number of drafts of the play, and the final draft (what Matheson calls 'rehearsal ready' (pers. comm. 5 April 2011), included here as Chapter Five, was completed early in 2011. At this point I began to reflect on the creative process, using my intuition as a guide; allowing dreams and images to lead the way. One image in particular, that of a metronome, sparked an insight into the act of writing as a rhythm-based process, one which was characterised by a deeply focused attendance to an internal beat. I recognised too, that there was a process of discernment at play, where I was engaging my memories of live performance in order to ensure the play would work live, feeling for some quality in the dialogue, but what?

I began to read across disciplines seeking understanding of musicality and the role of the body in creativity. Levitin's *This is your brain on music: Understanding a human obsession* (2008)

⁵ See p83-4 for a detailed description of *Enter stage write*, and Peter Matheson's role as dramaturg.

provided insight into how music is processed by the human brain. ‘Music is organised sound’, he writes, but some element of surprise, of the unexpected, needs to be involved in this organisation if it is not to become ‘emotionally flat or robotic’ (p111). Psychologist Robert McCrae (2007) provided an explanation of my experience of raised neck hairs, what he terms ‘aesthetic chills’, stating,

For a very open person who cannot compartmentalize feelings, a sudden dramatic turn in the emotionally charged atmosphere of music or drama may push emotional processing over some threshold and require release in the form of physical chills and gooseflesh (p10).

Synthesising these ideas I realised that I really was writing as a musician, working from an inner atmosphere which resembled the atmosphere of (hair-raising) live musical performance, characterised by a reflexive, intuitive, trance-like state where focused attendance was all important. From this point I rapidly moved towards a description of my process by defining who I was, and how I work, as a musician.

The play features jazz, and my own jazz experiences had therefore been engaged as I wrote. I saw that performing music was an absorbed act which relied on tacit knowledge and required me to locate that place of ‘not-knowing’ (Woolfe and Brophy 2007), so important to the creative state. That process of discernment mentioned above was integral here too, and I wondered what it was. In reading jazz musicians’ descriptions of their performance experiences I began to understand that I was seeking the same quality in the play’s dialogue as I was in music when performing it. I was intuitively seeking to *swing* it.

According to Matthew Butterfield *swing* is not only a rhythmic feel but something else besides,

a general rhythmic ethos – a mysterious quality purportedly transcending representation in musical notation (2010 p3).

I was feeling for a rhythm as well as something more, drawing on my musician’s ear, and my body too, to guide me towards that *other* thing, a mysterious quality, what I have often heard referred to as the ‘sweet spot’, especially by rhythm sections I have worked with, what could be called *swing*. Though it is difficult to articulate this quality, as a musician I intuitively know when a song is working, and it was this I was relying on to make the play work. From here I was able to begin to describe my process via these insights, and to outline my method for playwriting in these terms.

Examining the examiner: Reflection, intuition and jazz

Having described my creative process, and poised to begin the exegetical writing, I saw I had still to link my initial proposal and theorising with what had emerged from the above reflection process. I needed not only to describe my creative method, but to outline somehow my research method for the purposes of the exegesis. The *trash* journal had been proposed as a means to chart the process, yet it had been discarded with the rest of my best laid plans. Entries in the journal had only been made during breaks from writing, for I had discovered early on that describing the creative process while absorbed in it constantly threatened to break that connection with the writerly trance. The journal told the story of the ebb and flow of the process but left holes where the creative writing had actually occurred. These gaps represented those writerly spaces I had only been able to analyse and describe retrospectively.

Once again I began an act of reflection, this time on how I had reflected on and described the creative process. In effect, I was now examining the examiner, and found that my research practice closely resembled my creative process; I had engaged with the stuff of my Unconscious, following that intuitive guide to places I was then able to explore more consciously. This second reflection resulted in the location of a personal musical ethos central, for me, to both research and creative practice, and I was able to apply the jazz-based method to both, resolving that inner tension and streamlining the project.

The entire project can therefore be summarised as follows,

- Formulated the research question
- Decided to allow my creative practice to lead the inquiry
- Wrote the play
- Result: Play finished and scheduled for production
- Examined/ Reflected on playwriting practice
- Result: Discovery of and description of my creative practice (dreams, jazz, senses etc)
- Examined the Reflection process
- Result: Discovered the research practice resembled the creative practice
- Integrated the project by formulating a jazz/*swing* methodology which applies to both the playwriting and exegetical processes.

Shaping up: conjuring, denoting and indicating

This work describes how *Soph and the real world* was written, or to be more precise, it tells a part of that story; a version of it. It more likely indicates, denotes, and conjures. For me, the writing process is a synthesis of both the conscious and the unconscious minds. The various *elements*, the *trash* of my day, are mulled over both consciously and, like Saint Pol Roux, unconsciously; as I sleep, daydream, and stare into the distance. One without the other is only

half the story. The process of transformation is a type of musical processing of information, by my conscious self, my Unconscious, and my body. All, of course, are one, and only separated out here to illuminate.

The thesis takes a structure for the same purpose – to illuminate. I write of the various elements separately in an attempt to show a process which is, for me, so much deeper, richer, and more holistic than can be expressed here. It is for this reason that, having structured, separated and translated as much as is possible, the exegesis often takes the form of a narrative. It is, after all, a story. The thesis combines the exegesis and the play as a single document, asserting the play as part of a layered response to the research question.

The structure also serves to illustrate an important similarity between art and science; the iterative nature of research practice. In their previously mentioned article on the future of the doctorate in the arts, Van Gelder and Baetens contend that '(a)rt and science do not only have the same mother, they are even double-ovum twins' (p98), and demonstrate how scientific research, like art, 'is not an approach that starts from a given theory, but an approach that gradually builds one' (p106).

Structure

The thesis is, on the surface, not unlike a traditional format, that is, it appears to follow a standard suggested structure such as, for example, this one, suggested in *Your PhD Companion: A handy mix of practical tips, sound advice and helpful commentary to see you through your PhD* (Marshall and Green 2007 p 89),

- Introduction
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Once the text is entered, though, the reader will find that all is not what it seems. I have allowed both my academic and creative voices to exist here. As a performer too, I find it difficult to resist performing for the reader, and find myself desiring to produce something akin to

Artaud's theatrical *alchemy* in the exegetic writing, something like Barthes' 'text of pleasure', knowing that this is what will engage you (dear reader) most fully,

We read a text (of pleasure) the way a fly buzzes around a room: with sudden, deceptively decisive turns, fervent and futile: ideology passes over the text and its reading like the blush over a face (in love some take erotic pleasure in this coloring); every writer of pleasure has these idiotic blushes . . . : in the text of pleasure, the opposing forces are no longer repressed but in a state of becoming: nothing is really antagonistic, everything is plural (1975 p31-2).

Surely a story about a writer's *alchemy*, deserves an equally creative treatment, an *alchemy* of the page, where 'everything is plural', and 'blushes' (or neck hairs) come into play.

The thesis, dressed, as it appears, in the cloak of the academy, represents well the stance I have maintained as a PhD student engaged in scholarly creative research. It applies both academic *and* creative rigour to an important and fascinating area of research; the creative writing process. As a practice-led study grounded in lived experience, the thesis gives various responses to the research question. These responses interweave to produce a work which reveals a layered explication of my creative writing practice and the practice-led journey undertaken to unearth it.

The document is structured as follows:

- Chapter Two reviews the literature, weaving a web of connections between the various and often disparate influences on both the creative and research components. The first section describes the state of practice-led creative writing research in Australia at the time of writing, and shows how my research settles into its own niche as a peculiarly theatrical, musical and sensory description of the creative writing process. The second section is a multidisciplinary exploration of the playwriting process, and looks also at some of the influences at work on the play itself.
- Chapter Three engages with Roland Barthes' *The pleasure of the text* (1975) to examine the idea of the exegesis as a site of bliss. It foreshadows, and undermines, the following chapter's adherence to logic and sequence, and represents tacit elements of the writing process.
- Chapter Four describes the ways in which the methodology developed, showing it to be an iterative practice-led process, and drawing on the work of Schon (2011) and Anderson (2000) as the basis for an exploration of my techniques of practice, leading to the development of a personal jazz-based methodology. This chapter articulates explicit elements of the writing process.
- Chapter Five is the play itself; *Soph and the real world*. It can be seen as a further response to the research question.
- Chapter Six concludes with a reflection on the journey, on how the question was answered, and an exploration of implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Spinning the web

- Soph It's not normal, is it?
- Nick I think we can be a little too focused on the idea of 'normal'.
Probably not relevant in this situation.

(Soph and the real world, p165)

It's been necessary to question and reflect on what the nature of a literature study of this kind is, and should be (Munday 2011 p1).

Creative writers and practice-led research

Creative writers engaged in practice-led research are working in an environment which is still shifting its epistemological boundaries. No defined pathways exist for the creative researcher who is nevertheless expected to contextualise and theoretically frame her work in a manner which aligns with traditional academic requirements. Judith Mottram, in an essay which traces the history of the PhD in studio art in the UK, writes of her concerns about,

the resistance shown by some doctoral students to locating their inquiry within its context – otherwise known as “doing the literature search” (2009 p4).

She comments further that,

creative practitioners assert importance, or originality, based only upon the evidence that they “know” or “feel” that what they have produced is creative, original, or novel . . . this sort of value model does not sit comfortably alongside the well-established model of verification and replicability that forms the backbone of generic understandings of research within the university system (p5).

Orthodox methods of research can be, according to Brad Haseman, ‘unsophisticated and hamfisted tools for undertaking research “in” creative writing, and some resistance is understandable’ (2007). Typically, a doctoral student sets out to establish a gap in the research by conducting a review of the literature, defines a problem, and proceeds to investigate this problem with a number of aims and objectives for the project. An artist or creative writer, however, often begins with something entirely different. Haseman writes,

many practice-led researchers do not commence a research project with a sense of 'a problem' that has to be answered. A problem may be set or come with a commission, but many are led by what is best described as 'an enthusiasm of practice': something that is exciting, something that may be unruly, unmanageable or mysterious (2007).

He does not suggest that practice-led researchers do not have the required 'problem', but that 'its definition will emerge during the research and it may well be that it is only in the final stages that a practice-led researcher will articulate and explicitly connect the problem with the trajectory their research has taken'. The contextualising of such research builds therefore from 'a sense of the practice' rather than a 'sense of the problem',

As the researcher practises, a web of connections and links become evident to build a layered and rich analysis of the contexts of practice within which the practice-led researcher operates. In this way, undertaking a 'contextual review' appears to follow the principles of intertextuality rather than the screening and review methods that would give rise to a deliberate and systematic map of the field.

The web of connections that make up the context of this project; one that focuses on and is led by my personal writing practice, in order to be represented accurately, encompasses a variety of texts both academic and creative, and includes also what writers themselves say about their writing, as this has been important in illuminating the individual and complex processes by which writers produce their work. On the subject of this sort of diversity of sources to augment research, Kroll writes,

As a matter of course, late twentieth-century scholars have consulted both formal and informal, high and low culture materials to enhance their research (2004).

The intertextual web-building I have engaged in here, a multidisciplinary and eclectic review of the relevant literature, has dual purposes:

- to situate the research itself in its field of inquiry by a review of current academic literature, and
- to explore the literature which influenced, and is pertinent to, the creation of the play itself

I write, often, in the first person, as, to borrow an image from Jennifer Munday on the writing of her first literature review, 'arm-wrest[ling]' the language into third person because 'it is the expected language of academia' (p5), seems unnecessarily conformist, and the results could produce, if I rely on Munday's experience,

a story of sorts, but . . . dry without the voice of the experiencer and maker of the work. My voice sits outside those pages and attempts to look at the whole process in an unemotional fashion (p5).

The story of the literature review is therefore approached here, for the most part, as a type of narrative, as is the rest of the exegesis, in order to represent the organic, iterative process of web-building as accurately and transparently as possible. I emulate Michelle Crawford⁶ (2010) who in the foreword of her exegesis states,

My exegesis is written in a personal voice and grounded in personal experience, an approach still often absent in scholarly writing despite the work of many, particularly feminists, to retrieve it.

The sort of retrieval I attempt here when using my personal voice assumes that if I removed this voice, buried it, an (the most) important dimension would be lost to the reader. In using 'I', I am asserting that 'I' am the centre from which this context builds, the practitioner leading and being lead by her practice.

Overview

Creative writing is, and has long been, a hot topic. Much has been written. No dream description heralds this chapter but if there were to be a dream here, it would be of a journey through a vast and wildly disparate terrain. In order to map the meandering, practice-led trail I have negotiated through this literary landscape, I build on the themes developed in the introduction, beginning with a general overview of creative writing, situating it in the world of academic research. I then move on to the more specific topic of writing for the theatre, to give as clear a picture as was available at the time of writing of current research of this kind in Australia, in order to contextualise my own research.

Section 2 then explores the *elements* which I consider to have contributed to the writing of the play, weaving a web of connections which encompasses material from a wide variety of sources. Utilising the writing of Cixous (1976), Grosz (1996, 2005), and Artaud (1970), with reference to Breton's *Manifestos of Surrealism* (1972) and Freud's concept of the Unconscious (1940), and exploring my musicality and its effect on the writing process, I articulate a framework for my writing practice, moving towards what I term a jazz ethos or method of writing for the stage.

⁶ Amongst others (Burr 2009, Farrar 2008, Lashchuk 2009)

The Chapter concludes with a brief review of the above in order to set the stage for an exploration of my own practice-led methodology. The exegesis specifically asks ‘how will I, using my existing skills as a songwriter and writer of prose, write a play?’ and thus has a dual focus; first to investigate how this songwriter became a playwright, and secondly, how the play itself was written. The chapter is therefore not only an exploration of how one play was written but is also a picture of a writer actively establishing her own playwriting praxis.

Section 1: On creative writing and current academic research

Mike Sharples prefaces his book on writing⁷ with the following,

Over the past two years I have found an easy way to provoke an animated conversation: I mention I am writing a book on how we write (1999 p xi).

Like Sharples, I too have found that most people upon hearing the words ‘creative writing’ when discussing my research, are at least interested to hear more, while some are downright fascinated. In these conversations it is insight and practical advice that people are usually seeking; ‘But what do you do?’ ‘Where do your ideas come from?’ ‘Do you have a procedure you follow?’ ‘Do you hear the characters voices in your head?’ and so on and so forth. They want to know how it’s done, and it is as a result of this sort of public curiosity that books abound in the popular literature on the topic. Over the years, I have bought some of these books, most of which, since the initial reading, have sat gathering dust and which I could not now give much of a summary of beyond ‘they’re about writing.’ In retrospect, what I think I was looking for, as a novice writer, from these books, was a description of what it felt like to write something good, so that I could compare my own experiences, hopefully identify in some way, and, perhaps, learn how to refine my process. The books generally did not answer my questions, instead giving advice on time management and such things as handling criticism (Simon 1997), how to get published (Shinder 2001) or focusing on exercises the writer might use to initiate or expand on ideas, such as Kate Grenville’s practical and informative *The writing book: A workbook for fiction writers* (1990).

Useful as these books can be, I was seeking something else. I wanted the nitty gritty. I wanted to know specifically what was going on in an individual writer’s brain, in the writer’s body, what was happening emotionally. How did it feel? What were they dreaming about? It is this specific sort of knowledge which Mottram describes as,

⁷ *How we write: Writing as creative design*

That understanding of how it “feels” to wield the chisel/drape the fabric/draw the connection. Within art and design, this tacit knowledge is special stuff, our stuff (2009 p24).

Tacit knowledge is, by definition, difficult to pass on through formal means. A writer’s ‘special stuff’ is complex and not easily told. The sort of specific knowledge which artists possess is, according to Mottram,

the bit that current teaching generations see less and less of. It is though, the site of some rich questions that we may need to answer before we can claim the potential for studio activity to provide an opportunity for the development of skills and knowledge at a level commensurate with the descriptors for PhD study (p24).

Mottram is writing here of Art and Design Higher Research Degrees in the UK, but her ideas are relevant to creative writers engaged in Higher Research in Australia. Mottram emphasises the need for research already completed in the field to be available for Higher Research candidates in order that the sorts of questions which require asking can be identified, and suggests that the difficulty in locating this research could contribute to some candidates’ resistance to contextualising their work. She highlights the need to,

develop a consensus on the important questions for our subjects. In part we were developing a consensus that doctoral study had an important part to play in building the knowledge base of art and design, in a way in which had not previously been possible (p5).

Mottram goes on to describe the establishment of an Art and Design Index⁸, for this purpose, in the UK which ‘comprises a database of information on all research degrees awarded . . . in the subject fields of art and design’ in that country (p4).

PhDs in creative writing are recently come to academia in Australia, and at the time of writing no complete database of successful submissions, like Mottram’s ADIT, exists. The closest to a full listing is Nicola Boyd’s 2009 survey. According to Boyd, in a census taken in 2007/2008⁹, ‘199 creative writing PhDs, DCAs and a ‘Doctorate’ were ‘awarded between January 1993 and June 2008’ in Australia. Boyd comments,

⁸ Art and Design Index to Theses (ADIT)

⁹ Boyd’s census lists successful PhD and DCA submissions in the last fifteen years up until June 2008, the first ‘written by Graeme Harper, University of Technology, Sydney, in 1993’.

while my database of 199 successful submissions cannot be verified as the full and absolute population of awarded doctoral theses in creative writing, it is a population as close as anyone could reasonably be expected to find in the current circumstances (2009).

Boyd describes the difficulties she encountered compiling her census when searching for, and locating, creative writing theses, of which she writes,

the search functions for catalogues and thesis repositories are very limited and therefore I could not identify or further investigate gaps in the information I had gathered.

She lists a number of problems with regard to sourcing the material including restricted access; to staff and students of particular universities, or by the author; pending publication of the creative text, refusals of interlibrary loans, and, due to their multidisciplinary nature, confusion about whether or not some theses had a creative element and could therefore be considered for the census. Boyd's experience reflects my own which has been, at times, frustratingly like groping in the dark. This unidentified terrain is to be expected, however, and gives an indication of both the newness of the field, and what is required to map it.

These new creative theses, reflecting the field itself, are still often occupied with self definition, and there remains conjecture about what they are, that is, what the focus of their inquiry should be and how they should be structured. Many of Mottram's 'rich questions' have been, and continue to be, asked and answered in a myriad of ways, as creative doctoral candidates locate their individual contexts and build their own interpretations of practice-led research. While sometimes hard to locate, and occasionally impossible to access (Boyd 2009), the available theses give an idea of the types of questions being asked, and an indication of the individual and idiosyncratic nature of the resultant exegeses. Creative writing researchers are interrogating the creative process in a variety of ways, are engaged in practice-led contextual reviews, and are often focused on their own subjective processes as the subject of the research. It is no surprise then, that researchers are experimenting with the critical sections of their theses too. The use of first person is typical¹⁰, the blurring of boundaries desired, and increasingly inventive means of displaying individual journeys are being sought.

Theses cover such diverse topics as, for example, Australia's recreational horsewomen; *Women and Horses: A study of Australia's recreational horsewomen*, (Burr 2009), a thesis which includes as artefact a series of personal essays exploring the theme of women and horses, and

¹⁰ See for example Sherman 2010, Banks 2011, Crawford 2010

an exegesis which focuses on the lack of representation of this group in academic and popular literature, or Taylor's 2011 account of the experience of living with Vulvodynia (*Vulvodynia and autoethnography*, Taylor 2011) which is presented in the form of a 'memoir that deals with chronic vulval pain and its place in society'. Her abstract states of her work,

[it] is composed of creative and critical components that interweave and reflect upon each other . . . (and of which) the whole body of research and writing forms an organic entity that arose and took shape, guided by unfolding life-events and inner processes.

The sort of interweaving Taylor refers to, between the creative and the critical, is a growing tendency in the field¹¹, as writers explore their individual processes, asking questions such as the ones Colbert asks,

How do practitioners move in and out of their creative practice, reflect on and objectify their work and processes? How do they identify and position the particularities of their practice within larger cultural frameworks which may include theorists from many domains? How can the unpredictable insights and emergent shifts that inform creative work be juggled when writing academically? How does one develop the academic writing skills to elucidate this experience? (2009 p221-2).

These questions, directed as they are to the individual writer, are answered in a multitude of ways as writers pursue ever more imaginative ways to lay the truth of writing on to the paper. The personal and individual praxis of the researcher becomes the conceptual terrain, the laboratory in which the research is conducted, and the analysis and reporting of the findings of such research requires new languages and structures unique to each project. Here is where the gap lies. As each writer makes their own invisible stuff visible, writes what is hidden, new information is revealed. It is the type of research which Sullivan refers to when he writes,

if a purpose of research is to create new knowledge that increases our awareness of whom we are and about the world in which we live, then it seems plausible to argue that understanding is a viable outcome of enquiry (2005 p74).

An inquiry into the complexities of the creative process with the goal of producing new knowledge and increasing awareness and understanding in ways which stand up to academic scrutiny is not, however, a simple matter of, as Mottram puts it, 'individual show and tell'

¹¹ Wise 2001, Loveless 2005, Fenton Keane 2008, all cited in Krauth 2011.

(p24). As mentioned in Chapter One¹², initial expectations for the exegesis were ‘that an exegesis should be a sort of critical journal, a reflective account of processes undertaken while creating the accompanying work’ (Krauth 2011). According to Krauth, this was,

soon deemed unexciting by creative writing candidates, supervisors and examiners. In the early 2000s, research scholars who had risen above questions like *What is an exegesis?* and *Why do I have to do one?* sought to achieve more with the exegesis form.

Encouraging writers to find new and radical ways to approach the exegesis, Krauth cites, as an example, Michelle Crawford’s *Fingerprints: Exploration of Identity, Community and Place* (2010), describing it as ‘a marvellous investigation and record of the process of writing an exegesis’. Crawford’s thesis submission is comprised of *Fingerprints: The fiction* and an exegesis entitled *Fingerprints: The exegesis*. Her aims for the exegesis, she writes, are,

to offer greater insights into and focus on the value of the processes (rather than the products) of creative work . . . also . . . to make visible that which is normally hidden in the development of an academic and/or creative project (p3).

Like Crawford’s, this (my) thesis is concerned with illumination of the (my) writing process, and demonstrating its value as a field of enquiry. I differ in that I aim to offer specific insights via an investigation into the process by which I wrote the play, *Soph and the real world*. A number of other theses which explore the writing of, and incorporate, plays, have been undertaken in Australia to date¹³, including¹⁴ Simon Brook’s *Industrial playwriting: Forms, strategies, and methods for creative production* of which, Brook writes,

through the examination, reflection and reaction to a perceived crisis in playwriting in the Australian theatre sector, the notion of Industrial Playwriting is arrived at (2010 pii).

Victoria Carless’ *Making invisible pathways visible: Case studies of Shadow play and The rainbow dark* explores the process by which she wrote an ‘invisiblist’ theatre text, something that, she writes,

¹² See p 7

¹³ Due to reasons echoing Boyd’s (2009) I cannot be sure of a complete list of PhD theses which include plays as creative artefacts.

¹⁴ See also Payne 2005, Werf 2003, Millett 2001,

might comprise an otherness of form, character and/or language in both the written and performed text. The thesis navigates a writer's teasing out of aspects of the Invisible for performance, as well as ways in which to plot conditions conducive to an invisibilist theatrical experience (2008 pviii).

Catherine Fargher describes her *Evolution, hybridity and mutation: Three generations of hybrid performance texts from contemporary bioethical fables* as using,

biological concepts to chronicle [her] own creative processes . . . [and] argue[s] that biological principles such as evolution, mutation, metamorphosis and hybridity within the natural and bio-technological realms have informed [her] creative practice (2007 p2).

In *The ontological status of Pirandello's metacharacters: Six characters in search of a Platonic author*, Irene Sarrinikolau crafts,

a subjective response to [Pirandello's *Six characters in search of an author*] in accordance with the methods of analytical philosophy, making use of paradigms and techniques that stem from aesthetics and metaphysics to elucidate a complex self-reflexive play (2006).

The questions a thesis asks derive from the personal experience and interests of its author, and in the case of the practice-led researcher, directly from creative practice. This results, as the above examples attest, in unique themes, making it relatively easy for researchers to locate gaps in the current research. My own study looks specifically at the way in which I, using my musical and song writing skills, wrote the (my first) play, *Soph and the real world*. A search of the literature in Australia¹⁵ results in one other creative writing thesis which has musicality as part of its focus, Stefen Lashchuk's *I dream of Magda* (2008b), which comprises a novel¹⁶ of the same title, and an exegesis describing how he based the structure of the novel on the musical form of the Sonata. The musical element of Lashchuk's thesis deals with a strategic form of writing knowledge, rather than the tacit knowledge I seek to offer insight into here, and therefore differs substantially in its focus. The niche that my thesis settles into, then, is peculiarly musical, theatrical and sensory. Section Two explores these dimensions in depth.

¹⁵ The above searches were carried out via The National Library of Australia's *Trove* website, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/?q=>

¹⁶ Lashchuk's final manuscript, *I dream of Magda*, won the 2007 Australian/Vogel Award and has since been published by Allen & Unwin (Laszczuk 2008a)

A note on creative writing as research

A writer's hidden knowledge should not be confused with what Mottram calls 'strategic knowledge',

What is more invasive in the culture of the studio at present is knowledge about how to "be" an artist or designer (or even how to "be" a student). This strategic knowledge is sometimes confused with tacit knowledge. It is fairly easily communicated by the practitioner, academic or visiting lecturer with little pre-preparation, but it is more difficult to enshrine this expertise in a way that can be accessed without recourse to individual show and tell (2009 p24).

My 'how to write' collection of books exemplifies this type of strategic instruction as do, for example, the various how to 'be a student' Post Graduate workshops on offer at a university. While these have value, it is not strategic knowledge that I am concerned with but a far more fugitive knowledge, one which requires careful observation, self-awareness and imaginative reporting.

When writers write they are practicing their craft, a craft which has much in common with the artist at her easel, or the sculptor, chisel in hand, at her block of marble. Donald Schon's idea of the reflective practitioner who moves between 'knowledge on reflection', and 'knowledge in action', and supposes 'knowledge in action' (cited in Jones 2009 p32) as intelligent action, is useful when thinking about ways of defining and researching a writer's special knowledge. According to Timothy Jones in an essay entitled 'Research degrees in art and design', Schon's theory,

supposes thinking through art. It also stands against the absurdity of the theory/practice dichotomy which seems to imply that you must switch your brain off in order to make art or design (or whatever) and then switch it on again in order to reflect on what you've made (2009 p32).

With this idea of the creative/research process as a holistic one in mind, indeed one Jones suggests it would be absurd to dichotomise, it is unsurprising that artists and creative writers often consider their creative work to be a valid product of research, one which might be asserted as research itself. As already mentioned, there is conjecture about whether the creative artefact can and should be seen as bone fide research. The amount of scholarly articles and books available currently indicates a growing interest in the topic, as researchers endeavour to define not only what creative writing research is, but how this research should be undertaken. Debate exists, too, around the setting of guidelines for the examination of creative theses in general, and just how much weight the creative artefact carries in the final assessment of a doctoral

thesis. In other words, can art be considered research, and if so, how is this to be reported and examined?

A comprehensive overview of the debate in Australia may be found in the multitude of articles on the topic in *TEXT*, the Australian Association of Writing Program's online journal of creative writing¹⁷. A recent significant factor in the debate concerns changes made in 2009 in the way the Australian Research Council (ARC) assesses research quality in universities. The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative has introduced new processes 'for the recognition, collection and evaluation of research, which include[s]—for the first time—assessment of creative works as research' (Krauth, Webb & Brien 2010). On the subject, Brophy and Krauth write,

Under ERA, one might say we're out in the streets busting down academic and other barriers; setting sail to discover unknown worlds; plummeting to depths of culture, society, psyche, body, history, literature, etc, to dredge up the un-found, the un-mined, the untold ... The ERA parameters return us to what we always should be as writers: challengers of the status quo; investigators of new and better ways to see and do; critics of the moribund, the immoral, the unethical; opposers of the selfish who tread the world down (2011).

Despite ERA's changes with regard to creative works, however, and according to Hetherington,

the academy generally doesn't recognise them as delivering 'new knowledge'. Further, while it is indisputable that creative works use existing knowledge 'in a new and creative way' such works are not accepted by many Australian academic institutions as representing, in themselves, 'new concepts, methodologies and understandings' for research purposes (2010 p2).

ERA's assessment of creative works as research requires, in submission, an accompanying 'research statement', something which, in its 'infancy' at present, will 'evolve' (Krauth, Webb & Brien 2010 p7) with time, much like the exegesis is evolving. The debate around questions of what constitutes research in a creative writing context, and how creative works may be evaluated as research remains lively and is far from settling on any definitive answers.

SECTION 2: Influences

What is required for chutnification? Raw materials, obviously – fruit, vegetables, fish, spices. Daily visits from Koli women with their saris

¹⁷ See, for example, Kroll 2002, Nash 2011, Castro 2011, and Muecke 2010.

hitched up between their legs. Cucumbers (like his nose, for instance), aubergines, mint . . . and above all a nose capable of discerning the hidden languages of what-must-be-pickled, its humours and messages and emotions . . . I am able to include memories, dreams, ideas . . . There is also the matter of the spice bases. The intricacies of turmeric and cumin, the subtlety of fenugreek, when to use large (and when small) cardamoms; their myriad possible effects of garlic, garam masala, stick cinnamon, coriander, ginger . . . not to mention the flavourful contributions of the occasional speck of dirt. . . . In the spice bases, I reconcile myself to the inevitable distortions of the pickling process. . . . The art is to change the flavour in degree, but not in kind; and above all (in my thirty jars and a jar) to give it shape and form – that is to say, meaning. (Rushdie 1981 p460-1).

If knowledge is, as Michel Serres suggests, ‘in tatters like a Harlequin’s coat assembled from an infinite number of rags’ then,

to seek knowledge is . . . to embark on the task of journeying between these tatters and in the course of so doing to weave out connections between them (cited in Brown 2000 p12).

This section attempts to weave connections between the various bits of rag that have made up my Harlequin’s coat of writing knowledge, the *trash* which became the *gold*, the *elements* that influenced, infused and were incorporated into the play. Some of these things are as subtle as the sound of footsteps outside my door, others, like my love of jazz, are far more substantial players, and their influence is therefore more discernable in the finished product.

Throughout the writing process, of both the play and the exegesis, I kept a number of things in mind, the image of the character, Soph, as a rubbish bin, for example, and the idea of transformation. I held there statistics about such things as suicide rates of adult children of parents who had suicided¹⁸, and survivors of incest¹⁹, and lists of symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder²⁰. I kept close the memory of the first time I heard a recording of Chet Baker play *My Funny Valentine*²¹ (1953). I kept dreams and music and poetry there. I kept to my own

¹⁸ See, for example, Hawton, K. & Heeringen, K. Van, 2009

¹⁹ See Alexander, P., Anderson, C., Brand, B., Schaeffer, C., Grelling, B., Kretz L., 1998

²⁰ See Pineles, S.L., Mostoufi, S.M., Ready, C.B., Street, A.E., Griffin, M.G. and Resick, P.A. 2011.

²¹ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug2LQxOe53Q>, and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iQQGBfbB0k&feature=related>

beat. What follows is what I would ask the reader to keep in mind through the process of reading.

A retrospective tracing of the *elements* involved in the process of creating *Soph and the real world* is a bit like the retracing you do when you have misplaced something. You retrace your steps, hoping that somewhere along the way, as you move your mind (or even better, your body) back through the process, the memory will be triggered,

I came in through the door, and then I put the kettle on and then the phone rang and . . . oh there they are!

It is as though I am trying to recreate a dish which I threw together spontaneously, and having enjoyed it, I want again,

I marinated the chicken first, with red wine and garlic and . . . thyme! and I was listening to Nina Simone, and I had a glass of wine, and then Phil called and suggested . . .

As I wrote the play, I became aware that everything I sensed was somehow influencing what I was writing. Along with my internal world, my sensory immersion in the world, too, was informing the play. Lucy Dougan refers to a similar experience when, in response to a request from Hetherington to reflect on her process, she writes,

I think that I've pretty much always worked in a dreamy magpie-ish sort of way. For me a poem may be based on an experience that has settled deeply and then niggled itself to the surface. Along the way lots of loved, filed scraps may also make their way into the poem: snippets from songs; small details in paintings or movies; or quotes from books. These might not necessarily be apparent to readers but this field of associations—this tatty virtual folder—is what sustains my writing. And I would have to add to that movement—walking, swimming, immersion in a landscape—is a very important part of the way in which my poems make themselves known. So, I don't think of this as any kind of active research because, for me, that would be to become too self-conscious about processes and that would not be a good thing (also—when I 'lose' a poem a way back in may be through immersion in things that sit sideways to the poem—a memory, a letter, a passage in a book) (cited in Hetherington 2010 p6).

This section attempts, by immersion in the things which sit sideways to the play, to make my often capricious process transparent for the reader.

On writing and the body

Dougan's above reference to the importance of movement to her process appears to locate her body at the centre of her creativity. Elizabeth Grosz sees the body, similarly, as the centre of

‘perspective, insight, reflection, desire, [and] agency’ acting and reacting and generating ‘what is new, surprising [and] unpredictable’ (1994 pxi). The body as this site of action, and more specific to this thesis, the site of writing, tells the physical experience, the corporeality of the writer. A writing process which pays attention to the sensations of the body as I do, requires therefore, in the retelling, a story not only of the mind. In a narrative like this one, where I retrieve the personal voice for the sake of illuminating my own practice-led process, the inclusion of the story of (stories about) the (my) body fulfils a similar purpose.

Post Structuralist feminists have been engaged since the seventies with what Helene Cixous famously terms ‘Ecriture feminine’. In her seminal *Laugh of the medusa*, she urges,

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement (1976 p 875).

She continues,

Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth (p880).

The secret writer’s knowledge I want to mine here is not neatly compartmentalised, of course, but inextricably linked with all of my self. My first attempt at a contextual review circumnavigated the self, left holes in the research, and resulted in a superficial map which had little, if anything, to do with the real substance I was endeavouring to locate. I realised, eventually, that a different approach was needed, one which included deeper aspects of my self, if the process was to be revealed. Crawford realises something similar,

I had been forced to collapse the walls and recognise that the various fields and disciplines of my research interests could not be neatly separated and categorised to suit my purposes. Now it seemed I needed to scrutinise myself and collapse those walls between me as writer and as academic, as academic who writes, as wife, mother, daughter, friend, and so on, in order to proceed. I had to acknowledge too that, for me, one project cannot exist in isolation from another (2010 p254).

I recognise this sort of collapsing of walls as a prerequisite for my creative process. All of my self must be available to it. Approaching academic writing this way is a far more daunting and radical proposition. Is this the reason it is so hard to bring it to the page, into the light? Does an academic context, by its nature, disallow it? Cixous writes of women writing,

But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept them in the dark—that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute—there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have in common I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible (p 876).

Comparisons are irresistible here between her central topic and mine, for there is no typical writing process, no general writer, only an apparent agreement about the hidden or mysterious attribute of each individual process. I do not forget that the process I am investigating here is one which has occurred, too, in a (my) woman's body. I will settle here in the pages, bring my whole self, like Tess Brady who writes,

After all, I was a woman researching aspects of how my gender has been silenced. I listened to Cixous and from the very beginning placed myself firmly and comfortably within the text (2010).

Writing, as Dougan reveals above, is, amongst other things, a sensory process, transpiring in the body. In an interview on ABC's Radio National in 2005, Grosz discussed the nature of the origins of art, what she refers to as the 'raw materials' or 'conditions of art'. 'There's something', she says, 'about art that is an abundance of excess . . . a revelry in the excess of the energy in our bodies', and it is this excess which is 'linked to sexuality'. Describing how this energy is linked to art-making she comments,

this impulse to art is to not to make oneself seductive but to make oneself intense, and in the process to circulate some of that eros that would otherwise go into sexuality. . . there's something about the autonomy of sensation now in that artwork that is transmitted, at least ideally (2005).

Music as a transmitter of emotion and sensation which is linked to sexuality is nothing new to musicians, who often liken musical performance to sex. The idea will not be new, either, to anyone who has attended a rock concert or seen footage of fans screaming at the sight of their idols. Grosz' comments on the origins of art as a sexual impulse can be applied here,

So I think what's radical about what I'm saying is that art isn't primarily or solely conceptual, that what it represents is the most animal part of us rather than the most human part of us. Frankly, I find that really refreshing, in a way, that it's not man's nobility that produces art, it's man's animality that produces art, and that's what makes it of potential interest everywhere.

I began this thesis with an account of writing and performing my song ‘Francine’ (1996). There was a sense of excessive energy about me that night as I paced about the house. Writing the song produced sensations in me (raised neck hairs), and once the song was written, it was as if the energy had dissipated, poured somehow into the artefact. A few days later, when I performed the song, there was the sensation again, stored in the song, and transmitted through me, in performance, to the audience member who came to me later with the story of her own raised neck hairs. My story appears to align with Grosz’s description. What began as an excess of energy in my body was transformed and transmitted into the song. I have often, not really knowing what it was, referred to this stored substance as emotional resonance, as in, for example, ‘I don’t perform ‘Francine’ anymore, the emotional resonance is gone for me’.

Raised hairs on the body, or goosebumps, thrills or chills, in response to music, are described by psychologists as ‘aesthetic chills . . . transient emotional responses to music or other experiences of beauty’ (McCrae 2007 p5).

For a very open person who cannot compartmentalize feelings, a sudden dramatic turn in the emotionally charged atmosphere of music or drama may push emotional processing over some threshold and require release in the form of physical chills and gooseflesh (p10).

McCrae links the experience of aesthetic chills, something which he judges happens to about half the population and is a worldwide phenomenon, to what he terms ‘Openness of personality’ (p5), a personality trait which is linked with creativity in individuals. It follows then, that a transparent analysis of a creative process which includes and relies on chills, needs to take account of this sort of Openness in order to be investigated fully.

On memory and the body

I start with a tingle, a kind of feeling of the story I will write (Dinesen cited in Walter 1976 p17).

Harking back again to my shelf of writing books, there is one which does not appear as dusty as the others. Steven King’s *On writing: A memoir of the craft* (2000), is described on the dust jacket as ‘King’s master class on his craft’. That this ‘master class’ includes King telling the story of his life, including his history of, and subsequent recovery from, substance addiction, as well as his account of slowly returning to health after a life threatening car accident was unusual, all thrown together in what Gaylene Perry, reviewing it in *TEXT*, describes as ‘something of a mish-mash’. She writes,

This may be indicative of King's frame of mind (and body) when writing, as he wrote the book during his recuperation from a near-fatal road accident. The memoir reflects on King's path to writing success, although it focuses more strongly on his early years of writing than on his fame in later times . . . And it is the story of King's accident and how it affected his work. Each of these parts is engaging in its own right, but together in the one book, I found the parts overly fragmentary, going in too many different directions. Perhaps this fracturedness is interesting in itself: in its reflection of the circumstances and persona and usual writing genre of the author (2001).

What Perry finds overly fragmentary, I find fascinating. The book is a mish-mash certainly, but, for me, satisfyingly so. Two things provoke my fascination. Firstly, that King's body and its slow progress back to health after an accident is a factor that can be felt in the writing, and secondly, that his choice to combine practical advice for writers with memoir seems to indicate that in telling *who* he is, his memories and experiences, he is, in some way, showing *how* he writes. He is shaped, as a writer, by his experiences.

I hold a personal interest in King's account of his accident; I have had, myself, a similar near-fatal experience; one which resides in my body along scars and damaged tissue, buried deep in long-healed and steel-reinforced bones, one which required a long recovery. This real-life experience of embedded trauma was the inspiration for my Master's thesis (*A tail for my feet* 2009), a novella accompanied by an exegesis which explores writing with, and about, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I mention it here because I have long understood how the experiences of my body are intrinsic to my writing process, reading too. When reading King's account of his accident, I felt tingling in my upper lip, could taste gravel in my mouth, my nose, felt palpable aching deep in my bones; remnants of my own experience. Krauth produces these same tingles in me when he writes of something similar in 'The story in my foot: Writing and the body' (2010), where he describes the experience of using a childhood memory; a Christmas day on which he sliced his foot open with a tomahawk, as inspiration for a story,

When attempting to recall the moment of the impact, I found that my foot - the still-scarred one - would tingle, would call attention to itself, would make itself present in my brain as the source of the memory. . . I tried to think about the Christmas tomahawk event without involving my foot's response. It didn't work. My foot pulsated the memories. So I tried to see if I could remember the event without involving my brain. It did work. I could go straight to my foot - not think about it as a foot but somehow contact it directly without thinking. I began to realise that the story of my hacking my foot resided in my foot, not in my brain. My brain will call on my foot to tell the story. My brain-memory isn't that story's storehouse, it's merely the intermediary; it's just the controller flicking the switch. The repository for the story is my foot itself.

This trading of tingles, writer to reader, King to me, Krauth to me, mirrors my song writing story about raised neck hairs, which occurred in both myself and an audience member in response to the song. This is the stuff, the nitty gritty of writing. This is what I'm after, as musician, reader, writer and researcher. An important *element* in the writing of *Soph and the real world* was my ability to draw on my experiences with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in order to flesh out Soph's character. Digging in deep to this experience, I then allowed my imagination to push at the boundaries of what might be, and in so doing I have in many ways written myself onto the pages in a personal response to Cixous' call.

Understanding the body in this way, that is, as a repository for stories, and as a *crucible* for the *alchemical* writerly process, and as a central agency in that process, is a complex endeavour. To reveal such a thing as personal trauma, for example, as I have just done, in a scholarly context is tricky, and in danger of seeming irrelevant, or indulgent somehow. Exposing the body and its memories in order to reveal my process may be perceived, for example, as unscholarly, or worse, therapeutic. And yet these things are integral to a truthful, no, a better word here – rigorous – rendering of my research. Perhaps if I couch it in suitably academic language, create a little section, a box to put it in, just as I have done for my creative voice? What if I just came out and said things, tilted towards memoir, caused a scene? Is this what Cixous is talking about when she decrees,

At times it is in the fissure caused by an earthquake, through that radical mutation of things brought on by a material upheaval when every structure is for a moment thrown off balance and an ephemeral wildness sweeps order away (1976 p879).

I find, standing at the edge of upheaval though that, like Crawford, I am reluctant to expose too much of such things,

And again, I stopped. To admit to writing from, for example, a sense of loss, might have required me to expose my own fragility and/or vulnerability. The truth is, I really had no desire to explicitly bring my own experience into my university work (p253).

Here is a point where the art work, as an expression and embodiment of this visceral *element*, may be asserted as research, just as King's accident can be discerned in his writing, my experiences of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder may be discerned in the pages of the play, and I leave it to the reader to engage with it, trusting that energy has been transmitted, stored there for the audience to experience.

On musicality and writing

Put your trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur (Breton 1972 p30).

I found the above advice from Breton instantly recognisable, and it continues to appeal to my intuition the longer I mull it over. It is a reference to tacit knowledge, and evokes the inward sort of listening I do when engaged in the writing process. I am listening for a rightness, a type of rhythm, something quietly musical, and Breton's use of the word 'murmur', with its soft sounds, and its rhythm and rhyme, mirrors this. In an article for *TEXT*, Michael Beresford describes the creative process as 'an organic part of you that is your own *writerly* experience or *dreaming*' (2007). For Beresford, writing a play is akin to scoring a piece of music, where, in a type of trance, he 'sound(s) the rightness of a voice and action in any scenario', prioritising 'rhythm rather than content in what is essentially stream-of-consciousness writing'. For a song writer, this is an intuitive description, as song writing is exactly such a process, where sound and rhythm are privileged over content, allowing inspiration to arise from the unconscious untrammelled.

Beresford suggests that,

two fundamental conditions appear to pertain in the process of writing. They are the role of the unconscious mind as motor and initiator of unfolding material, and the engagement of the entire body in writing.

Like me, he brings his body to the process, gauging each sound, discerning rhythm, privileging these things over content, resulting in works which are of the senses, for the senses.

Playwright Samuel Beckett, whose works display a sense of musicality, was also an accomplished pianist, who, according to Stefan Brooke-Grant, 'spoke his written dialogue out loud, paying attention to the aspirations and pauses which the spoken words provoked, and the tempo at which they were best delivered' (2000). Brooke-Grant describes how Beckett viewed music as standing closest to the 'ultimate universal imageless language of emotion'. On the subject Beckett himself comments,

music is the idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in Space but in Time only, and consequently untouched by the teleological hypothesis (1965 p92).

Anna Gibbs refers to something similar, proposing that all writing begins with music which is felt in the body,

I think most writers - even of academic work - have experienced a dawning awareness in the act of writing that our word choices and our grammatical structures are dictating themselves to us via dimly-remembered melodies which we feel in some - perhaps not precisely locatable - region of our bodies as we write. It is in this sense that thought takes place without language, and the inchoate, subtle activity of the body . . . both drives and sustains our thinking and our writing. We are aware sometimes, that we are writing to a rhythm which will generate particular lexical selections, as rhyme also does for rap poets . . . What I'm suggesting, then, is that writing may be driven as much by the body as by thought: it partakes not simply of ideas, but of sensory and affective knowledges which are not secondary to thought (2005).

My musicality and my live performance experiences are integral, indispensable to my own particular writing process. While writing *Soph and the real world* I relied on my ability to access my memories of the live performed moment to gauge if a line would work. As I wrote, listening intently to that inner murmur, which has the effect of something like an internal metronome that keeps the beat for me as I compose the story, I was also accessing those memories of being in front of an audience. I was able to virtually place myself on a stage and speak the line, and imagine the response of the audience to it, and my response to them, drawing on this past experience to guide the fantasy. Always, when speaking the line in these scenarios, I am seeking connection; with the audience, with my experiences, with the internal murmur, with my body. When all these things align, then the piece is sitting in a type of, to use a common musical term, 'sweet spot'; where I want it to sit, where it should sit, where it wants to sit, where it *feels* right.

This sweet spot can be likened to the jazz musician's notion of *swing* which, according to Matthew Butterfield, is not only a 'rhythmic groove emerging from the bass and drums as they maintain the beat' but

a general rhythmic ethos – a mysterious quality purportedly transcending representation in musical notation – prompting active listener engagement, often expressed through spontaneous foot-tapping, head-bobbing, hand-clapping, finger-snapping or even dancing (2010 p3).

In other words, *swing* has a quality which powerfully engages the audience and musicians in a visceral experience. For my script to *swing*, to sit in its sweet spot, to connect viscerally with the audience I needed to engage my love of jazz, my musicality, and my memories of live performance, all powerful *elements* of the writing process.

Jazz performance is, at its heart, a dialogue. According to Vickie Willis, 'musicians create a dialogue, where they respond to each other through improvisation—a conversation where one speaks, another replies, another interrupts (cited in Spry 2010 p273). It is so '*conspicuously*

dialogical that it renders irresistible the art-as-language model' (Kraut 2005 p11). Musicians typically talk about their performative experiences of jazz in these terms, for example, drummer Max Roach, who says,

After you initiate the solo, one phrase determines what the next is going to be. From the first note that you hear, you are responding to what you've just played: you just said this on your instrument, and now that's a constant. What follows from that? It's like language: you're talking, you're speaking, you're responding to yourself (in Kraut 2005 p9).

Roach's description renders a vision of a spontaneous creative language spoken with the self and the instrument. Ted Gioia describes this improvisatory aspect of jazz as a distinctive feature (1997), and pianist Bill Evans, in the liner notes of Miles Davis' seminal *Kind of blue* album locates this process in the body, comparing jazz to a Japanese visual art form, writing,

These artists must practice a particular discipline, allowing the idea to express itself in communication with their hands in such a direct way that deliberation cannot interfere (1959 p4).

Jazz, if it is to be applied as a type of playwriting ethos, or method, as I intend to do here, needs to be understood, as the above examples imply, as a spontaneous tacit process resulting from dialogues with both the inner and outer worlds, which relies on and expands existing skills and takes place in the body. It is also a process which works within certain structures. Ted Gioia refers to these constraints, proposing jazz to be, amongst other things, a process of inventing which takes place within and is set against a background of specific rhythm and chord changes (1988).

Jazz performance as the basis for a method of creative writing is not new. The Beat Poetry movement of the 1950s was famously inspired by the jazz of the era. Jack Kerouac, possibly the most well known of the Beats, though not a musician himself, based what he called 'spontaneous prose' or 'sketching' (1973 pi) on jazz. James Campbell writes,

The improvisatory technique that Kerouac had evolved while revising the long scroll version of *On the Road* -sketching he called it-was shaped by his belief that jazz was the essential American art form, and his feeling that no one before him had seen the potential scope of a jazz prose. Kerouac's model for this new and self-consciously American melody line was adopted from the tenor man, "blowing a phrase on his saxophone till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his statement's been made" (2001, p455).

Clearly, jazz has influenced writers and their methods, and is therefore an existing phenomenon, yet as a means to, and a methodology for, higher research, it is uncommon. A literature search uncovers several applications of a jazz ethos to research.

Tami Spry's essay 'Call it swing: A jazz blues autoethnography' 'utilizes jazz swing as a method to further activate the critical processes in qualitative research' (2010 p 271). Reflecting on her father's history as a jazz musician, Spry finds 'his everyday lived methodology of swing provides an opportunity to explore the ways in which family inheritance collides with sociocultural practices of racial inequity and cultural appropriation'. She proposes jazz as a transgressive discipline which activates, 'an empathetic epistemology of critical reflection' which she then applies to issues of 'racial accountability, embodied theorizing, and the ethical implications of an aesthetic/epistemic praxis in autoethnography', stating,

Co-opting, corrupting, or deeply connecting one another, jazz in America has not been played alone. Engaged by selves and others in privilege, prosperity, obscurity, and side by side on a bandstand, jazz embodies what Wynton Marsalis (2005) calls "the strange dialogue of race, jazz, and America".

Spry's ideas about a jazz ethos spring from her father's lived experience. She writes 'even after he put his sticks away, I have come to see that the methodology and ethos of swing guided who he was as a husband, a father, and a man until his death in 2003'. Applying jazz methodology to critical reflection, she finds,

A performative ethos infused with jazz expands the concept of the performative-I researcher position where the researcher constructs "a plural sense of self that seeks to navigate the interrelations between self/other/bodies/language" (Spry, 2010 p273).

Spry's notion of a performative ethos applies well to my own ideas about a jazz methodology for writing. The sense I have of myself as a writer writing, and the various interrelating elements, both internal and external involved in that process, and which draw from my lived experience, sits well alongside it, and it is this aspect of her work that is relevant here.

In their article 'Is ethnography Jazz?', Humphreys, Brown and Hatch (2003) draw parallels between the improvising, empathetic jazz musician and the ethnographer, using this parallel to propose a 'very broad conception of ethnography as a fundamentally creative, exploratory and interpretive process' (p5). They write,

The aim of our article is to broaden and deepen our understanding of the work of ethnographers by transferring information from the base domain of jazz (p7).

Like me, Humphreys et al draw on the rich traditions of jazz to explicate a process, using it as a type of metaphor. My research seeks to use jazz not only as a metaphor for describing my process but as the template I worked from, the embodied methodology I used to create the play.

Corinne Mantle-Bromley's 'Jazz at the Improv' (2004) focuses on the experienced jazz musician's ability to continuously learn as a method for mastery of teaching. She writes,

Mastery in teaching follows the same path as good jazz musicians who are tireless learners; however, new teachers focus single-mindedly on "me" and "my teaching," which can contribute to the disappearance of skilled teachers from the classroom (p21).

The above examples indicate academic interest in the jazz ethos, and its applicability across disciplines. The scarcity of scholarly material on this ethos as it applies to creative writing for the stage reveals a gap, what could be termed an under-described jazz theory or methodology of writing for the stage, and it is here that my research sits. This thesis therefore, using a practice-led approach, focuses on articulating this, my particular methodology, heeding Haseman who views the development of methodology as one of the important tasks for creative writing researchers, and writes on the subject,

In this task of articulating methodology I believe the pivotal research strategy we have to deploy is practice-led research (2007).

On music and chills

My own jazz experiences, and the ones I was drawing on as I wrote, derive from my experiences as both an avid listener and a singer. A major influence on jazz singers is Frank Sinatra, of whom singer Harry Connick Jr. says, 'Sinatra swings like no one else. He knows where to put the words. He can take liberties; he never gets lost' (in Nelson 2004 p524). Bono, lead singer for rock band U2, in the same article, comments,

Rock and roll people love Frank Sinatra because Frank Sinatra has got what we want—swagger and attitude . . . His voice, tight as a fist, opening at the end of a bar, not on the beat, over it—playing with it, splitting it. Like a jazz man, like Miles Davis. Turning on the right phrase in the right song, which is where he lives, where he lets go, where he reveals himself. His songs are his home, and he lets you in (p523).

Swing requires attitude, precise timing, intuition and an openness to the audience; an ability to reveal oneself, and Sinatra expertly displays all four attributes. Francis Davis describes his style,

In his prime, Sinatra wrote the book on phrasing. No other popular singer ever knew better the combined value of precise diction and conversational delivery, and no other has ever been more aware that the beat shouldn't necessarily fall where the rhyme does . . . Sinatra may have been an intuitive musician, but he was an analytical singer. He knew that to inflect a word or a syllable that seems not to call for it can shift the rhythm and increase the sincerity of a lyric, by making it more like speech, and can also lavish attention on an especially attractive melodic phrase (1998 p120).

Sinatra's ability to continually surprise with his phrasing is a potent example of the sort of 'sudden dramatic turn in the emotionally charged atmosphere of music or drama' which McCrae refers to when he proposes the source of aesthetic chills. When writing *Soph and the real world*, and in order to produce a visceral response, to prompt, via dramatic turns, a reaction such as chills in the audience, I intuitively drew on my own experiences of singing, that is, I accessed memories of my live performances, and endeavoured to bring that attitude to the writing, to bring my analytical and intuitive abilities to the task, to play with the rhythm, to let the words swoop and fly where they would, and to reveal aspects of myself in order to let the audience in, always keeping in mind the constraints I was working within; the structure and shape of the play.

It is these surprises, the sudden turns in music or drama, the unexpected, which are key factors in producing audience response. A famous musical example of this is Gavin Bryars' composition *Jesus' Blood Never Failed me Yet*²² (1975), 'a musical meditation based on recorded fragments of the singing of a homeless man' (2011). Bryars uses a loop of the man's voice as the basis of the piece, gradually overlaying brass and strings. The recording produced a profound response in me on first and subsequent listens, often producing chills and even tears. A number of factors work together to evoke this response in me; the fragility of the man's voice and the subtlety of Bryars' musical accompaniment to it for example, but the more interesting aspect, for me, is that the many repetitions of the song in the 25 minute recording do not become irritating but serve to build emotion.

In interview on ABC Radio National's *Into the music* program, Bryars described the making of the piece. The old man was filmed as part of a documentary about homeless men in 1971. When the man didn't make the final cut of the film, Bryars was given the recording, and subsequently

²² The recording can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1lnSi7QWY8&feature=related>

noticed that it was conveniently in tune with his piano. He looped the song and the following day took it to his studio to work on. Bryars' studio adjoined a large painting studio, and when he left to have coffee that day he left the door of his studio open, and the song playing. Upon returning he,

found the normally lively room unnaturally subdued. People were moving about much more slowly than usual and a few were sitting alone, quietly weeping. I was puzzled until I realised that the tape was still playing and that they had been overcome by the old man's singing (2011).

The 13 bar loop repeats in 'a slightly unpredictable way' (2011), and it is this unpredictability which gives it its power. Writer Peter Carey, who listened continuously to it while writing his novel, *Theft: A love story* (2006a), comments,

Bryars loops the song and it repeats, always starting, almost ending, while the voice is joined slowly, always sympathetically, by strings, then guitar (2006b p18).

It is the 'almost ending' quality of the man's song, the unpredictability of the rhythm of his singing, and the oddness in length of the 13 bars which continually draw the listener back in. When writing the play, I applied the idea of sudden turns and unpredictability using what playwrights term 'reversals', defined by Robbins as,

Changes in action . . . which create interest and surprise. Dramatic units should change from one unit to the next, and beats and scenes usually end differently [to how] they begin (1991 p7).

On music, anticipation and reversals

'Music is organised sound' writes neuroscientist (and former record producer) Daniel Levitin, but some element of surprise, of the unexpected, needs to be involved in this organisation if it is not to become 'emotionally flat or robotic' (2008 p111). According to Levitin, our ability to appreciate music is related to our intuitive understanding of its underlying structures, and 'to be able to make predictions about what's to come next'. He writes,

Composers imbue music with emotion by knowing what our expectations are and then very deliberately controlling when those expectations will be met, and when they won't. The thrills, chills and tears we experience from music are the result of having our expectations artfully manipulated by a skilled composer and the musicians who interpret that music.

This setting up and manipulation of anticipation, of an audience's expectations, is achieved in 'countless' ways, for example melody, form, timbre, rhythm and so on. Human beings develop

musical 'schemas' (p117), says Levitin, which are developed, amended and informed each time we listen to music, and which include,

A vocabulary of styles, as well as of eras . . . rhythms, chord progressions, phrase structure . . . how long a song is, and what notes typically follow what . . . When we hear 'Yesterday' with its seven measure phrase, it is a surprise. Even though we've heard 'Yesterday' a thousand or even ten thousand times, it still interests us because it violates schematic expectations that are even more firmly entrenched than our memory for this particular song. (p117-8).

These ideas can be applied to the writing of a play, which is itself, amongst other things, an organisation of sounds. Allowing my internal metronome to dictate a rhythmic style of dialogue for *Soph and the real world*, where the characters are riffing off each other like jazz musicians in the form of word play, has perhaps tapped into these schemas, and may then access those schemas of the audience.

Understanding reversals in playwriting via this musical idea of thwarted expectations was an understanding which came to me as a sort of epiphany during the writing process. I suddenly began to feel intuitively when a reversal was coming, and how it should sound. The play began to sit in that 'sweet spot' I referred to earlier, began to *swing* somehow, and it was at this point that I began to make real connections between my musicality and my emerging skills as a playwright.

On writing and constraint

Constraints allow us to control the multitude of possibilities that thought and language offer. There are so many ideas that we might have, and so many ways of expressing them, that we have to impose constraint to avoid thinking and writing gibberish. Constraint is not a barrier to creative thinking, but the context within which creativity can occur (Sharples 1999 p41).

Just as Sinatra requires a rhythm to sing against, a structure to move within, a writer is working within a number of constraints, forming a framework which acts as a type of holding pen or playground, a space where the writer can create. According to Sharples, 'the topic and writing situation' and the writer's own knowledge and experience form the constraints (p42). He describes writing as a type of 'what next?' procedure by which the topic is used to mine long term memory, which activates 'related concepts' which the 'subconscious mind filters according to current constraints, the most appropriate of which are brought to conscious attention as ideas, 'framed as language', and then consciously evaluated by the writer. Crucial to the process, he says, is 'setting just sufficient constraints,' advising that an overly constrained

process will result in writer's block (p43). Equally, he says, too few constraints will result in a meandering trail which circles around the 'starting point', in effect going nowhere. The reader, or in my case the audience, must be taken on a journey.

In *Writing: Self and reflexivity*, Hunt and Sampson refer to something similar when they describe the writers 'intentions' for a work as those elements which 'influence the way we shape and develop the material'. Whether a writer begins with a blank page and waits for material to emerge spontaneously, in which case intentions will emerge too, or has clear intent from the outset,

it seems highly unlikely that we can write creatively without any intentions at all, although our intentions may be predominantly unconscious, and what we intend to say may be quite different from what we end up saying. But having too many intentions at the outset, or at least intentions that cannot be modified as the writing proceeds, is likely to inhibit the spontaneous life of the text and impair the end product (2006 p51).

Between these writerly intentions, or constraints, and the 'spontaneous life of the text', there exists an inevitable tension (p52), and Hunt and Sampson suggest that the writer ideally needs to develop a 'stance',

towards the work in progress that allows [the] material as much freedom as possible whilst also taking into account the need to hold and shape the material as it develops.

As I wrote the play, a number of constraints played a part in framing the work. My own experiences and my existing knowledge (of language, rhythm and the performed moment) shaped the piece, as well as a number of unknowns; how a play is structured and shaped, and how I would approach the writing of it for example. This twofold experience of a type of tension, firstly between my own intentions for the work and the spontaneous life of the piece, and secondly between my existing praxis as a songwriter and prose writer and my new and developing skills as a playwright, required me to develop, like Hunt and Sampson suggest, a 'stance' to the writing. It is this stance or attitude to the writing which I now refer to as a jazz ethos or methodology.

Dada: An attitude

As one of my first thoughts upon awaking from the dream origins of this study was of Dada, it seems appropriate, as always, to follow the lead of my Unconscious and show how Dada has influenced the project. Emerging during World War One, Dada could be defined more as a spirit, or a rebellion, than an art movement; more cultural movement than art, more anti-

movement than anything else. Dadaists were responding to the cultural ideals of their era with what they termed 'anti-art', by which they intended to blur boundaries between art and life. Marcel Duchamp famously achieved this by taking everyday objects and placing them in the context of the art gallery, naming them art. His *Readymades* are typical examples; a bicycle wheel (*Bicycle wheel* 1913), a bottle rack (*Bottle rack* 1914) and a public urinal (*Fountain* 1917).

Translator Mark Lowenthal, in the introduction to Francis Picabia's *I am a beautiful monster: Poetry, prose and provocation* remarks,

However one wishes to use Dada . . . its one overriding significance for the twentieth century, and its one attribute that continues to cast a formidable shadow into the twenty-first, is the way it managed to, however briefly, *embody an attitude* (2007 p1).

He sums up this 'attitude' as,

in its simplest form one of attack; on the bourgeoisie who had instigated the senseless horror of World War 1, on the mercantilism that was turning art into product, on the division between art and everyday life, and on the stultification imposed by a no longer relevant tradition.

Dada's 'attitude' was, then, an important beginning to the project as it initiated and informed the development of my own attitude, or stance, to the writing process.

Surrealism and dreams

Surrealists were occupied with the Unconscious and its liberation through experiments with, for example, automatic writing and sleep hypnosis, and in particular with dreams and their images. In his *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Breton urges the artist to direct her focus towards dreams, and away from the waking life,

I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams (1972 p11).

Breton considers the waking state a 'phenomenon of interference' (p12), one which gives nothing more than constant distraction from the 'marvellous' world of the dream. What he most enjoys about 'contemplating' a dream, he says, is,

everything that sinks back below the surface in a waking state, everything I have forgotten about my activities in the course of the preceding day, dark foliage, stupid branches. In "reality", likewise, I prefer to *fall*.

Breton, here, describes an immersion in, a 'fall' into, these 'below the surface' things, his 'dark foliage and stupid branches'; what could be seen as the *trash* of the everyday, that is, what we normally let sink back below the surface, what is discarded from a day, what we, in effect, *treat* as *trash*. He asks,

why should I not grant to dreams what I occasionally refuse reality, that is, this value of certainty in itself which, in its own time, is not open to my repudiation? Why should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from a degree of consciousness which is daily more acute? Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?
(p12)

A resolution of the dream state and the reality state, according to Breton, will result in 'a kind of absolute reality' (p14); a 'surreality', and further, Surrealism is defined as,

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (p26).

Although dreams, and the dream state, are afforded a pivotal role in the writing of this thesis, both the play and the exegesis, it is with the above definition that I begin to part ways with Surrealism. The writer's *alchemy*, as posited here, is a process requiring a synthesis of both the dream and the waking state, both the conscious and the Unconscious, both reason and imagination, just as much problem solving as fantasising. The process by which *Soph and the real world* was written was a complex one, involving many influences, or *elements*, and requiring not only the raw material of the Unconscious (sensory and emotional experience, for example), and the unconscious processing of that raw material into, for example, dreams, daydreams, thoughts, and images which just popped up, but conscious processing too, that is, a process requiring reason, rigour and problem-solving to get the text to the page. Though Surrealist ideas influence here, the Surrealist objective to express the actual functioning of thought in the absence of any control, or constraint, is not relevant. Instead, here, Surrealism provides the basis for a definition of the Unconscious as a marvellous realm which presents an array of possibilities for the conscious mind to then process into a creative work.

The Unconscious

When Breton refers to the Unconscious he is referring to Freud's psychoanalytic theory,

It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer and, in my opinion by far the most important part-has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud (p10).

Freud divides the mind into three categories, the Conscious, the Unconscious, and the Preconscious. He describes the Conscious mind as that which we are aware of, or conscious of, at any given time. He reminds us too that consciousness is ‘in general a highly fugitive condition’ since ‘what is conscious is only conscious for a moment’ (1940). The Preconscious is that part of the mind that is accessible but not always conscious, where you might, for example, store a password, and the Unconscious is that part of the mind which is repressed, which has no easy access to the conscious mind, and therefore must be ‘inferred, discovered and translated into conscious form’.

Breton’s interpretation of Freud’s Unconscious seems to be of a place where magic, or *alchemy*, occurs. Emmanuel Levinas has this to say about it,

Breton’s first manifesto displayed, on the one hand, a naive confidence in the clandestine and miraculous forces at work in the Unconscious. His references concerning Freud still read like allusions to some mythological realm ripe with promises of hidden treasures (Levinas and Maleuvre, 1992, p145).

The Unconscious mind, as Freud posits it, as Breton describes it, is a suitable definition to work from for this research. This fugitive part of the mind, not easily accessed except by dreams, daydreams, slips of the tongue and the like, plays a fundamental role in the creative process, and more specifically, in this writer’s *alchemy*. This thesis could be, in fact, seen as a type of chase, a hunt, a(n) (at times unrequited) love affair, a story of the productive and tumultuous relationship I have with my Unconscious, and more specifically, with what could be called my Unconscious writer, or to align with this work’s over-arching metaphor, my Unconscious *alchemist*, that is, that part of my mind which appears to produce and process ideas, images, characters, words, melodies, even whole songs and scenes, beyond my awareness.

Where does the stuff of the Unconscious come from? What constitutes it? Everywhere and everything according to Diderot, who writes,

I have come to believe that all we have seen, known, heard, perceived . . . from the entire range of human voices to melodies and harmonies of all the airs, all the musical pieces and all the concerts we have heard, all of this exists within ourselves in our unconscious (cited in Elkins, 2009 p274).

The polyphonic, multilayered profusion that this description suggests is appealing for a number of reasons, not the least of which is its fullness, a reassuring abundance which, it seems, could not be depleted. Diderot’s Unconscious as a holding place for all that the senses have experienced, most especially, it seems, the ears, and including all the highs and lows of the

human experience, recalls Breton's version of the Unconscious as a repository and source of the 'marvellous', and in this case exhilaratingly musically so. The image also brings to mind another, shifting, as it does, this discussion into the realm of science.

Why the brain is like spaghetti

Neuroscientist Sebastian Seung likens the brain to a bowl of spaghetti,

Or maybe really, really fine capellini with branches. Just as one strand of spaghetti contacts many other strands on your plate, one neuron touches many other neurons through their entangled branches. One neuron can be connected to so many other neurons, because there can be synapses at these points of contact (2010).

Seung is involved in what he describes as a 'quixotic' study of the brain which proposes to map the connections between each neuron. Seung hypothesises that it is in these connections that our memories and experiences are stored. Each brain will have a unique set of connections which he calls a 'connectome', stating 'we are our connectomes'.

The mapping of connections in the human brain is, to say the least, a hugely ambitious (and yes, quixotic) pursuit. Levitin describes just how numerous and complex these possible connections between neurons can be,

The number of combinations becomes so large that it is unlikely that we will ever understand all the possible connections in the brain, or what they mean. The number of combinations possible – and hence the number of possible different thoughts or brain states each of us can have – exceeds the number of known particles in the entire known universe (2006 p88)

Levitin goes on to describe the brain as a parallel processor as opposed to a serial processor such as a computer. He uses the analogy of a network of friends, each of whom is one dimensional, and each of whom produces a different emotional state in you when you speak to them, and whom you may call on the telephone at any time. These friends can also call each other, and influence each other's states,

With thousands of friends interconnected . . . and a bunch of telephones in your living room ringing off the hook all day long, the number of emotional states you might experience would indeed be quite varied (p90).

And, he goes on,

It is generally accepted that our thoughts and memories arise from the myriad connections of this sort that our neurons might make.

Seung and Levitin invoke images that work here both intuitively, and metaphorically. My personal experience of the creative process is one of, amongst other things, making connections between disparate things. If my memories are stored in the connections between neurons, and each neuron touches so many others, it is possible to see how these disparate links are made. The spaghetti metaphor in particular is a pleasingly entangled one, evoking well the (winding, slippery) trail of creative thought.

Nailing jelly to the wall

Creativity appears to be as much a mystery to neuroscientists as it is to artists, and there exists no unifying theory of creativity. According to Dietrich and Kanso,

To most neuroscientists, the prospect of looking for creativity in the brain must seem like trying to nail jelly to the wall (2010 p822)

Dietrich and Kanso guard against ‘simplistic’ (p823) theorising on the topic (citing as examples, Guilford ‘divergent thinking’ 1967, Torrance’s ‘Torrance Test of Creative Thinking’ 1974, Mednick’s ‘Remote Associates Test’ 1972), and emphasise the complexity of the creative process, viewing creative thought as a product of both deliberate and spontaneous processes. Dietrich, in an article entitled ‘The cognitive neuroscience of creativity’ further explicates this complexity,

Humans have a great deal of intentional control over what they attend to, and the attentional network of the prefrontal cortex is not only a mechanism to select the content of consciousness . . . but also to maintain the chosen content online long enough for a creative solution to mature . . . this article proposes that there are two types of processing modes, deliberate and spontaneous, that can give rise to creative thoughts. Much evidence exists suggesting that creativity can be the result of defocused attention . . . but the ability to deliberately direct attention to pertinent information must be a prerequisite for creative thinking that is the result of effortful, constructive problem solving (2004 p1014).

It is not my intention to nail jelly to the wall here, of course, but simply to underline both the complexity and mystery of the creative process, and to emphasise my earlier point that creativity is an holistic process; a combination of reason and imagination, of work and play, an exercise of the whole brain, the whole body, rather than this or that part of it. It is also important to note Dietrich’s suggestion that the ability to deliberately focus attention to pertinent information (in my case, for example, dreams) is a prerequisite for creative thinking, a notion which aligns with my own findings.

A study of creativity is a study of what it is to be human. Dietrich and Kanso again,

To study creative ideas, and how and where they arise in the brain, is to approach a defining element of what makes us human (2010 p822)

Finding ways to observe and map creativity, describe it even, is difficult. A (careful, reflective, creative, rigorous) subjective study of a writer in process, as this one is, is therefore an important step towards understanding and illumination of the topic, in a field of research which has a long and fascinating journey ahead.

Antonin Artaud: Alchemy of the senses

Preparation for the writing of my first play included a lot of reading of both theatre practitioners and theorists. Of the theorists, Artaud was the most revelatory, and once read, became the most influential with regard to how I initially approached writing of the play, and having been deposited somewhere, even if a dark corner, of my mind, has presumably influenced the playwriting. Having already established sensory links between my body and my creative process, as well as with my performance experience, I found his ideas about developing a concrete language for the stage, one which spoke to the senses and did not privilege words both intuitive and inspiring.

Artaud asserts that theatre is ‘like the plague’, a contagious force which must infect the audience. Just as the plague, with its threat of death, can erode boundaries (such as between social classes, between madness and sanity) and transform societies; thereby unravelling conflicts, liberating powers and releasing potential, so too can theatre,

and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre, but life (1970 p21).

According to Artaud, a theatre which mimics the effects of a plague, that is, one which destroys the structure and the false realities of a society, can bring about an experience close to the truth of the real. He proposes a means for life to show itself as it is.

I approach analysis of his work in two distinct ways; as a basis for theatrical writing, and as a demonstration of his writerly process. His writing provided me with a theoretical point of departure as I moved into the creation of my own pathways for theatrical structure, and informed my search for personal metaphors for the writerly process.

The blueprint

Artaud provided me, then, with a theoretical blueprint for my initial experiments with theatre. His emphasis on a ‘concrete’ (1970 p27) language for the stage; a language grounded in the physical, and his arguments for the uselessness of words as the dominant form of expression in this context, gave me a strong initial sense of how a work for the stage might be constructed.

According to Artaud, words are useless tools for the stage.

Dialogue – something written and spoken – does not specifically belong to the stage but to books . . . Theatre must differentiate itself from other forms with a language that is unique to itself . . . I maintain that this . . . language . . . must first satisfy the senses. There must be poetry for the senses just as there is for speech (1970 p 27).

This language, he says, must be aimed at these senses instead of, as with spoken language, at the mind.

Theatre requires such a language because ‘the thoughts it expresses escape spoken language’ (p 27). He refers here to some *other* thing, something inexpressible through spoken or written language. This *other* must be engaged if theatre is to provide audiences with powerful, transformative experiences, with visceral, multisensory encounters, with the thoughts and feelings which escape spoken language. Artaud proposes,

not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other’s bodies, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise on us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And theatre has been created to teach us that first of all (cited in Scheer 2000 p7).

In writing *Soph and the real world*, I brought my whole self to the process; my memories and dreams, my body and the memories embedded there, my existing skills with language and music in order to produce a work influenced by Artaud’s ideas, one which would provoke visceral responses in the audience.

Process

Artaud also influenced my investigation of my intrinsic writing processes. Reading Artaud is difficult, and the reader is variously confronted with scatological imagery, bemused by contradiction, and most relevant to this thesis, inescapably privy to the writer’s struggle for truth, real life and meaning, and for authenticity in the expression of these things.

‘I think about life,’ he writes, ‘[a]ll the systems that I shall ever construct will never equal my cries’ (1973 p109). Artaud’s writing is filled with these sorts of cries, expressing that which, he says, cannot be constructed. It is this place, this persistence in the face of despair, of pointlessness, which interests me and informs my own process. ‘All writing is pigshit,’ (Scheer 2000, p75) he writes, and I understand him, am intrigued by him. It is this place of intrigue - *that* he writes, *that* I do, *why* and therefore *how* – which informs my own explorations into the writerly process.

Artaud's process appears to be a complex procedure comprised of a desire for truth, the *otherness* of the process, and the blood and tissue of the body. He writes,

This pain driven into me like a wedge . . . I have learned to distract myself from . . . by means of a false suggestion. . . For the space of that minute which is marked by the illumination of a lie, I concoct an idea of escape, I rush down a false trail prompted by my blood. I close the eyes of my intelligence and, giving voice to the unformulated within me, I offer myself the illusion of a system whose terms elude me. But this moment of error leaves me with the sense of having wrested from the unknown something real. I believe in spontaneous conjurations. On the paths along which my blood draws me it cannot be that one day I will not discover a truth (1973, p 91-2).

Here, Artaud's faith in his body, his 'blood' is revealed. His scatological writings continuously evoke it. His writing challenges ideas about how we make meaning from things, by forcing the reader to look where she'd rather not; at the messy reality of physical existence. He seems to be at war with, yet completely inhabiting and exhibiting his body, making use of it; its orifices and excretions (the by-products, substance and decoys of his process).

Jane Goodall writes,

Artaud is, amongst other things, a bizarre logician, whose thought is so fertile and diverse it challenges most of the ground rules of meaning making but in doing so opens up other ways of seeing (cited in Scheer 2000 p4).

Artaud has had to construct such a text; has had to write, though he names it garbage, in order to construct something through which his cries may be heard, his process revealed, his meaning perceived. A thing must be built whether of words or garbage or pigshit, in order for there to be holes, in order to reveal or expose life. It can't be got at either directly or easily.

His proposed 'Theatre of Cruelty' is therefore also about his process. It is the separation of 'art on the one hand and life on the other' (p58) which seems to most infuriate Artaud. This separation is a 'lazy, ineffective idea' (1970 p58) and we are all 'mad desperate and sick' with it, he says, urging us to react, and pointing the way. A theatre which, with its emphasis on gesture, symbols and sound, a spectacular language of the body and its senses, will act like an injection of the plague, 'a revenging scourge, a redeeming epidemic . . . impelling us to see ourselves as we are' (p22).

In an interview on Artaud, Kristeva quotes him,

The artist who doesn't shelter the heart of his era at the depths of his own heart, the artist who ignores the fact that he is a scapegoat, that his duty is to magnetize, to make the wandering furies of the era fall on his own shoulders in order to discharge psychological sickness, is not an artist (cited in Scheer p271).

It is a quote she finds 'absolutely contemporary and completely topical' (p271) as do I. It is a call to the writer, an urge to serious work, to not 'relish' (p270) our own traumas but to send them out 'like a probe to irradiate the social space'.

Artaud offers a proposition to the playwright – to construct something (from garbage; *trash*) for the stage, full of cracks and holes and spaces where these cries will issue forth, unbounded and unavoidable, where life might be exposed or revealed. He edges the writer towards her/his own manifestos and metaphors, towards the experience of 'blood' and body, to a reliance on the spontaneous and a belief in conjurations.

Manifesting Artaud: Beckett and Kane

Samuel Beckett

If theatre is to be, as Artaud intends, a 'poetry for the senses', then Samuel Beckett can be looked to as a guide. Words are just a part of what happens in his plays. For the writer attempting to follow the map that Artaud has set down, Beckett's plays serve as powerful and illuminating examples of what is possible.

Beckett's plays can seem like puzzles, provoking more than the usual analysis and conjecture. In his introduction to *The Samuel Beckett reader*, *I can't go on, I'll go on*, Seaver notes that Beckett's works have 'probably been more commented on than any other works of the twentieth century' (1976 p ix). Beckett's works mesmerise for many reasons, not the least of which is their ability to mystify at the same time as being profoundly understandable experientially, as in the case of the San Quentin prisoners.

Esslin suggests (1961 pxv) that the lived experience of the prisoners was mirrored in the play, or that their lack of sophistication and preconceived notions about theatre allowed the play to have an impact upon them. I would argue that it is exactly this type of giving over of the body, of dropping preconceived notions and sophistry and entering into the lived moment of Beckett's plays which allows profound understandings of concepts which cannot be understood solely via the intellect.

There is something intuitively familiar too, about Beckett's surreal landscapes, about the waiting that Estragon and Vladimir endure in *Waiting for Godot* (1956), about the disappointments that life has delivered to Krapp (1984), about the indecisiveness of Clov

(1958), about the muteness of *Not-I* (1984) and the incessant speech of a mouth suspended in space. These characters and symbols speak directly to the body, and to the Unconscious; to the parts of us which dream and feel and create.

The enigma of Beckett's work arises from the plays' spectacular (in the Artaudian sense of the spectacle) synthesis of sound, rhythm, rhyme, and imagery. Manifestations of the Artaudian process are present, in the visceral, lived experience of all these things. Performers and audience alike are involved in a type of 'poetry of the senses' (Artaud 1970 p27) which can only be experienced in the performed moment of the plays. It could be argued that this bodily response is the truest response to his work. A post-play analysis, spoken or otherwise can only ever partially express this. Herein lies the work's radical nature – its ability to evoke visceral responses via that spectacular 'poetry of the senses' which Artaud advocates.

Sarah Kane

Sarah Kane was an English playwright who, in her short life, produced a significant and influential body of work. Her earlier plays are violent spectacles, difficult painful experiences for both audiences and actors, and she gradually refined, or distilled, her work throughout her career until, with her last play *4:48 Psychosis* (2001) she dispenses with all structure including that of character names, acts, sets and stage direction, stating '[i]ncreasingly, I'm finding performance much more interesting than acting; theatre more compelling than plays' (Singer 2004 p141). She can be likened to Beckett in that her plays have confronted audiences with surreal and ambiguous landscapes that have remained controversial, and can therefore be seen as examples of Artaudian theory.

In an article in the Guardian, Kane says of theatre,

I keep coming back in the hope that someone in a darkened room
somewhere will show me an image that burns itself into my mind (cited in
Saunders 2002 p14)

She sought, in theatre, an experience akin to that which Artaud prescribes for audiences; a difficult, painful and transformative one. Her own plays present audiences with exactly this type of intensity, creating, as they do, chilling atmospheres in which she explores themes of love, pain, torture and death. Her first play *Blasted* (2001), which opened at the Royal Court Theatre in 1995, was met with outrage from critics. The play, which contains scenes of cannibalism and anal rape, begins in a naturalistic setting where a man and a young woman play out a scene bristling with discomfort, and eventually violence. The violence then extends outside the room when, with the arrival of a soldier at the door, it becomes clear that a war is taking place. Proceeding through even a personal reading of the play is a disturbing experience as, scene by

scene, the violence escalates, culminating, for this reader at least, in an act of cannibalism where the now-blind man eats a dead baby. Despite the violence, the play ends on a redemptive note, prompting fellow playwright, Caryl Churchill, to describe it in a letter to the Guardian as ‘rather a tender play’ (1995).

Kane asserted that she was not trying to explain the violence of war but instead, reflecting its chaotic nature. Of *Blasted* she says,

I tried to draw on lots of different theatrical traditions. War is confused and illogical, therefore it is wrong to use a form that is predictable. Acts of violence simply happen in life, they don’t have a dramatic build-up, and they are horrible. That’s how it is in the play (cited in Singer 2002 p146).

This truth about violence, that it happens, and happens spontaneously and without warning, is clearly discerned on even a reading of the play. For me, reading *Blasted* was a physical experience, both repulsive and nauseating. It was also compelling. The acts of violence simply happened, and they were horrible. Truth was revealed. I can only imagine the full-blown shock and transformative effect of witnessing it on the stage.

Kane’s works can be seen to express Artaud’s theories then, in that, like Beckett, she produces works which communicate directly to the body of the spectator, to the senses. On this subject she states ‘[p]erformance is visceral. It puts you in direct contact with thought and feeling’. Singer suggests that,

[t]his visceral drama that Kane promotes bypasses interpretation and, instead, directly confronts the audience’s thoughts and feelings through physical reactions (Singer 2004 p141).

There are parallels here with Beckett. Like the performance of *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin, which spoke directly to the visceral experience of the prisoners, Kane’s works are aimed at the body.

During my own writing process, as already discussed, I kept in mind the idea of provoking visceral reactions (chills) in the audience. My play is vastly different to the above practitioners’ works, yet their praxis and work have informed my approach to the writing, that is, approaching the writing with an awareness of this visceral aspect, seeking to, as Kane describes it, ‘put the audience in direct contact with thought and feeling’, and evoke physical responses to the work.

Conclusion

This chapter has contextualised my research by exploring what I consider to be the most relevant *elements* of the investigation. Section One offered an overview of creative writing research in Australia at the time of writing, and established a gap for my own research, that is, by way of its particular focus on my tacit writerly knowledge as it was applied to the writing of the play *Soph and the real world*, a practice-led process which was peculiarly theatrical, musical and sensory. Section Two then explored the many influences on the writing of the play itself, establishing a web of connections between a wide variety of sources for the purposes of, and working towards, the articulation of a personal practice-led methodology for writing for the stage. Chapter Three engages with Barthes' *The pleasure of the text* (1975) in order to explore the possibility of the practice-led exegesis (which focuses on tacit knowledges) as a text of 'bliss'. It begins a series of answers or responses to the research question, and is intended to foreshadow Chapter Four's examination of methodology, acting as an *other* to that logical account of my writing practice. Chapter Five is the play itself, and is presented as a further response to the question. Chapter Six concludes with a summary of the thesis, explicating how the aims of the project were met, and discussing the implications of the research.

Chapter three: Chiaroscuro, *tissue*, exegesis

This chapter riffs on the idea that an exegesis focusing on tacit aspects of artistic practice must be a 'site of bliss' (Barthes 1975 p4). That the creation of such a text in this context is likely 'impossible' and 'untenable' (p22) is understood and underpins the writing, mirroring and emphasising the contradiction inherent in writing about tacit processes which by their nature are inexpressible. The chapter acts as a preface to the methodology chapter which follows, thereby undermining, even satirising, the logic prevailing there. It is a shadow, a chiaroscuro, an *other* to that methodical writing. The chapters haunt each other, press close. At the meeting place is difference, a split. Something may be revealed.

Unsayable, unspeakable, unwritable

An exegesis which deals with the tacit writerly state must reveal a 'site of bliss' (Barthes 1975 p4); a place 'between two edges'(p10), a 'flash', located as it appears between 'two imposing systematic presences' (p30); here: practice and theory (or science and art, the academy and the *real world*, language and the body). It must aim at exposing a writerly truth which by its nature is unsayable, unspeakable, unwritable. Like Barthes' 'starred text' (p13), writerly practice,

is comparable to a sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks; like the soothsayer drawing on it with the tip of his staff an imaginary rectangle wherein to consult, according to certain principles, the flight of birds, the commentator traces through the text certain zones of reading, in order to observe therein the migration of meanings (p14).

An exegesis engaging with the edgeless vista of writerly practice sketches out such a rectangle, attempts a tracing of writerly flight zones, seeking the moment of exposure which will *show* something despite the structures, the words which must be used (Artaud's 'pigshit', his 'useless things' cited in Scheer 2000, p75). This exegesis desires (and it must seek this, however untenable) 'a moment' where it will somehow 'escape its web of meanings and appear without its veil of human interpretation. It [will] be simply there' (Michels 1995).

Such an exegesis must resemble Barthes 'text of pleasure' which,

is always possible, not as a respite, but as the incongruous—dissociated—passage from another language, like the exercise of a different physiology (p30).

This incongruous ‘passage’ acts as a transgression, a ‘subversion’ and ‘must produce its own chiaroscuro’ (p32): a shadow, bits of things, shards, ‘traces’; ‘a *bit* of ideology, a *bit* of representation, a *bit* of a subject: ghosts, pockets . . . necessary clouds’. The following text assembles ‘bits’ seeking to expose tacit elements of the practice of this writer.

Close up: the grain

Int. Recording studio. 2005. Writer (as singer/songwriter) has just listened to the playback of the vocal track for ‘Lullaby’ (Modric 2003). She wears headphones. She looks out through glass from the soundproof room at the producer who is engineering.

Writer I want to lay a whispered track under that vocal.

Producer Whispered? Why?

Writer I want to whisper the words.

(Pause)

Producer What for?

Writer I just want to.

Producer Alright. Try the first four lines.

The track plays in her ear. She whispers into the microphone.

Writer Lay your head down/Is there something
wrong?/When you’re aching/You know I always
know

Producer plays the track back. They listen. They grin at each other.

Producer *(she hears him through her headphones) You can
whisper in my ear anytime.*

End scene.

The whisper, here, amplified, microphone-intensified, is ‘the sound of speech *close up*’ (Barthes 1975 p67), the ‘fleshiness of the lips’ can be discerned in the recording, ‘the breath’, the body of the singer is thrown into the ear: sensual, material. My impulse was to whisper directly to the

listener, into the listener's body. I was intuitively cruising my listener, inhabiting Barthes 'site of bliss' where,

It is not the reader's [listener's] person that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game (p4).

As a musician I am 'palpably aware of the trance-like state that musical performance demands of the musician, without which there will be no *concert*' (Modric 2008 p33). In a chapter of my Master's dissertation entitled 'Seduction', I alluded to the 'site' of this trance-like experience,

A state of bliss occurs with the awareness of audience, with the *dialectics of desire* that are created with this awareness, in the changing responses to this blissful place of negotiation, this *jouissance* (p33).

It is a literal comparison, that of the site between audience and musician with Barthes' site, but one which nevertheless warrants further unearthing here. What Barthes' 'bliss/pleasure' wants (and here he warns 'terminologically, there is always a vacillation – I stumble, I err . . . the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse incomplete' p4),

is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss (p7).

'Is not' he asks 'the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?*' (p10). This gape, a site 'between two edges', is what seduces. 'Text of bliss:' he declares (whispers in my ear), 'the text that discomforts . . . unsettles (p14).

The song 'Lullaby' is, appropriately enough, a lullaby, a song designed to lull, to comfort. I wrote it in the wake of a friend's suicide during that horror-filled period where questions about what could have been said or done are interminable and ever present. 'Lullaby' was my attempt to answer these. The scene (some months later) in the studio is, therefore, discomforting. During the recording I intuitively dissolved grief into desire, allowed a sensuality, an eroticism, into the song when I whispered into the microphone, the sounds of my lips and breath falling into the listener's (the producer's) ear, summoning an overt response from him, our grins acknowledgements of what had transpired. This is not to say that bliss is mere sexuality, but that the presence of this fleshiness, this life, 'the whole presence of [my] human muzzle' in the midst of a requiem for my friend is the loss, the cut, the deflation that seized me in the midst of recording, in the midst of grief, in the midst of bliss, the cut of grief, the life going on, the grief again in the midst of sensual proceeding and so on. The gaping reveals a truth.

The truth here in this scene of the songwriter and the producer, of grief and fleshly whispers, is reminiscent of Grosz' implication that it is not man's nobility which produces art but his animality (2005) (and I wonder here about the use of the word 'man'; is it a slip? A rupture? What can she mean?). The appearance of my human muzzle through those whispers is animalistic (I imagine a nose, perhaps, cold to the touch, cat's eyes caught in the glare of torch). It is the quest for this grainy erotic gaping that I seek to articulate through exegesis.

The writing practice I intend to reveal in exegesis is my practice of writing for the stage. Artaud writes of theatre (and of writing) as the site of a truthful revelation which must occur despite the words spoken (or read). Theatre must speak to the senses, its unique language must invoke something *other*; unspeakable truth. Theatre requires such a language because 'the thoughts it expresses escape spoken language' (1970 p27). When Barthes imagines an aesthetic of textual pleasure, he refers to Artaud,

It would have to include *writing aloud*. This vocal writing (which is nothing like speech) is not practiced but is doubtless what Artaud recommended (p66).

Writing aloud is not 'phonological but phonetic' he continues,

Its aim is not the clarity of messages, the theatre of emotions; what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, not that of meaning, of language (p66/67).

How can I make the reader hear my materiality, my human presence (p67) as an audience does? How to shift the 'signified a great distance', to lubricate the writing, make it supple, vibrant (p67)? How to *whisper* in *your* ear? Towards this aim, Barthes 'would go so far as to take bliss in the *disfiguration* of language' (p37).

William Burroughs perpetrates a literal disfiguration when he applies his method of cut-ups to his own and others' writing. 'Language', he proclaims, 'is a virus', and 'writing is still confined to the . . . representational straitjacket of the novel . . . [c]onsciousness is a cut-up' (cited in Docherty and Lee, p 99). Writerly consciousness *is* a 'cut-up'; not smooth, not sequential, not logic. For it to be restrained, captured in the straitjacket of logic and sequence is to conceal the animal muzzle, to tame it, to speak in the drone of what is to be expected. Barthes again,

How can a text, which consists of language, be outside languages? How *exteriorize* the world's jargons without taking refuge in an ultimate jargon wherein the others would simply be reported, recited? (p30).

The chapter which follows this one deals with methodology; it orders, signposts, reports, recites. It is the vocal track which this chapter whispers beneath. Its presence here is foreshadowed, just as it, in turn, will be haunted by this one. Sections from this looming (tamed) chapter, cut-up²³, proceed somewhat differently, move outside of themselves. They are cracked open, allowing for revelation.

And the again, once the again (cutting up)

A paragraph from Chapter Four introducing a section which deals with improvising methodology states,

In order to shine a light on my creative process, I needed to allow it to proceed, to flow. Sitting at my computer to begin my play, deadlines imminent, my head swamped with the research question, methods and various theorists effectively stopped this flow, and it was only when I decided to throw all of this out and *just write* as I had always done that the creative energy flickered into being and I was able to move forward again. Once the play was forming, all else abandoned, and relying once again on my intuition, I decided to approach analysis of the playwriting method retrospectively as I had done with the song 'Francine' (1996). It seemed reasonable, and, from within the writerly space I was inhabiting at that point, unavoidable, that the significant elements in its make-up would be clearer from that future place where, the play finished, I would once again don my exegetical hat.

And cut-up:

*clearer done shine it that the I exegetical from the to Sitting play my its
was playwriting flickered elements to exegetical approach again write this
Francine done as elements inhabiting abandoned, I again inhabiting
exegetical future to I that don else In and, writerly my my my within just
needed hat. the decided light elements once and, proceed, again the song
method to question, my playwriting this place I as my relying I my future
elements and the again once the again. Sitting play was needed process,
all else allow to this relying would make-up the in else approach flickered I
play stopped the it with to when out decided future decided to of the done
when make-up the once the my it and computer head place and point,
play exegetical various elements make-up flow, decided from my that
method write song my and shine as within my and play was my song
creative Francine that all*

²³ The text was cut up via the 'Cut-Up Machine' <http://www.languageisavirus.com/cutupmachine.html>

Cutting-up the paragraph re-introduces something of the chaos and spark of the inner world, its energy, its aliveness. Vowels lie more voluptuously against one another, fragments resonate with meaning, the story of my process lies within them, I spark with recognition.

The next chapter lays out the journey of the thesis, a sequence:

1. Formulated the research question
2. Decided to allow my creative practice to lead the inquiry
3. Wrote the play
4. Result: Play finished and scheduled for production
5. Examined/ Reflected on playwriting practice
6. Result: Discovery of and description of my creative practice (dreams, jazz, senses etc)
7. Examined the Reflection process
8. Result: Discovered the research practice resembled the creative practice
9. Integrated the project by formulating a jazz ethos/methodology which applies to both the playwriting and exegetical processes.

A series of fragments lifted (in the order they appear) from the above cut-up also tells this journey:

Clearer done shine it: the I exegetical

Sitting play (my its) was playwriting flickered elements

To exegetical approach again: (write this) elements inhabiting abandoned

Again inhabiting exegetical future

Writerly: my my my within

And proceed: again the song method to question: my playwriting this place.

And the again once the again.

Sitting play was needed process, all else allow to this relying.

Flickered I play, stopped the it.

Decided future decided.

Method write song.

And shine as within.

Play was my song created.

The 'I' exegetical

It is the unsayable truth about writing I attempt when I am making exegesis. This truth is a truth about me: an 'I exegetical'. For it to shine clearly, to flash (cat's eyes), I must do as Cixous stresses and attempt to write outside of constructions, write the other, 'thread the pages' with 'a secret narrative, delving deep' (cited in Sellers 1994 p10). She writes of writing,

I need writing; I need to surprise myself living: I need to feel myself quiver with living: I need to call myself into living and to answer myself by living: I need to be living in the present of the present: I need double-living (p95).

To write of *my* writing I must surprise myself writing, translate the quiver, reveal (doubly) a double-living; *my writerly: my my my within*.

The text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel (Barthes 1975 p4).

My Within is a plural 'I', it is my my my infinite. It is Seung's²⁴ bowl of spaghetti, slippery and endlessly tangled, it is Levitin's²⁵ thousand-fold phone network, it is Diderot's²⁶ profusion of all the seen, known, heard and perceived.

Once again (it becomes irresistible; wielding the knife), I cut-up:

network, thousand-fold network, Seung's my is Levitin's slippery My slippery It infinite. the my is profusion my My spaghetti, Within perceived. and plural is 'I', and It my is network, my of tangled, the seen, 'I', is of it Within

I assemble fragments:

Thousand-fold network

Seung's my is Levitin's slippery

My Slippery It Infinite

The My is profusion: my My spaghetti: Within perceived

²⁴ (2010)

²⁵ (2006)

²⁶ (cited in Elkins 2009)

And plural is I

My is network: My of tangled: The seen

'I' is of it Within

my My spaghetti

The exegesis mines this slippery, infinite 'I', *splays* out its plurality onto the page, spreads it awkwardly, and the more awkward the better, odd angles and corners providing hope of pockets, shadows, shards even (did I break something?!) of truth; opportunities for the grain to make itself apparent.

The text written from a plural 'I' gives way to plural meanings, multiple interpretations, which arise according to the infinite 'I' of the reader. Barthes, discussing the judging of a text 'according to pleasure' (p13) writes,

I cannot go on to say: this one is good, that bad . . . I cannot apportion, imagine that the text is perfectible . . . (that) it is too much *this*, not enough *that*; the text (the same is true of the singing voice) can wring from me only this judgement, in no way adjectival: *that's it!* And further still: *that's it for me!*

A song is always judged by the 'me' of the listener:

(The death of a songstress)

Int. Living room, Melbourne, 1997. Writer (as songwriter/musician) and band, sometime on a seemingly never-ending tour, have adjourned to the home of a friend where they are staying temporarily. They have just finished a gig, a party is in progress. Writer is in conversation with someone she has just met. This someone tells the writer she is a fan, and loves the writer's first album. She knows all the lyrics, she says, and has a favourite song. The background music is loud, they drink red wine.

Someone/Fan	I love that song. It really resonates with me.
Writer	(<i>Flattered</i>) Thank you.
S/F	It's <i>about</i> me. That same thing happened to me!
Writer	It did?
S/F	I was just so busy that my boyfriend left me.

Writer Huh?

S/F I didn't realise how much wiser than me he was.

Writer Wiser? But/

S/F I *miss* him so much.

(*beat*)

Writer That's not what it's about.

(*beat*)

S/F Yes, it is.

(*beat*)

Writer (*incredulous*) It's really not.

S/F It's about love and not appreciating what you have
and . . .

*Writer grows increasingly annoyed as S/F talks. She, however, suddenly
imagines herself in a conversation with a writer about some song she has
a similar personal attachment to. She understands something important
(despite the wine). Writer lets go of her song to S/F. S/F is RIGHT.*

Writer You're right. That *is* what it's about. To *you*.

(*beat*)

S/F How can you not know what your own song is
about?

End scene.

Enough about me, what do you think (about me)?

The above scene describes an epiphany. It became obvious to me in that moment that a song must be let go of, that, once performed/recorded it would belong to other people too. They would build their own relationships with it. In her thesis, Arnold invites readers to collaborate with her in constructing the text, challenging 'conventional thesis mode and genre' stating,

The invention and fabrication of the text is shown as a non-didactic weaving. Instead of seeking to show this text as a finished 'work' I collaborate as/with readers to display the constructedness of the text (1994 p2).

Arnold invokes Barthes' 'writerly-reading', 'abdicates AUTHORITY', acknowledges and invites readerly power over the text. I intend the same here, this text throws scenes, bits of theory, shadow words, cut-ups up against each other on the page (*splays* them), pushes itself against the next chapter, haunts it, whispers beneath it. It invites the reader to collaborate in interpreting and constructing meaning. I invite the reader to *tell* me what the song is about. I desire for writer and reader glimpses, flashes of the infinite 'I', to establish 'a sort of islet within the human-the common-relation' (Barthes 1975 p16).

In an article for *TEXT*, Miller presents a 'grunge-memoir-hypertext', stating,

This is dramatised research that genuinely wants to *show* rather than tell: to colour in and sculpt its ideas and findings through aesthetic and non-verbal means. It doesn't want to 'exegeticise' or 'verbalise' the non-verbal—to force words into the mouths of the mouthless. But . . . it must 'speak' the unspeakable to conform to the conventions of scholarly practice: to explain rather than enact its aesthetic findings (2010 p3).

Miller's artefact, which 'uses words, images, colours, quotations, backgrounds, and layouts . . . to form a multimedia scrapbook' (p2) invites me to engage with these unspeakable things, make sense of them within myself, and it is the relationships between these elements and how they are *splayed* on the page which present, for me (*that's it for me!*), the most intriguing flashes. Not what he writes, or who appears in the photos, but that he places *that* photo there beside *that* piece of text. Miller aims to avoid,

the habit of pegging prose to horizontal lines and white portrait pages; one sentence following the next with no digressions or disruptions; speaking through words and prose rather than images and colour (p3).

(Intrigued, I search for his thesis online and don't find it. Perhaps it has not yet been submitted? How has he succeeded in escaping the horizontal line, the pages, the sentences, one following the next?)

I bring my exegetical 'I' in its plurality to a reading of Miller's work. Where he desires colour and images, I want to conjure sound, musculature and rhythm. I want speech not language (Barthes 1975 p21), sound; grain. I want music.

Arnold proposes the existence of what she terms a ‘sous-voice’ in texts, one heard by the reader yet unknowable to the writer (2010). Her methodological approach, she writes, is that of ‘subjective academic narrative’ where she brings to the reading her ‘personal observations and reactions as well as [her] academic reading and thinking’. Arnold’s article engages with Barthes’ ‘grain of the voice’ to explicate this ‘sous-voice’ via an examination of the ‘apophatic’ and ‘liminal’ in autobiographical writing. She states,

Apophatic reading means to me, in the context of this paper, that we enter into an engagement with the text that is both allusive and elusive. The liminal is the space that describes something that is between the known (where we are) and the unknown (where we are entering). The liminal is a threshold that, in the context of this paper, places both the writer and the reader between states of certainty.

This ‘sous-voice’, something which, according to Arnold, I cannot know or avoid voicing, represents a possibility for the grain of my voice to be discerned. Will the reader hear music? In entering the liminal space that is my own ‘subjective academic narrative’, the reader as ‘readerly-writer’ co-constructs the text. Arnold continues,

Any text is inert until it is co-constructed with the reader, the text and the sriptor in a transmogrifying state. By this I mean that the reader makes the text anew on the basis of what is there, what is brought to it, and what is found hidden within it. The reader is not the original sriptor, but neither is the text the authorial document: it is remade anew at each reading for/by each reader.

On liminality (and transmogrification):

Int. Room at a university.1995.Writer (as undergraduate anthropology student) has just given a presentation; a Turnerian²⁷ analysis of a wedding ceremony: reading it as a liminal space and the bride as symbolic sacrifice.

Writer Any questions?

(pause)

Female student I went to my sister’s wedding last weekend and she was really happy!

²⁷ This refers to Victor Turner’s writings on liminality and rites of passage. See *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (1969)

End scene.

My scene-making, the placing of fragments of larger (imagined) scripts of my life here for the reader, is a means to bring my own observations and experiences to this narrative. I write them to explore my own nexus between practice and theory. I come alive to theory which resonates with personal experience, which gives me bliss. When I sat with S/F I had not read Barthes, was dimly aware of him when I whispered a lullaby. These events (constructed from memory, notoriously vague) are placed here to illuminate meeting-places, flashpoints; my body encountering theory. I make meaning at conjunctures. My multiple selves are at play for the reader. I am riffing on/with myself, encountering my 'individuality' (Barthes 1975 p62). 'A certain pleasure is derived' from this, writes Barthes, from,

making oneself as *individual*, of inventing a final, rarest fiction: the fictive identity. This fiction is no longer the illusion of a unity; on the contrary, it is the theatre of society in which we stage our plural: our pleasure is *individual* - but not personal.

I take certain authorly 'pleasure' in constructing these scenes, my authorly intentions are manifold. The (plural) reader will derive meaning from them, perhaps detect a 'sous-voice' too. Am I here now *intending* the unintentional?

No "thesis" on the pleasure of the text is possible; barely an inspection (an introspection) that falls short . . . and yet, against and in spite of everything, the text gives me bliss (Barthes 1975 p34).

Inadvertently, then, a text gives bliss, unintentionally and in spite of itself. The exegesis on writing practice as a site of bliss must *splay* writerly things, engage with theory which imparts bliss, aim for accidental revelation, intend for unknown (unconscious) expressions.

Barthes envisions an example of a text which gives bliss,

A vast, collective harvest: bring together all the texts *which have given pleasure to someone* (wherever these texts come from) and display this textual body . . . However it is to be feared that such a labor [sic] would end *explaining* the chosen texts; there would be an inevitable bifurcation of the project: unable to speak itself, pleasure would enter the general path of motivations, *no one of which would be definitive* (if I assert some pleasures of the text here, it is always in passing, in a very precarious, never regular fashion) In short, such a labor [sic] could not be written (1975 p34).

Barthes 'precariously' asserts pleasures, and 'always in passing'. An exegesis (on tacit practice) as a text of pleasure, a site of bliss, must be written with this in mind; that the tacit may be asserted only in passing.

I can only circle such a subject (Barthes 1975 p34).

Here I seek chance expositions. I seek encounters with theory, not explaining but coming upon it via the experiential, towards this aim; to expose the tacit.

(seek with experiential, upon aim. expositions. encounters expositions. not I it theory, with encounters encounters encounters experiential, coming aim. seek chance seek)

Notion of a book (of a text) which is braided, woven in the most personal way, the relation of every kind of bliss: those of 'life' and those of the text, in which reading and the risks of real life are subject to the same anamnesis (p59).

Encounters encounters encounters

(Write what you know)

*Ext. A street in Seville, Spain. Summer, 1992. Writer (as ingénue) has been living here for six months. She is thinking of not returning to Australia. She watches her friend (here called Lola) dance the Sevillana (Seville's famous version of the Flamenco). Lola is wearing her flamenco dress; layer upon layer of ruffles. The performance is spontaneous; a busker plays guitar, a group of young men have spotted her in her dress and begun a clapping rhythm; an invitation, a challenge. Lola dances in response. Writer is bewitched – this happens **spontaneously**, in the **street!** (**I love this city!**) Lola finishes with a flourish and rejoins writer on the street corner.*

Writer That was amazing, muy bien, guapa!

Lola Gracias.

Writer *(eyes bright)* Lola, I want to learn Sevillana!

Lola laughs. Sees writer is serious.

Lola But you must be Sevillana to dance Sevillana! I dance since I was three. My grandmother taught this.

Writer Yes. Of course.

(beat)

Lola sees writer's disappointment.

Lola Come. You have your Australiana dance, no?

Writer Haha. No. (*Imagines the heel and toe polka*).

Lola You have Australiana dress?

Writer (*pictures a Drizabone and Akubra hat*)

Lola realises 'no'. A look of great sympathy passes across her face. Writer suddenly feels terribly sorry for herself, Seville will never be home.

(beat)

Paris either, come to think of it.

End scene.

Encountering my 'individuality', that which separates my body from other bodies; its suffering or pleasure, is an encounter with my 'body of bliss', 'also my *historical subject*',

for it is at the conclusion of a very complex process of biographical, historical, sociological, neurotic elements that I control the interplay of (cultural) pleasure and (noncultural) bliss, and that I write myself as a subject at present out of place, arriving too soon or too late (this *too* designating neither regret, fault, nor bad luck but merely calling for a *non-site*): anachronic subject, adrift (Barthes 1975 p62).

The text here is '*tissue*', not 'ready-made' but 'emphasizing' in itself that it is made, 'worked out in a perpetual interweaving', and lost within this 'texture' I unmake myself (p64). Unmade and arriving late (or too soon), (*soon arriving (or late (or Unmade and)*) I spill things. What is it I am carrying?

Thus every writer's motto reads: *mad I cannot be, sane I do not deign to be, neurotic I am* (p6).

An exegesis as a site of bliss must be *tissue*, must interweave, encounter, unmake. The following chapter made, is here unmade. The exegesis argues against itself for no other reason than something must be constructed in order for truth to reveal itself. The text is neurotic, holds an invisible injury, (a cut, a loss, a dissolve).

Soph (surprised, realising) There's something inside me.

(Soph and the real world p185)

'I think about life,' writes Artaud, '[a]ll the systems that I shall ever construct will never equal my cries' (1973 p109). The writer moves always into impossibility, pegs words to the page, piles them, *splays*, hoping to be surprised by something inside her, makes the words behave, dares them to revolt²⁸. A 'play thing' (p34): the writer, 'a cork on the waves' (p18). 'I write because I do not want the words I find' (p40).

impossibility, impossibility, into pegs them, splays, the pegs revolt. them to the dares always to hoping to piles to words moves the moves her, piles her, page, them, behave, dares

In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again (Carroll 1992 p3).

Writing such an exegesis must mean falling down rabbit-holes, following paths, ending in places which bear no resemblance to beginnings, letting it be so. The writing is not 'triumphant' or 'heroic', 'no need to throw out one's chest' (p18). There are no corners to write oneself into, to escape from; theory is *loosened* (p64). Pleasure (bliss) lies in the quest, the question.

(On endings bearing no resemblance to beginnings)

Ext. Morning. A cafe. Writer (as new PhD candidate) sits at a table on the street, orders eggs, coffee. She pulls out a copy of Sarah Kane's 'Blasted'. Kane is new to her. She anticipates the reading of an unfamiliar writer. She reads.

Sometime later writer pushes away her untouched eggs.

Writer leaves cafe.

End scene.

²⁸ This sentence is what appears again cut-up.

(On the responsibility of playwrights)

Int. Night. Two weeks after the previous scene. A theatre foyer. Writer (as theatre conference attendee) is in conversation with a fellow (produced!) playwright.

Writer Have you read Kane? I just read *Blasted*.

FP Yes.

Writer Wow! I mean, I couldn't eat my breakfast, I was too sick. Just from *reading* it. Fantastic!

FP *(laughs)*

(beat)

She's very . . . dark. She suicided, you know?

(beat)

Writer Um. Yes. I know.

(beat)

FP I think we have a responsibility to our audience to not leave them traumatised. To make sure we resolve things for them so they can leave feeling light.

(pause)

Writer You do?

(beat)

FP We want them to *come back*, don't we?

End Scene.

(The writer of such an exegesis might say, 'I want them to *pass me*, don't I?')

Exegesis of bliss: To not only relinquish authority (and responsibility) over the writing but to admit it, to imply splits, to encourage perversity in the reader, to imply the impossibility of the aim. And further; to introduce something which never eventuates.

Every text on pleasure will be nothing but dilatory; it will be an introduction to what will never be written . . . such an introduction can only repeat itself—without ever introducing anything (p18).

Manifesto (theatre-making): To not care if they ever come back.

(theatre-making): ever ever care if they come come back. To

This exegesis doesn't care. It *ever ever cares*. It wants its cake and to eat it too; desires bliss, succumbs to explanation, makes logic in order to break it, weaves theory with the creative, with the experiential. It follows this chapter's desire to be a site of bliss with a chapter devoted to methodological logic, and then with the play itself. The three chapters work together (and against one another) to answer the research question with the intention of demonstrating the lived plurality of writing practice.

Chapter four: Method

We know more than we can tell (Polanyi 1997 p4)

The previous chapter foreshadows this one with an extended riff on the idea that an exegesis should be a 'site of bliss' via engagement with Barthes' *The pleasure of the text*. It emphasises the untenability of reporting tacit knowledges in an academic context, and suggests that an exegesis concerned with such knowledges must be a 'text of bliss', simultaneously acknowledging that such an endeavour is likely impossible. The chapter embraces paradox and contradicts the rationale exhibited in this one, the exegesis arguing against itself and imagining a place between two edges, a third place, where something *other* of the writing process may be revealed. That chapter not only presses against this one but haunts it, whispers beneath, just as the shadow of this one falls across the pages which precede it.

The two chapters allow for different perspectives and interpretations of the research question. The question is concerned with creative practice, and specifically *my* creative practice, and my responses to it engage with subjective experience, using this subjectivity to connect, more broadly, with the topic of practice-led research, and how this research might be undertaken. The two chapters, in turn, preface (whisper, echo, circle around) the creative work itself, which can be considered a further response to the question of how I wrote a play using my existent skills.

This chapter discusses methodology pertaining to both the creative and research process via an examination of my techniques of practice. These techniques are then re-purposed into research strategies with special emphasis on the part my musicality plays in my praxis, and specifically here, jazz and the *swing* ethos. The previous chapter is intended to echo through it, allowing for a richer readerly interpretation.

Overview

Inquiry conducted by practice-led research is typically reflexive and creative. The inquirer remains, as Schon describes, 'open to the discovery of phenomena, incongruent with the initial problem setting, on the basis of which he frames the problem' (1991 p269). He continues,

the inquirer is willing to step into the problematic situation, to impose a frame on it, to follow the implications of the discipline thus established, and yet to remain open to the situation's back-talk. Reflecting on the surprising consequences of his efforts to shape the situation in conformity with his initially chosen frame, the inquirer frames new questions and new ends in view (p269).

My project developed in this way, as I, having established an initial framework, allowed the situation to talk back, and consequently adapted the study according to new questions and with a new end in view.

The following chapter justifies and clarifies the choices I made, and demonstrates why a practice-led method was unavoidable. I draw on Schon's theory of the 'reflective practitioner' and Anderson's notion of 'intuitive inquiry' as a valid method for research, to 'custom-build' (Clough and Nutbrown 2007 p19) a methodology for the project. I examine my techniques of creative practice, and demonstrate the similarities between my creative and research processes via the insight that both rely on my intuition and creativity as much as they do on my critical faculties, and that my musicality, and the awareness of who I am as a musician, is integral to understanding and unearthing these techniques. I include sections on the project's constraints, on JUTE Theatre Company's *Enter stage write* program and the dramaturgical drafting I underwent under the guidance of dramaturg Peter Matheson, and on the role the *trash* journal played in the research. These techniques of practice are then re-purposed into research strategies drawing on my musicality for insight, and demonstrating how practice-led research of this kind may be conducted.

The methodological approach to the writing emulates Arnold's 'subjective academic narrative' (2010) in that I interweave personal observations and experience with academic material, attempting to unearth certain tacit features of my creative and research practices. Hendry maintains that 'all research is narrative' stating,

Resituating all research as narrative, as opposed to characterizing narrative as one particular form of inquiry, provides a critical space for rethinking *research* beyond current dualisms and bifurcations that create boundaries that limit the capacity for dialogue across diverse epistemologies (2010 p72).

My research, in elucidating the similarities between my artistic and scholarly practices, blur boundaries between them, and through explicating a jazz/*swing* based method which applies to both the writing of the play and to the research, presents a different way of inquiry for creative and research practice.

The trajectory of the project can be summarised thus,

1. Formulated the research question/established initial framework
2. Decided to allow my creative practice to lead the inquiry
3. Wrote the play
4. Result: Play finished and scheduled for production
5. Examined/ Reflected on playwriting practice

6. Result: Discovery of and description of my creative practice (dreams, jazz, senses etc)
7. Examined the Reflection process
8. Result: Discovered the research practice resembled the creative practice
9. Integrated the project by formulating a jazz ethos/methodology which applies to both the playwriting and exegetical processes.

The chapter examines these steps in detail.

Establishing the framework

The project began with a dream. As described in Chapter One, I dreamt I was walking down a path picking up objects and scraps of paper, *trash*, which would then be used to write a play which would be inspired by and incorporate this *trash*. Upon awaking from this dream, I thought immediately of Duchamp and of the visual arts Found Object method, and of Surrealism's focus on dreams. Theory was already weaving with the creative objective. This initial proposal was then changed and developed in response to constraints (*Enter stage write* deadlines and the milestones of the PhD process) and practicalities (lack of *trash* on my walks). I decided to see the dream as a symbol for the project, and proposed that writing was an *alchemical* process by which the *trash* of the everyday would be transformed into the *gold* of the artefact.

I formulated the question 'How will I, using my existing skills with music and prose, write a play, and in so doing, establish a new playwriting practice?', and the following aims,

- To use my skills as a writer of song and prose to develop a different dimension with regard to stage work, and writing for the stage.
- To construct a performance text (a play) that demonstrates manifestations of Artaud's theories.
- To interrogate the writerly process (the *alchemy*), the theoretical underpinnings of the proposed method and the resultant work in an exegesis.

Creative choices and constraints

During the playwriting process, a number of creative choices were made intuitively, and others were made as a result of external constraints. The initial decision to write a play was a largely intuitive pull I felt towards the stage. After two years of writing short stories for a Masters degree, I was missing writing for performance and the collaborative opportunities it offered. As a musician I was used to writing with performance in mind and to collaborating with a band, and as a prose-writer I had enjoyed having the time and space that the page allows to extend my voice. Writing a play was, I thought, an ideal way to synthesise my skills with live performance,

song-writing and prose-writing and to stretch my writing practice into new territory, affording me the opportunity to explore not only existing skills but the formation of new ones.

I wrote the play as a participant in JUTE's *Enter stage write* program, and as such was constrained by the directives of that program (see below). As my intent was that the play be produced by JUTE, I complied with these requirements. This type of intent for a piece of performance work is always a constraint for me at the outset of a creative project. A specific and practical goal for the production of a work, whether it be a song which I intend to record and perform, or in this case, a play I intend for production has always been, for me, an important factor in the creation of the work. My experience of performance, and what does and doesn't work, is therefore always engaged when I write, as I search for what will work to make the song performable, or in this case, the play producible.

Enter stage write and dramaturgy

JUTE Theatre Company's *Enter stage write* (ESW) program is a script development program for new and emerging, as well as established, playwrights, which aims to generate plays for the JUTE stage. The JUTE website states,

JUTE's multi-award winning script development program, Enter Stage Write, has been developing regional playwrights' skills, and producing new works since 2001, with over 50 scripts produced for the JUTE stage (2011)²⁹.

JUTE proposes a number of criteria for participation in the program including the following directives,

If developing a new work, your script is to have a maximum of 3 actors . . .
. You must meet all deadlines and attend the Dramaturgy workshops (2011).

These directives helped frame the creative context, providing a time structure to work within, as well as the initial concept of the play as a three-hander. JUTE's schedule states,

Each Residency Includes
1 x 2 hour group workshop (compulsory)
1 x 1 hour one on one dramaturgical session
Deadlines for new drafts of work follow each of the residencies
Please note: participants will only attend approx. 3hrs of a 3 day residency each i.e. 2hr group workshop & 1hr individual session with dramaturg.

²⁹ <http://www.jute.com.au/for-artists/development-programs/EnterStageWrite2012.php>

Between Residencies - 3 x 1hr phone sessions with Dramaturg throughout the year.

Final Residency - Includes full play readings of your work (2011).

I began in March of 2009, and over the following two years (and meeting all projected deadlines and directives) produced a number of increasingly refined drafts of *Soph and the real world*, culminating in the final draft included here. My play eventually emerged as a four-hander and this was approved by JUTE's Artistic Director. The play is scheduled for production in 2013.

Peter Matheson

The ESW program is headed up by dramaturg Peter Matheson, who brings his many years of dramaturgical experience and expertise to the task. His website states,

With a wide range of experience from state theatre companies to regional ones, from city to country, from physical theatre through text based narrative, Peter guides individual playwrights through the creative process and the maze of what to do with your play when it's finished (2012)³⁰.

According to his website, Matheson's extensive experience includes dramaturgy, script assessment and playwriting. His plays have been produced by 'companies as diverse as the Brisbane Festival, Melbourne Theatre Company . . . and Freewheels Theatre in Education Company' (2012) amongst others. As a freelance dramaturg and script assessor over the last six years he has assessed scripts for numerous organisations (including Sydney Theatre Company (Patrick White Award), Queensland Theatre Company, The Australia Council for the Arts and The Australian Script Centre) and worked dramaturgically with many more.

Matheson describes his dramaturgical input as follows,

Solutions to problems are discussed as well as strengths and weaknesses to the writing. With dramaturgy, I can extend, develop, question, offer suggestions. The length of the contact is dependent on the writer and their needs. This process is on-going and individual (2012).

The process I underwent with Matheson as an ESW participant reflects this statement. Strengths and weaknesses of progressive drafts were discussed, ideas were extended, questioned and clarified, the play honed, and under his insightful mentorship, my playwriting skills were

³⁰ <http://www.petermatheson.com.au/>

developed from novice to (soon to be) produced playwright over the course of two years. A number of my conversations with Matheson were recorded for the purposes of the thesis.

Practice takes the lead: Writing *Soph and the real world*

In order to shine a light on my creative process, I found I needed, first, to allow it to proceed, to flow. Sitting at my computer to begin my play, deadlines imminent, my head swamped with the research question, methods and various theorists effectively stopped this flow, and it was only when I decided to throw all of this out and *just write* as I had always done that the creative energy flickered into being and I was able to move forward again. Once the play was forming, all else abandoned, and relying once again on my intuition, I decided to approach analysis of the playwriting method retrospectively as I had done with the song *Francine* (1996). It seemed reasonable, and, from within the writerly space I was inhabiting at that point, unavoidable, that the significant elements in its make-up would be clearer from that future place where, the play finished, I would once again don my exegetical hat.

Writing *Soph and the real world* was a combination of conscious and unconscious processes, a process of 'reflection in action' (Schon 1991 p268) where a period of intuitive flow would occur followed by a meeting with Matheson prompting a conscious analysis of the work; where it was heading, how the characters were developing, the emerging structure and symbols and how all these things fitted together, and also, all importantly, Matheson's perspectives on how the text might be staged and any inherent problems which might arise in this transition. These meetings constituted a break in the creative flow and were often difficult as a result. I would return to the writing with new constraints and would then have to find my way back to the writing state (and that place of not knowing) somehow incorporating these new ideas, for example, thinking about the length of the play; one act or more, or the practicalities of staging certain scenes night after night, for example, in an early draft, the main character using an axe to smash up an old piano.

In this way, the play took shape; choices were made intuitively initially, and then adjusted according to the project's constraints. Writing to JUTE's deadlines, and interrupting that important first draft to have these meetings with Matheson seemed, at first, to be hindrances but reflection has provided a different perspective. In writing my first play, I was not only faced with the creative challenges associated with writing a new work but concurrently forging a new practice. It could be likened to a songwriter writing a song while still learning her instrument. Rather than my fingers intrinsically finding their own way around the fret board of a guitar, for instance, as I compose a song, I was learning the chords as I went, that is, I was learning the craft of playwriting as I wrote (and by writing) a play.

In November of 2010, and coming to the end of my second year of research, JUTE conducted a reading of the first draft of *Soph and the real world*. I attended the reading and left with much to ponder. The play was not right, was somehow jumbled and unsatisfying, in fact, I *felt*, parts of it were terrible. I decided to start again. This was a strong intuitive impulse; I felt that my way forward was to treat the first draft as a practice run and rewrite the entire script. Three months later I presented an almost completely new play to JUTE. The Artistic Director rang me to say she intended to produce it. ‘How did you do it?’ she said (pers. comm. 6 April 2011). My immediate answer was ‘I have no idea.’ I thought for a moment, then, about the process. It appeared inside me as a shimmery, tumbling, sensory knowing. ‘I just did it,’ I eventually told her, ‘I started at the beginning and I wrote until it was finished.’

The drafting process: Imagining Soph

Soph (*She pulls away and sits up.*) Oh! Oh, oh!

Nick What?

Soph Hang on, I just have to . . .

Nick What? Right now?

Soph It’s . . . I’ve got an idea . . .

(*Soph and the real world* p119-20)

When I began with *Enter stage write* in 2009, I had not much more than an idea derived from a dream; a woman as a rubbish bin, an image which held a lot of energy for me, by which I mean that I understood intuitively that a story was located within it. I engaged with this image, giving it space in my mind, asking questions of it, allowing it to reveal itself. What did it mean to be a rubbish bin? What had she swallowed? How was I to start laying her on the page?

I attended my first dramaturgical meeting with Matheson who asked me to formulate what he called a ‘key dramatic question’ for the piece (pers. comm. 3 March 2009). His reasoning was that, in order to maintain the energy to drive a piece of work to a final draft, it was important to be asking an overarching question which is not easy to answer. I approached the idea with some enthusiasm, as it mirrored what I had done formulating the initial proposal for this thesis. I came up with the question ‘can a person really change?’ I didn’t know the answer. I doubted if I would find it.

I wondered about who the protagonist was, considering she was symbolised by the image of a rubbish bin, wondered how she had become this, and if she could change. I wrote more questions,

- Is there an unchangeable part within human beings which is the essence of who we are?
- What is the nature of this essence? Are we born who we are or made?
- If made, can we be unmade? Will Soph always be a rubbish bin?

I began to think of the play as a sort of therapeutic process for the main character. What did I understand about this process? That change was possible? That beneath damage was an undamaged part which the process could somehow access or restore? Here was the core of the play, I realised. The character, whom I decided to call Soph, would spit out her rubbish, and in the process be changed, something within her would begin to be restored. The character would be going through a change or changes which symbolically mimicked a therapeutic process.

At my next meeting with Matheson, I described the various ideas I had had about the protagonist. During the meeting, and in response to Matheson's questions, I proposed three other characters; Alice (Soph's sister), Nick (her lover), and a wise man of some sort, perhaps a trumpet player. I also posed the question I had been mulling over; do we have an essential part which never changes? Matheson's task for me, set at the end of this session, was to think about what would happen in the play,

I think really what I'd like you to do is that, I'd like you to think of what happens. And I don't want any more other than, take all these ideas that are quite amorphous at the moment and kind of settle on a couple. You know, like, do you want it to be realistic, do you want it to be metaphoric? Is it going to be over a weekend or is it going to be over a life? . . . It would be nice to think about the scenes that you would like us to see, and although I don't want them in any order, I'd like to see what you want us to have a look at, you know like, the first time she . . . ? (pers. comm. 30 April 2009)

I had a felt sense of the characters all jumbled together in time and place, over a weekend then perhaps, and not a life. I began to ponder what it was I wanted the audience to watch, to experience. I also began to think about the wise man character I had proposed; who he might be and what sort of relationship he might have with my protagonist.

Frankly Darkly and the unsayable

That night my Unconscious obligingly provided me with a dream; a vivid image of a trumpet playing character named Frankly Darkly. I recorded the dream in my *trash* journal the next day, along with a definition of the word frankly. There was another character too, who was not as clear, and who I felt represented Soph. I wrote,

Who are you Frankly Darkly? Dreamt two characters – ‘Frankly Darkly’ and ‘No-No’. FD is male, No-no female.

Collins English Dictionary Australian Edition (Third Edition 1991p611):

Frankly. Adv. 1. (sentence modifier) in truth, to be honest: frankly, I can't bear him. 2. In a frank manner.

Frank. 1. honest and straightforward in speech or attitude: a frank person. 2. Outspoken or blunt. 3. Open and avowed, undisguised 4. An obsolete word for free and generous 7. To facilitate or assist (a person) to come and go, pass or enter easily. (1 May 2009)

The vision of Frankly Darkly reminded me of Chet Baker, one of my favourite trumpet players. I listened to Baker as I pondered the image. I was hearing, I realised, the sound track to the work; jazz. I thought about what I knew of Baker; a sublime musician and heroin addict; a not uncommon combination. I thought about Soph and what the rubbish bin metaphor implied. She would have addictions, not heroin, I thought, because I wanted her, as the protagonist, to be accessible to the audience, wanted them to be able to identify with her, wanted to normalise her, but alcohol maybe, cigarettes, chocolate? I saw her shoving these things in. Someone had filled her with rubbish. She was continuing the job, a sort of annihilation of the self. Who, then, was Frankly Darkly? In light of the definition of the word ‘frank’, was he some kind of truth teller? Did he represent the truth of this self-destructive part of her? Not a wise man, then (nor a fairy godfather), but something else? An antagonist?

I was, at the time, reading *Porno*, Irvine Welsh's sequel to *Trainspotting* (1996), and found this passage,

And I just know that fucking Estelle; I could have her singing on her back for her supper in six months' time down in King's Cross if I gave her the full treatment. Aw, aye, there's some chickies you just smell damage off-of, some you know that bad daddy or step-daddy's left some psychic scar tissue that just cannae be healed, and that while it may be dormant like a social eczema for a while, it's just waiting to erupt. It's just there in the eyes, that blighted, wounded aspect, manifesting itself in the need to give a destructive love to an evil force, and to keep giving until it consumes them. Chicks like that, their whole life is underscored by abuse, and, make

no mistake, they have been programmed to hunt their next abuser down just as relentlessly as the predator who seeks them (2002 p 291).

I experienced an intense visceral reaction to the paragraph; nausea, chills. It cut to the chase, somehow fused my images of Soph and FD together, defined their relationship; my body was speaking up. My protagonist was such a person, I realised. Was it possible to represent this *felt* truth about abuse and its effect on people onstage without resorting to clichés or neat resolutions? I noted this concern in my journal,

There are some things that can't be said. I don't want to make them sayable onstage (19 August 2009).

Could I show Soph as a rubbish bin while also showing how she had become this and why she was continuing to be it without reducing her to a stereotype? Would the Frankly Darkly (FD) character act as a device to reveal this part of her, externalise it, and illuminate her relationship with this part of herself?

My next deadline for ESW was approaching so I wrote a few scenes, none of which felt alive with the energy that I was encountering in my developing internal image of Soph. The scenes involved Soph interacting with Alice, Nick and FD. Alice had come to visit, disrupting Soph's familiar if dysfunctional world, and Nick was obviously her lover but I didn't know how long he'd been around or what the nature of their relationship was. FD had appeared to Soph in these scenes as a dream. The dialogue, however, felt contrived. I was searching for a real start. I was also finding it difficult to articulate answers to Matheson's questions about what would happen in the play. A note in the journal describes my feelings at the time,

Uncomfortable physical sensation when I feel I have to tell the story of the play before actually writing it. Feel the process is being short-circuited – that the writerly dreaming isn't being trusted. Leads to a block. (20 August 2009).

At my next meeting with Matheson, he commented that the scenes I had sent him lacked real action,

For me to make sure that your character is constantly central is to do all those dramaturgical things that talk about being in conflict, and stuff like that and okay I can see that she's in conflict but she's not relating to the world around her, she's avoiding it still (pers. comm. 5 August 2009).

This gave me pause to think about both the character and the writing process itself. My writing practice in the past, whether songs or prose, had been intuitive, where characters and action was

revealed as I wrote. Here I was required to tell these before I wrote them. I was searching around, groping for what was actually happening in the play, why it was happening and why it was happening particularly at that time in Soph's life, before actually writing it; my usual path to discovery of these things.

It was also no surprise, I felt, that this character was avoiding the world, it was surely in her nature to do this, to protect herself from change. If she was to remain the protagonist she had to change this. This was the action she would take then, the transformation; she would change this inability to change; move from passivity to action. Soph would make contact with the world, the real world, her real past, her real present. She would step out of the familiar; crawl out of her hole. Why would she do this? And how? What event would create the level of desperation for her to want to make this change? How was I to articulate this before writing it?

Matheson continued,

What I'm doing first is going for the action so that I can say okay, from that point, I can see that the piece deals with an emotional journey. Now, not that I necessarily need a physical journey to contain that emotional journey, but it helps. When we see something, we want to hang on to what's really going on, and if it's going to be a physical journey, you know, like Arnold Schwarzenegger going and killing the 43000 people to get to the other side of the river, that's what he does physically. If there's a journey for your character, an emotional one, or a symbolic one, it's got to be as basic as that too, you know, first he kills the Russian, then he kills the German, so that those steps are there too.

He ended the session with the comment, 'There's an interesting story in there, just make her active.'

I wondered, in the wake of this session, how I was going to make Soph active when her defining trait seemed to be her passivity. She was a rubbish bin, used to being dumped in, used to dumping *in* herself. I had to bring her to the point, and quickly too, of change, and for her this would be the point where she could not swallow one more thing, representing an end to her passivity. She would be full, overfull, a receptacle who eventually said 'Enough!' Her body as the receptacle would say it, would refuse to swallow any more. Something would occur which would represent the thing that she couldn't manage to swallow, that she couldn't take, and she would begin the process of spitting out. I intuitively wanted this spitting out process to be literal and physical, that is, I could see her vomiting actual objects, symbols for the journey, like Schwarzenegger killing first the Russian then the German, Soph would vomit first, say, a little elephant (the elephant in the room), then something else, and something else, giving her emotional journey fundamental steps for the audience to follow. She, being passive, would, of

course, fight this process and her scenes with FD would represent this conflict, be the obstacle she needed to overcome. Alice, as her sister and representative of her family, would also resist the spitting out. Nick, on the other hand, would be necessary as an ally, because this was a journey Soph could hardly take on her own.

Just write

I began writing again (this time *just writing* without conscious regard to anything I'd expressed to Matheson or any of the theoretical objectives I had proposed) and a scene³¹ between Soph and Nick emerged intuitively. The writing had finally come alive as I followed an internal rhythm. Whatever I thought about what would happen, the real answers, and surprises too, would come in that writerly trance. What surprised me about this particular scene was its comedy, its word play. There was a lightness to the dialogue which contrasted with the dark underpinnings of the play. This appealed to me. Of course, I thought upon reflection, survivors of trauma didn't walk around bleeding, their wounds were hidden, a dark sort of humour wove its way through their conversations, was how they met the world. I wanted this characteristic for Soph and could see it emerging.

Matheson's favourable response to the above scene convinced me to throw out any plans, trust my internal rhythm and see what happened. In this way, I completed a rough first draft by 2010. The dialogue in this draft felt authentic but I was not yet happy with what was happening, as though I was missing something important. My answer came, as I walked out of a group ESW session, in a chance comment from Matheson about 'reversals' in playwriting (pers. comm. 5 May 2010). My subsequent understanding of what reversals were³² sparked an epiphany in me, and changed the way I was approaching the play, that is, I seemed to develop a deeper intuitive understanding of how to write it. Something in me resonated strongly with this new knowledge. I didn't understand why at the time, and, concerned predominantly with the writing of the play, decided to reflect upon it at a later date³³.

In November 2010, JUTE conducted a reading of the play. As already described, I decided to view it as a practice run, and soon after, I began rewriting, throwing everything out and returning to that original image of Soph as a rubbish bin, much more dynamic now as I knew far more about the character. With this image in mind I listened intently for the first lines to

³¹ See p96-7 for an excerpt of this scene

³² See 'On music, anticipation and reversals' (p48)

³³ See p49 for my consequent understanding of this

come intuitively and proceeded from there. What emerged was a conversation between Soph and Nick about a list,

Nick Morning.

Soph Morning.

(pause)

Nick 65.

Soph What?

Nick The list? How about the smell of good coffee?

Soph Oh, 66, I think. Bit predictable though, isn't it?

(beat)

Nick 66?

Soph Number 65 - Tequila. Remember?

Nick Aah. How could I forget? (*Soph and the real world* p116)

I had no idea what they were talking about as I wrote this, but determined to follow the internal process rigorously, attending the rhythm of sounds as precisely as possible, and in the cases where words or ideas didn't make sense, continued, trusting that at some point all would become clear. In this way (what I now perceived as the only way to proceed), the new draft was written in three months, and is included here as Chapter Four.

Reflecting on the playwriting process

The playwriting process, I knew, had been one of sifting through ideas as I engaged with dream images and the stuff of my Unconscious, but, as the above section is intended to indicate, I hardly knew what I had eventually done to write the finished product beyond the sense that it had been an intensely focused and intuitive experience where I seemed to be following some internal guide. I also understood that this guide could only be heeded in a place of not knowing, that is, the key to locating it was in abandoning conscious processes enough to allow it. Woolfe,

similarly, describes her need 'early in the writing, to wilfully invoke not knowing', something, she says, seems 'critical to imagining' (Woolfe and Brophy 2007 p10).

It had also been imperative to trust that internal guide even when nothing seemed to make sense. Brophy writes,

The real task is to trust that, just beyond our comprehension, we know enough to be going on with the project/question/search/problem. I seem to be drawn to those instances where you express a lack of knowledge that turns out to be exactly what is needed in order to allow the knowledge to be expressed or the method to be uncovered (p11).

An examination of the *trash* journal confirmed for me that during my playwriting stints I had had little or no knowledge of what was going on, that is, I had written nothing for fear that the fragile connection with the writerly trance be broken. Like Brophy suggests, these gaps were exactly where I needed to begin the search. My task was to re-enter those spaces and describe them somehow.

I began to reflect on, and re-imagine, these spaces and it soon occurred to me that the creative act had been a kind of deep listening, an internal attendance, and that what I'd been listening for predominantly was a rhythm. With this discovery I began to link my song writing practice with this new form.

Jazz and writing: Feeling my way to integration

Now with neurophysical evidence that thoughts and memories might be coded in the brain according to their emotional nuances or feeling tones, I've come to wonder if the creative process is more dynamic than the uncovering of something pre-existent. I'm wondering if, as I said in *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady*, 'some trigger late in the writing process causes the tagged *themata* to connect'. Till that point, ideas are often experienced as frustratingly disparate - and may in fact be so. But when the trigger comes, the emotions might sequester and connect the disparate ideas. Often it seems that after not-knowing for an eternity, you move with astonishing rapidity to knowing. (Woolfe in Woolfe and Brophy 2007 p13-14).

I had begun the project using *alchemy* as a metaphor for what I assumed was happening as I wrote, a hypothesis based on retrospective examination of the writing of the song *Francine*. I proposed that, in writing the play, a number of *elements* would combine in the *crucible* of my body where a transformation would occur to produce the work. I listed these *elements* and decided that I would eventually be able to produce a recipe or map which would then constitute the findings of the study.

Upon entering the writerly state, however, I became aware of a gap between this hypothesis and what was actually happening; on the one side a detailed list of influences, theory, skills and unconscious processes, and on the other what it actually felt like, that is, a trance, or a fog, a place where I lost my bearings and with them any ability to analyse. I was *just writing*, as I always had. Reflecting on this trance-like state, I realised that the key to understanding it, the unavoidable option, was to follow my intuition in examining it. Just as I had with writing the play, I began to attend to the stuff of my Unconscious to lead the way, rather than the intellectual suppositions I'd made.

My question 'What exactly was I doing when I was *just writing*?' gave way to questions about who I was as a musician, and how that identity had been formed. As the play was infused with jazz, I thought particularly about my relationship with jazz, allowing thoughts, images and feelings to rise to the surface, to my conscious mind, and giving them my attention, just as I would when working on a creative project. I thought of my grandfather, a singer, whose voice lulled me to sleep throughout my childhood, his repertoire; jazz. I thought about the many hundreds of hours I have spent listening to jazz. I recalled my first foray into jazz singing, lured to the form from my singer/songwriter niche by older experienced jazz men; friends and musical mentors, where I surprised myself (and them) by knowing lyrics to songs that I couldn't recall learning, and with an ability to improvise with phrasing. I felt at home in that new form in ways that, at the time, I couldn't explain.

There was something else too; the thrill of singing with players who were constantly improvising. My body came alive, songs stretched out, I was absorbed, the external world was excluded just as it was when I wrote. Reflecting on this, I realised that what I was doing in this absorbed place mirrored my writerly state, was what I was after, then, was somehow the heart of this research, and what would unify everything.

It was obvious suddenly that writing *Soph and the real world* was like my experiences of jazz; improvisatory, rhythmic, visceral, responsive, even performative; played to an imagined audience. As with all revelations I wondered how I had not seen it before. Like Woolfe describes above, I moved suddenly and rapidly towards an holistic understanding of the project. I began to identify distinctive characteristics of my performance state; listening, responding, improvising, allowing (the body), revealing the self, a dialogue of the whole body in a state of focused attending. From this point I was able to bridge the gap which had formed between my research and my creative work, and therefore to see that both came from that intuitive, focused, reflexive, musical inner core; the stuff that makes me who I am.

Intuition, rhythm and musicality

My writing process is essentially musical in that when I write I am listening intently to an internal rhythm which acts as a guide, like a shimmering thread that must be held onto throughout the writing. I usually have a sense of the rhythm of a line sometimes long before the actual words become apparent. My work is then to unearth these words as best I can without losing hold of that all important rhythmical thread. Sometimes these words don't make sense at first. Song writer Paul Simon describes something similar in a documentary on the making of his album, *Graceland*,

To my ear, certain words . . . or certain sounds that become words, sometimes those words formed a phrase and the phrase was interesting. Sometimes it was banal, sometimes it didn't make any sense like 'I'm going to Graceland'. That phrase sang very well against what was happening in the track. It was very comfortable to sing that so I sang it, thinking all along of course I'm going to replace this, of course I'll replace this, until I'd been into it for several months and I realised uhuh, I'm not going to replace it, I can't get this out of my head, it's always going to be that way in my head (1997).

Simon's temporary phrase stayed, and eventually provided, too, the evocative title of the album.

An image occurred repeatedly to me during reflection on this internal rhythmical guide, generating insights into the process. It was the memory of the many hours I spent as a child playing scales on our piano to the beat of an old wooden metronome, such as the one pictured below. Years of this structured practice gave me a solid sense of rhythm, one which I relied upon throughout my years playing with other musicians, whether counting a tune in, that is, setting the tempo for the band, or in maintaining that rhythm in conjunction with the other musicians throughout the song, a collaboration which also requires active listening, reflexivity and a bodily intuition akin to what Anderson calls 'sympathetic resonance'³⁴ (2000 p33). When this is all working, a musical symbiosis occurs between the musicians, the body comes alive and a trance-like state is entered, much like my experience of the creative writing state.

³⁴ See p107 for an explication of Anderson's phrase



Figure 1 METRONOME

My internal rhythm, then, mirrors this musical symbiosis, engaging my inner metronome, my body and my memories of live musical performance. When in this state the external world recedes and I am especially alert to the world inside me, allowing ideas, words, sounds and symbols to emerge as they will and which I then process into words on the page using all my tacit writerly knowledge, that which has been developed through years of writing and musical practice.

Another aspect of my musicality at play throughout the writing process was a type of call and response pattern. This became apparent as a distinctive feature of the dialogue between characters in *Soph and the real world*. Call and response in music is, according to the *Continuum encyclopaedia of popular music of the world: Performance and production* ‘a structural device characterized by the integral relationship between two musical figures: an initial call followed by an answering response’ (2003). An excerpt from the play (and, in fact, any excerpt of the play) demonstrates this,

Nick Big night.

Soph Titanic.

(beat)

Massive task, isn't it? Having that much fun.

Nick Epic.

Soph Exactly.

Nick Like climbing Everest?

Soph More like jumping off.

Nick Free falling?

Soph I can fly!

Nick Look mum, no hands!

Soph It'll all end in tears.

(Soph and the real world p117)

The characters Soph and Nick are engaged in word play where one is constantly taking up the other's call and responding to it. The dialogue has an improvisatory feel to it, as they spontaneously riff off each other's words. This reflects the process I am engaged in as I write, the words coming to mind as bursts of rhythm first, then as words, and I am playing not only with that rhythm but with the words themselves and their meanings in a call and response way, a jazz-like way. I am essentially trusting an internal flurry of sounds and ideas, reminiscent of what Breton terms 'verbal excitement' (1987 pxiii).

Coming alive to intuition, dreams and the Unconscious

First things first. Where did the angel come from? I had a dream, in 1985, I believe, when a friend I'd gone to school with was sick—one of the first people I knew who'd gotten the AIDS virus. I had a dream of him in his bedroom with an angel crashing through the ceiling. (Kushner cited in Kachka 2008 p72)

Like Kushner, dreams and images are integral to my writing. They inspired not only much of the play, but the initial research proposal too. When an interesting image appears in my conscious mind, I give it careful attention, give it a place of residence, allow it to emerge and evolve. When my body 'comes alive'³⁵ (Anderson 2000 p33) to an image of this sort, I get the sense that there is energy within it, that it will produce something of worth, and that its energy

³⁵ See p107

will sustain the process of unearthing and unpacking its meaning. This unearthing is a subtle affair, and must be approached gently and carefully. King writes,

No matter how good you are, no matter how much experience you have, it's probably impossible to get the entire fossil out of the ground without a few breaks and losses. To get even *most* of it, the shovel must give way to more delicate tools: air hose, palm-pick, perhaps even a toothbrush (2001 p128).

When I have an important image, such as, for example, the one, which presented as a dream, of the play's protagonist as a rubbish bin, the most integral tool at my disposal is attendance. I give my concentrated attention to the image, what it might become, how it might sound, that is, in this instance, what Soph might do or say as a rubbish bin. I ask questions of the image. How does she feel? What is she saying? Will she change? What action might cause that change? Why is she like a rubbish bin? Is she full? What happens when a bin is full? Can she empty herself? Who might help empty her? I continue in this way, always allowing the image to respond as it will, and in turn reacting to those responses, a call and response process, therefore, and one which allows meanings to emerge as delicately and fully as possible. What emerged, in this instance, and eventually, was the main character of the play. The unearthing process became one of characterisation, the internal call and response pattern allowed the character the independence necessary to become what she would be.

Dreams also inspired the character Frankly Darkly, as well as many solutions to problems which arose along the way. These dream images were always unearthed in the manner described above. When I dreamt of Frankly Darkly, for example, I wasn't sure at the time how, or if, he would fit into the play, or whether he was the seed for something else but there was a sense of energy about the image which I knew would yield something interesting. Dreams would usually be reflected on (and this reflection includes noting, and following up, any random connections I make with the dream as in Baker's music or Welsh's passage) for a period of time until it became clear what I would, or in some cases wouldn't, do with them. On some occasions a symbol or image would be used in one draft, only to be discarded from a later one, and even, once or twice then picked up again later in the process. These insights about what to do with a dream image often popped suddenly into my head, and I would make a note of them, placing them where I could see them as I wrote, setting up an easel near my computer for the purpose. Attending to my dreams in this way has resulted in them becoming more significant to my personal praxis, and an increasingly richer source of inspiration.

My process recalls Breton's proposal to the artist to attend the Unconscious. In an introduction to *Mad Love*, Breton's classic novel, translator Mary Ann Caws writes,

Breton was able to persuade a whole generation of thinkers, writers, and artists to pay attention to their inner gifts and intuitions . . . he expected the inner and the outer experiences to mingle in an ongoing, constant communion . . . providing an extraordinary dynamism of activated images (1987 pxiv).

Activating my images by attending and responding to them like this allows the dynamic creative process to come alive. Just as a jazz musician is somehow *in* the music, *in* an ongoing constant dynamic communion, not consciously contriving notes based on intellectual analysis but relying on tacit knowledge and intuitive bodily processes, I am *in* the writing, *in* the creative space. The first draft of the play emerged in this way. Unlike Breton³⁶, however, what followed was the more conscious and analytical process of editing.

Epiphanies: Action and reversals

Reflecting on the dramaturgical experience, I saw that my understanding of two concepts that Matheson had presented me with, in particular, seemed to have sparked leaps in my intuitive understanding of playwriting. Firstly that action was imperative in each scene, and secondly the notion of reversals. I engaged intuitively with each of these ideas, and allowed them space in my mind as I read and watched plays, and also films adapted from plays.

In reading Albee's *The goat* (2004) and *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1980), for example, I discerned an atmosphere of constant conflict, and in watching the film version of the second (1966), I could see the many reversals at play in each scene, where characters constantly changed their minds, their emotional states, formed and broke alliances with each other, and how these changes revealed and deepened the characters, raised stakes and built tension.

The above understandings were largely intuitive during my own writing process; I knew they had been integral but not at a conscious level. In retrospect I began to see how and why they had been so enlightening, had resonated so deeply with me. The connections I had been making between my writing process and my musicality paved the way and I looked to my musical/writerly self in order to locate intersections between these concepts and my writing method. I realised that my understanding of them reminded me of music, and in particular, of jazz. The way I had intuitively interpreted and incorporated them into the play was by locating and working from my experiences of the live performed moment, of jazz, and was writing in an intuitive and active call and response way, endeavouring as I went to surprise, to raise tension and to move the piece forward to some inevitable end. I had placed a quote from Albee on my easel before beginning my final draft which read,

³⁶ See section entitled 'Surrealism and Dreams' p51

No matter how surprising a play is, it should always be inevitable (cited in Wallach 2005).

The quote seemed to capture the way the play needed to unfold, and I resonated with it. On reflection, it reminded me of a performance of a tune where the players are improvising (encountering and creating surprise) their way to an inevitable end, where tension (conflict) is being raised, and how a song can be lost, and the audience too, if one or the other player meanders too much away from this pull. I had been writing from this place, feeling the pull of the song so to speak, allowing my musicality to actively dictate, improvising as I went.

The playwriting method unearthed: a summary

This section has focused on describing those essential elements that characterise my particular writing method. My creative method, custom-built for this particular job, examined above, can be seen to have three key components, those I gave careful attention to as I wrote and which were applied intuitively in the act of writing, that is, were improvised with in a jazz-like way,

- engagement with sensory experiences and embodied memories (chills, coming alive to the work)
- engagement with dreams and the stuff of the unconscious
- focused attendance to a sense of rhythm and musicality

The following section focuses on jazz/swing, using it as a metaphor to describe the *writerly* stance I took to the playwriting.

Jazz and the art of playwriting

It seemed fitting that a play which featured jazz and jazz players would, in the writing, engage my own experiences with the genre. I thought about the place of 'not knowing' and its equivalent in musical performance, which involved, for me, clearing out any conscious thoughts about the music and allowing myself to enter a sort of trance where the whole self was engaged in the music. This trance-like state was characterised by an attitude or stance, something like Sinatra's 'swagger'. There was no room for hesitation or timidity and an openness to the music, the other players and the audience was required; an ability to reveal. Tacit knowledge of the music was relied upon (structure of the tune, the developed ability, acquired through practice, to play or sing). In writing *Soph and the real world*, I had drawn on this to take a similar stance to the writing.

I recognised that these musical experiences had influenced the rhythm of the play, the dialogue, the pauses between sounds, and even the structure of the play, in that I had employed my experience with not only intuitively shaping a song, but shaping a set of songs for performance;

a kind of intuitive knowledge of what song comes next, which translated into a feel for the overall shape of the play and what scene would come next.

The raw material, what I had begun the project calling *trash*, and the various other *elements* of the process, had been engaged and played with from this jazz-stance that I was now describing. Dreams, memories, random thoughts, everyday experiences, sensory and otherwise, had been attended to in this jazz-like way, that is, with focused attendance, and improvised with in a call and response way in order to connect and synthesise them into text on the page. I realised I was now describing my playwriting method rather than focusing on these various *elements*, and that the stance I had taken was the most integral part of the puzzle, the key, in fact, to my research and would therefore be the focus of the thesis.

A jazz/swing stance

Jazz is difficult to define. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, for example, in its article entitled 'Jazz' states,

Any attempt to arrive at a precise, all-encompassing definition of jazz is probably futile. Jazz has been, from its very beginnings at the turn of the 20th century, a constantly evolving, expanding, changing music (2012).

Similarly Gridley writes,

Many different kinds of music have been called 'jazz'. So it's no surprise that people cannot agree about how to define it (1997 p4).

Gridley goes on to define 'most jazz styles' as having two elements in common, 'improvisation and jazz swing feeling'. Improvisation describes the spontaneous nature of jazz performance, where musicians are composing and performing simultaneously (p4). Gridley likens it to the 'impromptu speaking all of us do every day when we talk "off the cuff"', using words and phrases we have used before, we improvise by 'using them in new ways and new orders that have not been rehearsed'. Working within the framework of a tune, jazz musicians 'improvise their own melodies to the tune's accompanying chords' (p5). *Swing* is defined as 'a rhythmic phenomenon' resulting from 'several easily defined factors' (p5) ('constant tempo', 'cohesive group sound') and 'a few subtle, almost indefinable factors' ('lilt', 'groove', 'spirit' p6).

Jazz is used here as a metaphor for my internal writing process. That the form itself is collaborative, and can't be played alone is acknowledged. It is the performative spirit of jazz I take here to describe the internal polyphony I experience when writing; the collaboration between my multiple selves, my 'infinite I'. Spry emphasises the 'coperformativity' of jazz and uses the concept to elucidate and expand her own position as researcher,

A performative ethos infused with jazz expands the concept of the performative-I researcher position where the researcher constructs “a plural sense of self that seeks to navigate the interrelations between self/other/bodies/language” (Spry, 2006, p. 343) into a larger methodological process (p273).

Similarly, I use a jazz-infused ethos here to illuminate certain salient features of my playwriting method; its improvisational, performative quality, its attention to sound and rhythm, dreams and images, the collaboration of my plural selves, and the role of the body as the central agency in the process.

When I refer to my writing as improvisational and performative I am invoking not only that academic notion of performative writing and in particular here, ‘that aspect of a text that is specifically self-conscious about an interaction with the audience or reader, who then become co-contributors to its meaning’ (‘Performing Autobiography’ *Encyclopaedia of women’s autobiography* 2005) but also use the term to describe my experience of writing as a type of performance which engages my embodied memories of performance, (and perhaps *performerly* could be used here). When writing I am listening for the ‘grain’ (Barthes 1975) of my many voices, an internal ‘*writing aloud*’, not asking consciously or intellectually for the next best word; the one which may expose this grain, but *feeling* for it, *listening*. The inner writerly state is a ‘site of bliss’ where I engage various selves; performer, musician, audience, writer, where I inhabit the imagined spaces between these selves and others, between the play’s characters too; a collaborative site, a copperformative space, a jazz-like act. I am chasing chills, anticipating the play in performance as a visceral experience, seeking a *swing* quality in the work.

Gridley’s definition of *swing* as both rhythmic (constant tempo) and cohesive (collaborative) and as something less definable to do with lilt, groove and spirit works here as a metaphor for what I am seeking as I write. My inner metronome provides a constant tempo as I write copformatively, using an intuitive feeling for what works; a groove, a spirit to the writing. This intuitive sense of what *swings* is derived from my musicality and performance experience.

The play is written with a constant and definite tempo. The ‘beats’ throughout the dialogue are there because I intuitively sensed a space was needed, a rest of one beat, before dialogue resumed. Similarly, ‘pauses’ are used to indicate a slightly longer rest, 3 beats perhaps; an indication for the director, and for the actors, who will use their own sense of rhythm to collectively dictate this. The actors will collaborate in this rhythm, like musicians, to render their own collective interpretation of the play, the director assuming the role of conductor throughout the rehearsal process. The rhythm and constant tempo of the piece is intended also to produce a mesmerising quality, drawing the audience into the world of the play.

The dialogue between performers, their word play, reflects the jazz infused *performatively* writing style and is/was intuitively intended to create the illusion of improvisation between the characters of the play. As discussed earlier, the characters appear to be riffing off each other, calling and responding in a jazz-like way. They move together towards the inevitable end of their tune, keeping a constant tempo, apparently improvising their own rhythms and melodies against this structure, pushing and pulling against the tempo and each other; raising tension through a type of syncopation.

Syncopation is, according to Gridley, another condition which must be met for music to *swing* (1997 p6). He writes ‘syncopating means accenting notes that occur just before or just after a beat’, and further,

The tension generated by members of a band tugging at opposite sides of the beat is essential to jazz swing feeling (p7).

Jazz requires not only a rhythmic element but also,

a continuous rising and falling motion or the alternation of more and less activity in a jazz line that provides alternation of tension and relaxation in the listener.

The above defined elements of *swing* were sought, through writing from a *performatively* state, in order to give the play a dynamic aliveness, to produce visceral responses in the audience, to create a performable producible work that will transcend mere words and conjure the type of ‘poetry for the senses’ that Artaud describes (1970 p27) as essential to theatre.

Reflecting on reflection: Improvising Methodology

A characteristic purpose of a methodology is to show not how such and such appeared to be the best method available for the given purposes of the study, but how and why *this way of doing it was unavoidable – was required by – the context and purpose of this particular enquiry* (Clough and Nutbrown 2007 p19)

Once I had unearthed my creative method, I began to reflect on the process by which I’d done this, and to think about what form the exegetical writing would take. The original proposed aims, theories and procedures for the project, though deposited somewhere outside my consciousness (or at least on a far edge), had nevertheless, it can be assumed, been influences on, but had not consciously dictated the research (or creative) method. How then to report this not-conscious research trajectory? My initial research questions about the writing process remained relevant. What exactly had I been *doing* as I wrote the play? What role had my

existent skills played in its development? And how, more importantly, was I to report this *doing*? Having reflected on my creative method, and understanding I needed some sort of unifying stance to bridge the gap between the creative and exegetical works, I looked to my playwriting practice, and further, to my musicality, to find a pathway into the exegetical writing and research methodology.

The sorts of reflexive, reflective, creative, intuitive acts described above can be likened to Donald Schon's notion of the 'reflective practitioner'. Schon shows how,

practitioners in very different sorts of professions reveal an underlying similarity in the art of their practice, and especially in the artful inquiry by which they sometimes deal with situations of uncertainty, instability, and uniqueness. This is the pattern of reflection-in-action which I have called "reflective conversation with the situation" (1991 p268).

The inquirer, he says,

remains open to the discovery of phenomena, incongruent with the initial problem setting, on the basis of which he reframes the problem.

According to Schon, reflection happens not only during practice, but after too, as a kind of 'post-mortem', where practitioners,

think back on a project they have undertaken, a situation they have lived through, and they explore the understandings they have brought to their handling of the case (p61).

My experience of the practice-led research journey parallels Schon's reflection-in-action model, and resulted in the unearthing and construction of a playwriting method, much in the way that Clough and Nutbrown advocate when they write,

A method turns out not to be a spanner – or even a micrometer – but rather something which has to be painstakingly custom-built from other drafters' cast-offs which, whilst providing a general guidance, were not made *for this particular job*. It is actually this particularity which it becomes the task of methodology to explain (2007 p29).

Intuition: Common ground

The practitioner researcher seeks to uncover, record, interpret and position, from an insider's perspective and experience, the processes they use within the context of professional contemporary practices in the field. The resulting stories are placed in historical, social and cultural contexts

and, when shaped through autobiography, become a form of self-portraiture, the mirroring of experience (Stewart 2003).

In order to explore intuition and its role in my current practice, it is helpful to look back further than the beginnings of this project, to my undergraduate years. Reflecting on the shaping of myself as an academic (with an eye to, as Stewart describes above, uncovering, recording, interpreting and positioning), it is easy, now, to trace back to the two most integral experiences in this shaping. Both occurred in my first year of tertiary education, and both still underpin any academic thinking I undertake. The first came in an Introduction to Poetry lecture, as I sat, tense at the thought of having to write academically about poetry when all I knew was that reading it had a profound effect on me; something I *felt*, somewhere in my body. The lecturer read an excerpt from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which I had glanced at in preparation for the course and found incomprehensible. I vividly recall the moment of revelation when I discovered that, though difficult on the page, the words sprang to life for me as he read them. I literally gasped as the light went on, chills swept my body.

Whan that Aveyll with his shoures soote

The droghte of Marche hath perced to the root

And bathed every veyne in swiche lycour

Of which vertu engendered is the flour (cited in Leonard 1992 p456).

'Poetry', he said, and I am relying on memory here, 'must be read out loud'. As a musician I understood this. Yes, of course it must! How, though, I thought at the time, do academics study it, write about it, this thing that has just happened, these feelings?

My answer came later in the lecture, as the lecturer began talking about essay writing. 'Read the poems out loud,' he said (and once again, memory is notoriously indistinct), 'experience them. Trust your feelings and then go back line by line, and find the words that prompted them. Write about that.' He had said, for me, the magic words: *trust your feelings*. 'I can do that!' I thought, and it is exactly what I have done since. How does it sound when I read it aloud? What is it about that word, that line, that metaphor, that argument, that theory, which provokes this feeling (these chills)? And what therefore do I think about that? What have others thought about it?

The second experience was a piece of advice from a different lecturer, written as a comment on my first attempt at essay writing, one month into tertiary life, a practice run; 500 or so words about a short story we had looked at. I had read a book on how to structure essays, and had

written a tentative, rather plodding critique which compared and contrasted images in the story. The lecturer commented that '[t]he words could be a bit more sparkling'. Sparkling? Sparkle the words? He seemed to be urging me to play, to engage my creative voice. As a musician and songwriter (with an ingrained horror of boring), I understood intuitively what he was talking about. He wanted me to engage him, entertain him in some way. I could do that too.

In writing this I intend to illustrate how blurred the boundary has always been between my academic and my creative selves; how similar both processes really are, relying, as they do, on my body, my intuition and my intellect, something I have only realised in retrospect, that is, in the act of unifying them through locating a personal ethos for this project. During my undergraduate degree, I had no problems splitting myself between my two roles as musician and student. They remained separate; one occurring out in the world, and the other within the walls of the university. Through this time, too, I was accumulating knowledge to support these processes; musically as I honed my performance, instrumental and vocal skills, and listened extensively to music, both live and recorded, and academically as I read widely of literature and theory, and began to stretch my academic writing wings. The more I learned, the more I had at my disposal when I wrote, whether songs or essays, and the more I mastered, the more intuitive these processes became.

In gathering knowledge, I was constructing something like what King calls a writer's 'toolbox' (2000, p85). King distrusts plot, leaning 'more heavily on intuition' (p128). He likens stories to 'found things, fossils', and the writer's job, he says,

is to use . . . the toolbox to get as much of each [story] out of the ground intact as possible (p128).

This idea of writing as a type of retrieval aligns with psychologist Hans Welling's description of intuition as a process. He writes 'for an intuition to be useful, it has to be unravelled; its meaning has to be understood' (2005). Song writing and research are, for me, both such processes, intuitive acts of unravelling or excavation.

Research as intuitive inquiry

Rosemarie Anderson posits what she calls 'intuitive inquiry' as a valid methodology for researchers investigating transformative human processes. She writes,

To communicate powerfully and resonantly, intuitive inquiry invites research participants to speak from their own unique and personal perspectives born of their own experience (2000 p35).

Anderson advises research students (echoing Cixous) to 'write from the sense-scape of the body', stating that,

If in relaying experiences the participants' bodies come alive to the experiences described, the resulting utterances will be rich and full. If in relaying research findings, the researcher's body comes alive while writing, it is likely that the researcher is writing from an embodied perspective (and not from the head alone) and readers may discover that same resonance within themselves (2000 p35).

Using the metaphor of a cello, of which she says, '[i]f one plucks a string on a cello on one side of a room, a string of a cello on the opposite side will begin to vibrate' (p33), Anderson describes how research may be likened to a sympathetic resonance, stating,

The principle of sympathetic resonance introduces resonance as a validation procedure for the researcher's particular intuitive insights and syntheses. The principle suggests that research can function more like poetry in its capacity for the immediate apprehension and recognition of an experience spoken by another and yet (surprisingly and refreshingly, perhaps) be true for oneself, as well.

My intuition was central to this research, leading and validating the iterative process from the initial proposal to the last word. As such it is the essence of both my creative and research methods. Like Anderson's, my intuitive process can be described as a resonant experience, and this resonance is felt in my body, very often as tingles or chills, but also as the sort of 'coming alive while writing' that she describes.

Intuition plays a part in all research, whether as sympathetic resonances, hunches, images, or things felt in the body. Welling quotes Einstein on his process,

The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be voluntarily reproduced and combined.... The above mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some muscular type (2005 p21).

He goes on to quote Poincare, who describes how a solution came to him as he entered a bus,

At the moment when I put my foot on the step, the idea came to me without anything in former thoughts seeming to have paved the way for it (p21).

Like Schon's 'reflective practitioner', I have retrospectively investigated my intuitive playwriting process, using an intuitive method of inquiry akin to Anderson's. In this way, the project unifies and streamlines, becoming an holistic one which relies on my creativity, that is,

my developed ability (my toolbox) to reflect and be reflexive, allowing my body to come alive to the task and attending carefully to my sense of rhythm and musicality in order to give the work coherence.

Journaling: What went in the *trash*

Any opinions I have about *Blasted* have been put together with hindsight. Writing my first play really was a process of groping about in the dark, making connections that I understood on an instinctive level but couldn't (and didn't want to) necessarily articulate (Kane cited in Singer 2004 p147).

As described in Chapter One³⁷, my initial ideas of following Rauschenberg's Found Object method were abandoned as my first deadline with *Enter Stage Write* loomed, and my daily walks along some of what were, apparently, Cairns cleanest streets, yielded nothing. I realised I needed to rethink my methodology if the project were to proceed. I decided instead to attempt to keep track of my creative process using a *trash* journal as a repository for descriptions of anything which seemed to be related to the process, that is, as described earlier, any thought, sensation, memory, image, dream, daydream, as well as any other outside elements, for example a play I'd seen, or a book I'd read, which I felt may inspire these, and which seemed to be related to the creation of the play. As I recorded these things, I found that giving focus to the signs and symbols of the unconscious seemed to increase their occurrence.

I approached the journal like a diary, purchasing a large visual diary for the purpose, (the large unlined pages appealed), structuring it only by date, and writing in it whenever I thought something was relevant. The diary starts with a *Hubba Bubba* gum wrapper (19/3/2009), and two scraps of newspaper (21/3/2009) which read 'celebrated in stone' and 'child safety to streets', the only products of my initial methodology. Following this is a description of my first reading of Sarah Kane's play *Blasted*, which I, unsuspectingly, did at a local cafe,

'Read *Blasted* . . . sitting in the sun drinking coffee . . . quietly went into a state of shock. Felt exposed and obscene in the sun, left traumatised, food uneaten' (29 March 2009).

Clearly a profound experience, something I felt palpably in my body, and one, I was sure, that would somehow influence my own writing, thus its appearance in the journal. There follows some initial dialogue between two characters (9/4/2009), a newspaper article on Dada (9/5/2009), a detailed description of the dream which gave me one of my characters; 'Frankly

³⁷ See p12

Darkly' (1/5/2009), a number of stream of consciousness ideas, and a lot of questions, as I began to write.

The *trash* also includes brief summaries of my general state of being in a given moment, like snapshots, such as this, dated 10 August 2009,

Stuck.

Watched *Cat on a hot tin roof* (1958).

Thinking about atmosphere.

Rhythm.

Writing in the journal was a hit and miss affair. If writing can be described, as 'groping in the dark', then writing in the journal about this groping about was so lacking in reference points or direction as to seem, at times, an impossible pursuit. Around the end of my first year of research, I attended the Australian Association of Writing Programs' 14th Annual Conference in Waikato, New Zealand (2009), and presented a work in progress paper on my research entitled 'Examining alchemy: The problems with trash collection' in which I described the difficulty I was experiencing with recording the process while in it. I include a section from the resulting paper below.

Surrounded by the writing fog, I would attempt to scrawl things in the journal without breaking my trance, so to speak. For example, an entry dated 25 August 2009,

Dreamt about the characters all screaming at each other. Don't know what they were saying, just a sense of chaos.

Thinking about the creative process while going through it is a daunting task.

'A soldier in the midst of fighting cannot describe the battle' (De Beauvoir in Brophy 1998 p6).

Man Doctor, doctor, I think I'm a trash can!

Doctor That's rubbish!

I remember scribbling this, dumping it quickly, so that I could get onto the more pressing business of writing the play. This entry, including as it does a dream, a quote, a comment on the difficulty of describing the process I was engaged in, and a joke told to me by my nine year old

daughter the night before, is typically eclectic. The trash journal contains all manner of things. It is notable that the entries made before or after a creative stint are neatly written, logical, lengthy and well-structured, quotes are correctly referenced, and newspaper articles are glued in. There is even a charcoal sketch which I fear I drew because the journal looked a little drab. The entries made during a writing stint are messy and often incoherent, or describe experiences which appear to be irrelevant as in the following,

I heard a rhythmic scraping sound from my front patio. I went out to look. A teenager walking very slowly along the road, listening to an MP3 player. The sound was comforting. (3 September 2009)

There are stretches of days on end, too, where no entries appear at all. During these times it felt precarious to open the journal, to pull myself back from the trance, afraid, as I was, of losing the precious connection with the dreaming. Once finished with a draft of the play, I was tempted to go back and fill these spaces with recollections. This urge to fill up spaces, to blot out emptiness was, I realised, misguided. The spaces, the holes, existed. There was no point trying to hide them. They represent a point in my process where I become so immersed that a type of inarticulacy results, an incomprehensibility. I found that like Paul Auster I wanted to be 'less self-reflective, less philosophical, less worried . . . [about] . . . theoretical problems' (Rabalais 2009). 'I'm now,' he says 'just sliding into these projects with my unconscious and groping my way through them'. Like him I want to slide and grope. The empty spaces in the journal draw attention to this place of inarticulacy, of sliding and groping. They suitably describe this part of the process.

Writing the paper was a significant moment in the course of the research, as it demonstrates a move away from my research plan, and a willingness to examine what was actually happening. I was telling the truth, in other words, rather than endeavouring to fit what was happening into a preordained format.

The *trash* journal, while not a reliable account of my tacit processes, tells a story of the ebb and flow of writing. Its abandonment in times of creativity exemplifies the step away from procedure and into practice, representing the defining act, or gesture, of this study.

Jazz/swing method: Research strategies

This section re-purposes my techniques of practice into a number of research strategies in order to demonstrate how practice-led research of this type may be conducted. My techniques of practice have been distilled into the following key components,

- engagement with sensory experiences and embodied memories (chills, coming alive to the work)
- engagement with dreams and the stuff of the unconscious
- focused attendance to a sense of rhythm and musicality
- taking a stance to the work (jazz/swing)

Following is a demonstration of how these may be applied as research strategies.

Coming alive to the work: the body and sensory experience

Success is never the result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire (Glasow cited in Roberts 2004 p117).

The passion that drives a musician to master an instrument, to spend hour upon hour practicing scales, is akin to the motivation required to negotiate (and survive) the PhD process. Just as a musician is drawn to the style of music that makes her 'come alive' (Anderson 2000 p35), so too is the student drawn to the discipline and subject which speaks to her; excites. The body and its senses can be relied on to lead the research journey, to gauge the usefulness of ideas, the quality of writing, to sense important connections before conscious understanding of these things become apparent. A researcher who attends the body in this way is always alive to the research, ensuring a dynamic and engaging process, an individual and therefore unique journey, and generates the energy required to see the process through to completion.

Researching from the body also provides the chance of encountering Grosz' 'animality', Barthes' 'grain', connects women with Cixous' call to write their bodies, and affords the opportunity to engage the researcher's whole world of experience in the research act. Krauth's notion of the fiction writer could be applied here to the (writing) researcher too,

Writers are hunters and gatherers in the real world; what they garner they store in their heads. Continually they pass between the real world and their stored world. This process of passing between - this weaving / merging of inner and outer environments - creates fiction. The fiction writer exists in an ecosystem of mind, body and world (2008).

The researcher exists in such an ecosystem, and attending to the body, and to sensory experience, opens pathways to a rich and complex research process.

Dreams and the unconscious: attending the inner world

This project began with a dream. Consciously I had been searching for a focus for the thesis, a question I could pose, a shape for the proposal I was about to submit. I had come up with and rejected a number of ideas, on the basis that none 'inspired' me (my body had not 'come alive' to them) and it was the dream which eventually provided the seed and impetus for the project.

My engagement with dreams has long been a part of my creative practice and here it was taking the lead, too, in my research. The dream heralded the journey, inspired the proposal and acts as a symbol for the project; an alchemical process, where *trash* (those things which normally go unheeded) is transformed into *gold*.

Engagement with dreams, random images and connections arising from the unconscious can provide the surprises and epiphanies which are invaluable to creative and research processes. Practicing careful attention to these unconscious insights, playing with them, focusing on them (and here also using the body as gauge to discern those pertinent to a project), particularly when the research has led to dead ends, can provide the necessary impetus for forward movement.

Rhythm and musicality

Writing, any writing, whether creative or academic, begins with a felt rhythm. Gibbs' previously cited suggestion echoes this,

I think most writers - even of academic work - have experienced a dawning awareness in the act of writing that our word choices and our grammatical structures are dictating themselves to us via dimly-remembered melodies which we feel in some - perhaps not precisely locatable - region of our bodies as we write (2005).

Gibbs not only points to the body as a driver of writing work but emphasises that it is a bodily rhythm and musicality that energises this drive. My research has illuminated these internal rhythms as essential to my creative and academic writing practice, and my musicality has enhanced my capacity to hear these rhythms. A musician's most precious ability is that of listening. An ability to attend internally, to listen to, intuitive rhythms such as those Gibbs refers to is an essential research skill, and one which is developed by the 'doing' of writing.

Taking a stance

The two components of this thesis, the creative artefact and the exegesis were integrated by my decision to take a stance to the work. This stance derived from my musicality, and therefore my ethos and identity as a musician. Taking a stance derived from personal identity and expression is integral not just in practice-led projects but for all students engaged in higher research. In a conference paper dealing with the problem of how to foster creative skills in research students entitled 'Tackling the Wicked Problem of Creativity in Higher Education', Jackson states,

Preparing learners who can engage with the problems that emerge from increasing complexity is higher education's 'wicked problem' and creativity is an important facet of this problem (2008 p6).

He continues,

Higher education has a responsibility to help learners develop their understandings and awareness of their own creativities as they develop their own identity – an important part of which is the creative expression of who they are.

Stance-taking (and here I take a jazz/*swing* stance) is essential to research, is something akin to Sinatra's swagger or Duchamp's attitude. It must derive from an individual student's identity, and encompass that individual's 'coming alive' to ideas, as well as a dynamic communion with dreams and the unconscious in conjunction with the student's world of experience. The taking of a stance is invaluable to the reporting of research, in asserting knowledges and establishing methodological perspectives, and in encountering and actively engaging with theory. It is a means of taking control of the work.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the development of the project's methodology, showing it to be an iterative and practice-led process. It explores how I came to construct this methodology by examining and reporting those techniques of practice which I consider integral to the writing of the play, and how I came to recognise, upon reflection (Schon 2011), and via a form of intuitive inquiry (Anderson 2000), that those same techniques were employed in researching my creative practice. Using this information I then 'custom-built' (Clough and Nutbrown 2007) an overarching methodology which draws on my personal musical ethos and applies to both the creative and research components of the thesis, blurring boundaries between the two and offering a different way of inquiry for creative and research practice.

The following chapter represents the outcome of the creative process; the play *Soph and the real world*. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, it can be considered a further response to the research question, in essence uttering, 'How did I write a play? Well, exactly like this.'

Chapter five: Soph and the real world

Characters

Soph A woman in her thirties.

Alice Soph's older sister.

Nick Soph's lover.

Frankly Darkly A jazz trumpeter.

Act One

The action takes place in Soph's small one bedroom apartment. There is a piano, open with a manuscript and pen, bookshelves with books (Soph reads a lot), a kitchen area, and a fold-out sofa bed. The room is decorated in an eclectic way. It is messy but has charm. There is also a balcony off to the side.

Scene 1

Int. Morning. A trumpet plays 'My Funny Valentine'. There is an empty wine bottle and glasses on the coffee table. Soph and Nick are entwined on the sofa bed. Soph wakes up. She snuggles into the embrace momentarily, then extricates herself. Nick wakes.

Nick Morning.

Soph Morning.

(pause)

Nick 65.

Soph What?

Nick The list? How about the smell of good coffee?

Soph Oh, 66, I think. Bit predictable though, isn't it?

(beat)

Nick 66?

Soph Number 65 - Tequila. Remember?

Nick Aah. How could I forget?

(beat)

So tequila's not predictable but coffee is?

(beat)

Soph The list could probably do with some revision this morning, I admit.

(beat)

Nick Big night.

Soph Titanic.

(beat)

Massive task, isn't it? Having that much fun.

Nick Epic.

Soph Exactly.

Nick Like climbing Everest?

Soph More like jumping off.

Nick Free falling?

Soph I can fly!

Nick Look mum, no hands!

Soph It'll all end in tears.

(beat)

Plummet. What sort of word is that? A little plum, monsieur? Une plummette? I mean, where did it come from? Plummet? How did it end up meaning what it does? It's deceiving, isn't it? It appears to be one thing - all sweet and . . . and nice, doesn't it, but it's actually something else entirely.

(beat)

Nick Just a word. Isn't it?

Soph You're so literal, Nick. Everything's just as it is, isn't it?

Nick Realist. Anyway, what's predictable about it?

Soph Reality? Where do I start?

Nick No, coffee. 66?

Soph Oh, back to that.

Sophie goes to kitchen area.

Sophie Sweet and white, right?

Nick Right.

Sophie Polar opposites.

Nick What . . . bitter and black? Oh, the *artistic* temperament. Soph, you're a riot.

Sophie Why, thank you.

Nick Anyway, it's the way it works, Soph. You know that.

Sophie What? Rioting?

Nick Opposites. Attracting. You know what you are? You're obtuse.

Sophie Triangular?

Nick No, circuitous.

Sophie Yes, ran off to join it at 16.

Nick What, the riot?

Sophie The long and winding road crew.

Nick McCartney was never my favourite Beatle.

Sophie I prefer ladybugs, actually.

Nick Oh really, well it's cockroaches that come out in the dark.

Sophie Amongst other things. Kettle's on.

Nick Go on, then.

Sophie What?

Nick Other things?

Sophie Oh, you know, the usual; rats, snakes. The occasional monster.

Nick Monster? Under the bed?

Sophie *(laughs)* Oh, in it too, it has to be said. Right?

(beat)

Nick Oh?

Soph No, I didn't mean/

Nick No, of course you didn't.

(beat)

Soph *(hesitant)* Nick?

Nick Soph?

(beat)

 Me Nick. You Soph.

Soph Thus nature reveals itself.

Nick Reveals? Striptease, hubba!

Soph Nature: not known for being coy.

Nick pulls Soph towards him down onto the sofa bed and starts to undo buttons on her pyjama top. They kiss. Nick stops.

Nick Soph, I . . . there's something I/

We hear a trumpet start to play.

Soph *(She pulls away and sits up.)* Oh! Oh, oh!

Nick What?

Soph Hang on, I just have to. .

Nick What? Right now?

Soph It's . . . I've got an idea . . .

Nick groans.

 Just give me five minutes.

Nick Fine, Soph. (*He gets up*) I'll have a shower. I have things to do too.

Soph I'm sorry, Nick. It's just, you know, when the muse calls. . .

Nick You answer. I know, Soph. He just always seems to call at the same moment. It's okay. You write, I'll see you later.

Nick exits. Soph gets up and goes to her piano. The trumpet is still playing. She begins to play along with it. The phone rings. She ignores it.

End of Scene 1

Scene 2

Afternoon. Soph has fallen asleep on the sofa, There's a half-drunk bottle of wine near the piano and an empty glass on a nearby coffee table. The trumpet starts playing. Frankly Darkly enters. He walks towards Soph and blasts in her ear. She wakes in panic. She screams when she sees him.

Soph Who are you?

FD Fairy godmother?

(beat)

Soph Who?

FD Whoever you want me to be, baby.

Soph *(groans)*

FD Your guardian angel, superhero . . Sugar daddy? . . . Come on kid, don't be obtuse, you know how these things go.

Soph Obtuse?

(beat)

What, again?

FD Kid, you're the bee, and I am your honey tree.

Soph My what?

FD I am your deepest darkest.

(beat)

Soph Piss off.

FD Think you're Cinderella, do you?

Soph Cinderella?

FD Kid dressed in rags loses a shoe and gets gig as Princess.

Soph I know the story.

FD Underpaid and overworked scullery maid finds her prince and avoids life of grime.

Soph Yes, I know/

FD Lost cause gets last minute makeover, wins belle of the ball after all.

(beat)

Soph Considered a career with the tabloids?

FD Forget it, kid. It's a fantasy. No-one's gonna save you. *He's* just like all the rest.

Soph I'm not doing Cinderella!

FD Princess.

Soph Figment! . . . I'm dreaming. You're not real.

FD Everything so literal? All just as it is, then?

Soph Wait, that was . . . a private conversation. . . it's a joke!

FD Don't see anyone laughing kid.

Soph Well, there's no-one here is there?

FD Who am I then? The cat's mother?

Soph This is *my* dream, isn't it? Get out of it.

FD Oh, this aint no dream, kid.

(beat)

 Maybe this'll turn your lights on.

He plays the trumpet. Soph recognises the music. She's shocked.

(beat)

Soph Hang on. That's . . . *You!*? . . . That's you? *You're* my . .

FD That I am. *(He continues playing)*

Soph Wow, you're good. But . . . who are you? Haven't I . . . seen you
 somewhere before? I mean, there's something so familiar . . .

*The music has a soporific effect. She lies down and gradually falls back to sleep. FD
finishes playing.*

FD Who's your daddy, doll?

End of Scene 2.

Scene 3

*Late afternoon. Soph wakes. She gets up, puts the phone on speaker phone to check her
voice mail while she lights a cigarette. She goes to the piano and sits down.*

Alice It's Alice. Don't you ever answer your phone? Have you been
 getting my messages? Will you please call me, Soph?!! . . . It's about
 Dad, alright?!

Message ends.

(beat)

She starts to play but instead becomes sick. She retches and vomits up a little elephant.

Soph What the fuck?

(beat)

What is that? . . . An elephant?

(beat) *She picks up the wine bottle and drinks, stares at the elephant.*

What's happening to me?

(beat)

Okay. It's not real, obviously. Just some sort of . . . waking dream. Hallucination. I mean, people don't go round vomiting things up, do they? Not unless they've . . . swallowed them first. (*She drinks*).

(beat)

A vision? Does it mean something? What?

(beat)

Elephant?

(beat)

Elephantine?

(beat)

Elephantitis?

She takes another drink.

If a girl falls apart in her own lounge room and nobody's there to see it, did it ever really happen at all?

(beat)

Oh, alright, then. Woman. Not a girl anymore. Obviously.

(beat)

(sings) 'The corn is as high as an elephant's eye'.

(beat)

Ha. 'The man who falls frequently in the gutter sees, in the extremity of his ecstasy, blue mice and *pink elephants*.' Jack London. On drunks.

(beat) *She puts the elephant in the bin.*

Elephant?

(beat)

(drinks) What elephant?

Nick enters as she does this.

Nick I'm back. Miss me?

Soph I pined.

Nick Took to your bed?

Soph Oh, languished. Utter misery.

Nick Completely understandable.

(beat)

What were you throwing away?

(beat)

Soph What?

Nick You just put something in the bin. You were talking to it.

Soph No.

Nick Soph. (*He goes to the bin and retrieves the elephant*). What is it?

Soph Shit, you can see that? I was hoping it was . . . symbolic.

Nick Of course I can see it. What is it?

Soph What do you mean 'what is it'? It's an elephant. Obviously.

(beat)

Nick Cute.

Soph Indigestible.

Nick What?

Soph Forget it.

Nick They don't, do they?

Soph Sorry?

Nick Elephants.

Soph What do you mean?

Nick They don't forget, do they? They remember everything.

Soph Christ. Poor bastards.

(beat)

Nick You okay?

Soph I'm fine.

(beat)

Nick How'd the writing go, then?

Soph My cup runneth over. Drink?

Nick The muse made good then? Stuck around, did he?

Soph Oh, vividly.

They pour drinks and drink.

Nick Well.

Soph A deep shaft sunk into the earth, you mean?

Nick Yes, exactly.

They laugh, kiss.

(beat)

Soph, I/

The phone rings.

Soph Hello . . . Alice! . . . Yes, I got the messages, sorry I . . . What's so urgent? . . . What? I . . . Jesus. . . Yes, when. . . Tomorrow?! . . . Yes, okay. . . bye.

Soph is obviously sick.

Nick Soph? Are you alright?

Soph I'm . . . I'm okay.

Nick Who was that?

Soph No-one. Let's go out. Dinner?

(beat)

What?

(beat)

Nick Fine. No-one called just then, and you didn't say 'Jesus', and 'urgent', and then get sick after you hung up. That all didn't happen. Because I'm not here am I? I'm just like a . . . cardboard cut-out, right? One-dimensional? . . . Disposable?

(Pause)

Soph Like a nappy, you mean?

(beat)

A blow-up doll?

(beat)

Nick Why won't you talk to me about it?

Soph Because it isn't us, is it? We don't *talk*, do we?

Nick What do you mean we don't talk?

Soph Nick, we said at the beginning that/

Nick *You* said.

Soph *Nothing serious, nothing exclusive*, and . . . I don't remember you objecting.

Nick You were the one setting the rules. I was happy for something more . . . organic.

Soph Organic?

Nick Growth.

Soph Strange word - organic, I mean what sort of organ is it related to/

Nick Stop it, Soph!

(beat)

Christ. I know what you said, okay? I know you think you're no good at relationships but we are actually in one, you know. We are relating.

(beat)

Hang on. Nothing exclusive? I don't remember that one.

Soph Oh, come on.

(beat)

Nick What?

Soph I don't want to talk, Nick. Next thing you know we'll have issues and . . .
and *baggage!* Christ. Bad enough having it, isn't it, then we'll have to
unpack it!

(beat)

Nick Right.

(beat)

Soph I'm sorry, I just . . .

(beat)

Nick Sometimes things change, Soph.

Nick's phone rings.

(beat)

Nick looks at the phone. Soph stares at Nick. He gets up and goes into the bedroom to answer it. Not long after, Nick re-enters carrying a bag.

Nick Sophie?

Soph Hmm?

Nick Here.

Soph What is it?

Nick Something for the list? What are you up to? 67?

Soph 66. What is it?

Nick A nice bottle of/

Soph God, Nick. What? Red wine? That was number 1.

Nick Oh. Before my time, clearly.

(beat)

Am I on the list?

Soph What?

Nick What? Am I?

(beat)

Soph?

(beat)

Soph It's just a stupid list, Nick.

(beat)

Nick Right.

(beat)

Soph Don't be sad, Nicholas. Nickleodeon. Nicholai.

(beat)

Nick Nick of time?

Soph Excellent effort.

Nick Knick knack?

Soph Knickers?

Nick Now we're getting somewhere.

They laugh, kiss.

(beat)

So, dinner. Where do you want to go, then?

Soph Actually, let's just stay home.

(beat)

Nick But you said you wanted to go out.

Soph Well, not now.

(beat)

Nick Now . . . not.

(beat)

So you

(beat)

changed.

Soph Oh haha.

Nick Capricious creature, changeable as the wind. I never know what's happening one moment to the next.

Soph Yes, very funny. . . I thought sarcasm was my thing.

Nick You and sarcasm have a thing?

Soph Oh, torrid.

(beat)

Nick Soph? I just . . . I wanted to tell you/

Soph No.

Nick What do you mean, 'no'?

Soph I mean you don't have to tell me.

Nick But you don't know what I'm going to say?

(Pause)

Nick I see. No changes. Everything just as it is? Is that it?

(beat)

Listmaking? Word games?

(beat)

Soph Drinking.

(beat)

Don't forget that.

(beat)

It's a list in itself.

(beat)

Nick Another glass?

Soph Exactly.

End of scene 4

Scene 5

Morning. Soph is asleep alone on the sofa bed. She wakes.

Soph Nick?

(beat)

Nick?

She gets up and looks for him. FD enters behind her.

FD He's gone, baby, gone.

Soph Nick?

(beat)

FD He loves you, he loves you not.

Soph God. Where is he? Typical. *(She turns and sees FD. Screams)* Fuck fuck fuck!

FD Calm thyself, doll. The cat was no good. Baby, he done you wrong.

Soph Christ, you could ease off a bit on the clichés. Anyway, at least he was real. Three-dimensional?

FD Kid I got dimensions you aint even dreamed of.

Soph What are you doing here?

FD Knight duty.

Soph It's morning.

FD Shining armour, kid. Damsel in distress? Hop aboard the steed, doll. . . .
(lewd) Fancy a ride?

(Pause)

Soph There is *no way* that *you* came out of *my* unconscious.

FD Oh, you don't want to get into that.

Soph Into what?

FD *Your* unconscious. Talk about a mad woman's breakfast.

Soph I've never understood that. I mean, what's wrong with her breakfast?

FD Not digging the changes, are you, kid?

Soph Changes?

FD Overrated.

Soph What are you talking about?

FD Change. Who needs it, right?

Soph I just don't get all the fuss.

FD What I'm saying.

Soph I mean, what's wrong with things the way they are?

FD Your wish, as they say, is my command.

(beat)

Soph It is?

A knock at the door. FD disappears. Soph answers the door. It's Alice.

Soph Alice!

Alice Sophie!

Alice enters and puts down her bags. They hug.

Alice God, let me look at you. What are you wearing - your pyjamas? Ha, same old Soph. It's eleven o'clock. In the morning.

Soph You look great.

Alice Thanks.

Soph No, but I mean, you just look so . . . sparkly, Alice.

Alice Thanks, hon. Nothing you couldn't do with a bit of effort. *(At 'effort' she looks around the flat which could obviously do with some effort. She eyes Soph up and down)* God, you are pale, Soph. Seven unanswered messages? Are you sick?

Soph Oh, no I'm, I'm fine, it's just . . . I've been busy.

Alice Oh, what, work? Fly spray? *(Begins to tidy a few things as she speaks. This continues throughout the play)*

Soph Oh, you heard that?

Alice Who didn't?

Soph I thought it was/

Alice It was an ad for fly spray, Soph. If I had your talent I'd be famous, and what do you do? Fly spray.

Soph Just earning a living.

Alice Family of musicians and I end up tone-deaf. How'd that happen?

Soph You got lucky.

Alice Oh, yeah, that's right Soph. Lucky. Fortune just shines down on me, doesn't it? . . . Why didn't you answer my calls?! Urgent is usually taken to mean pressing, Soph? Requiring immediate action.

(beat)

Soph How was the flight?

Alice It was fucking long. And I'm starving. Can't stand airline food.

Soph Always quite liked it, really. All those little boxes.

Alice Just a boiled egg would do.

Soph Um, sorry, I don't have any eggs.

Alice Oh, well okay, just some toast or something then. A sandwich?

(beat) Soph shrugs to indicate there is no toast either.

 You did know I was coming!

Soph You only told me yesterday.

Alice I left messages! You eat too, don't you? I mean, who doesn't have eggs and bread in their fridge?

Soph Vegans. The gluten intolerant.

Alice They have tofu, don't they? And sprouts. Honestly I don't know how you survive.

Soph I eat out. Okay?

Alice Plenty of red wine around, I see.

Soph Sorry?

Alice Look, I didn't come here to fight.

Soph I'm *not* fighting. *(She lights a cigarette)*

(beat)

Alice You still smoke? Who still smokes?! Don't you have a fire alarm? Jesus, what is it with musicians? Something in the contract, is there? Must neglect health completely? Must drink litre of *(she looks at a label)* cheap red wine daily?

Soph It's not cheap! It's just . . . good value!

Alice Completely disregard appearance?

Soph What? . . . You know, Alice, it's not my fucking fault that you're tone deaf.

(beat)

Alice Look, do what you like, okay? I'm just here to sort out some family business - that's us now, Soph, we're it.

Soph Family? Oh, I've gone all warm and fuzzy.

(beat)

Alice He's in the bag.

(beat)

Soph I'm sorry?

(beat)

Alice Dad.

(beat)

Soph What?

Alice His ashes are in the bag. Okay? I'm going to have a shower. Towels in there are they?

(beat)

I'll find them.

Alice exits. Soph smokes her cigarette. She is very agitated by the presence of the bag. Eventually the door opens. Nick enters.

Nick I 'ave ze croissants, cherie.

(beat)

Soph Oh! Nick?

Nick Oui, madame?

Soph Here you are!

Nick Oui. I am ici. I . . . hang on.

(beat)

 You thought I'd left, didn't you?

Soph No.

Nick You thought I'd gone! Deserted.

Soph I did not.

Nick You did.

(beat)

 Typical bastard, was I? Good riddance and all that?

Soph No.

He hears Alice.

Nick Who's that? . . . Someone here?

(beat)

 That was quick? Oh well, that's life for us disposables.

Soph *(preoccupied)* Stop it.

Nick *(laughs)* There's someone here, Soph. I can hear the shower.

Soph No, I mean, yes. It's Alice.

Nick Alice?

Soph My sister.

Nick Sister?

(beat)

Soph has a sister? What next? A whole family? A childhood? A heart?

Soph Yes, that's right, Nick. I am a stone-hearted creature of unknown origin.

(beat)

Nick What, like a sort of . . . orphaned Gargoyle?

(beat)

That would explain the commitment phobia. Bound as you are to the prince of darkness.

Soph I'm not commitment phobic.

Nick All me, then, is it? Mr Wrong?

Alice emerges from the bathroom, putting her hair up in a towel. She is naked.

Alice Whoops! I didn't know we had company.

Nick Yes, that's me, company.

Alice And you know a man by the company he keeps.

Nick Flighty? Artistic? . . . Long-suffering? . . . Nick.

Alice Alice.

Nick Some wonderland.

Alice *(laughs)* I'd better get something on.

Soph You think?

Nick Yes, we don't want you catching cold.

Soph Catching cold?!

Alice I am a bit delicate that way.

Soph You don't get a cold from being cold, it's a virus.

Alice goes into the bedroom. Pause as Sophie stares at Nick.

(beat)

Nick What? You don't care. Right?

(beat)

Soph retches. She spits onto the floor between them.

Jesus!

Soph What, no, it/

Nick What was that?

(beat)

I'm sorry, alright? I was angry.

(beat)

You're jealous, Soph! Just admit it.

Soph No, I/

Nick You just spat at me!

Soph I didn't spit!

Nick You did!

Soph I didn't! I couldn't help it, it just . . . came up of its own accord.

Nick Accord? Came up of its own accord? What, it just spontaneously decided it would be a good idea to launch itself out of your mouth, did it?

(beat)

Soph I didn't spit.

(beat)

Nick I will go and make the coffee and you can sit down and contemplate the extraordinary possibility that you may be human, after all.

Nick goes to the kitchen. Soph picks up what she has spat.

Soph What is that? A pill?

She begins to retch again and vomits more pills into her hand.

Jesus.

Staring at pills.

What are these, sleepers?!

(beat)

Options?

(beat)

Are we talking options now?

(beat)

Who am I talking to?

She puts the pills in the bin. Alice enters, dressed now.

Alice Soph?

(beat)

Who are you talking to?

Soph I just said that.

Alice Said what?

Soph Who am I talking to?

Alice Me?

Soph I said 'Who am I talking to?' just before you walked in.

Alice Who were you talking to?

Soph Yes.

Alice What?

(beat)

 You were talking to someone just now. I heard you.

Soph spits into the bin, another pill.

(beat)

Alice What is this, the Wild West?

(beat)

 Saloon bar Soph and her imaginary friends?

Soph spits again.

Alice You really are a mess, aren't you?

Soph I'm not a mess! *She retches and spits another pill.*

(beat)

Alice Evidently. What are you spitting out, then? Tabaccy?

Soph I'm spitting out spit. That's what you do with spit, don't you? You spit it.

Alice *(She looks in the bin)* Pills?

(beat)

 What, sleeping pills?

(beat)

Oh, *really* appropriate.

Soph Appropriate? What? Like parading around with nothing on?

Alice I wasn't parading! I didn't know there was someone else here.

Soph Who walks around naked in someone else's house?

Alice It's not exactly someone else, is it? It's my *sister's* house. Anyway, I am perfectly comfortable with my body.

Soph Well, I'm not.

Alice Your body's fine, hon, a bit of time at the gym and/

Soph I meant I'm not comfortable with the way . . . it's just not the sort of thing – Christ! Just forget it.

(beat)

Alice So. Who's Nick? He's cute.

Soph Nick? He's a friend. . . . And he's already involved.

Alice Alright, alright.

(beat)

Didn't act like it though, did he?

(beat)

Oh, so you and he/

Soph No. . . he and I nothing.

Alice Oh, clearly not.

Soph Clearly? What's clear? You just walk in here, and assume you know what's going on. You don't, okay? You don't know anything.

Nick re-enters with three coffees.

Alice Thanks Nick.

Soph Thanks.

Nick So, close family, then?

(beat) Soph is feeling sick.

Hey, are you alright?

Soph I'm fine. I'll . . . oh.

Nick Sophie?

Alice What's wrong?

Soph Wrong? What could be wrong? *(groans)*

Alice Soph, just calm down. Take some breaths.

Soph I *am* taking breaths, Alice, it's a basic function of the human body. Miraculous! We just breathe. We don't have to take them! They just happen!

(beat)

Nick What's got into you, Soph?

Soph It's what's getting out that's the point, isn't it?

Nick You're/

Soph *(snappy)* I'm what? Jealous?

Nick *(More gently)* No, there's obviously something wrong.

Soph is slightly disarmed. Nick puts his arm around her and sits her down on the couch.

Alice *(Sighs)*

Soph Yes, Alice?

Alice What? I didn't say anything. Nick, did I say anything?

Soph You *sighed*.

Alice Well, it's . . . you have always been a bit. . I mean . . haven't you?
(beat)

Soph Go on?
(beat)

Alice Artistic?

Soph What?

Alice You're not the only one whose father has just died.

Nick Jesus, Soph! Why didn't you tell me?

Soph *This* has nothing to do with . . *that*. . Look, I'm sick, alright, I'm just
having problems with . . with . . .

Nick With what?

Soph With music. . . with . . oh forget it. You wouldn't understand.
(beat)

Nick Try us.

Alice No, please Soph, we're on the edge of our seats.
(beat)

Soph With . . . I don't know . . . my muse, alright?

Alice Oh, Jesus, here we go. Her *muse*?

Soph Shut up, Alice!

Nick Soph, it does sound a bit , , ,

Soph A bit what?!

Nick Imaginative?
(beat)

Soph Right, well, you know what? This is my place, and I will be as imaginative and, and ‘artistic’ as I want, okay?

(beat)

Nick No. No, you’re right, Soph. Be yourself.

(Beat) Soph looks suspiciously at him.

Nick It’s all we can be, isn’t it? Who we are?

Alice You’re just encouraging her.

Soph Well, yes. I . . . suppose it is. *She lies down on the couch.*

Alice Here we go.

Nick It’s the only way isn’t it? Follow our . . . hearts?

Alice I haven’t got time for this.

Soph I suppose the problem is knowing who you are . . . what you want?

Nick Mmm.

Soph I mean/

Alice Well, thank you Doctor Freud! I don’t believe it! You see! This is what she does. One minute we’re discussing what to do with our dead father’s ashes and the next thing she’s off with the fucking fairies - and everyone else is floating along with her!

Soph Don’t know what to do with his ashes?! How about we flush him down the fucking toilet?! There! Problem solved!

(beat)

Nick Look, you’re both upset. It’s a normal reaction to/

Soph You don’t know anything about this, Nick.

(beat)

Nick Want me to just give up, don't you?

Soph They always do.

Nick You're lumping me in with every other man who's ever/

Soph Oh? Lumping. *That's* my problem, is it? Good to know. Go on, then,
Nick. What was it you wanted to tell me?

(*beat*)

Nick I . .

(*beat*)

Soph I know you're married. Alright?

(*beat*)

Nick What?

Soph I overheard you, talking to her. On the phone. Last time you were here.
It's not like I wasn't suspicious.

(*beat*)

Alice No improvement in your love life then, I see, Soph?

Soph Shut up, Alice. (*to Nick*) This is the part where you say 'but Soph, I love
you, not *her*. She doesn't understand me like you do'. That's how these
things go, don't they?

Alice Haven't learnt anything, have you?

Nick Finished?

(*beat*)

Alice Well, have you?

(*beat*)

Nick I have told her.

(beat)

Soph What?!

Nick I've told her about us.

(beat)

Soph What the hell did you do that for?!

(beat)

Nick What?

Alice I don't know why I bothered to even come. It's just like it always is. One crisis after another.

Soph Then why did you come, Alice?! Why the fuck did you?!!

(beat)

Alice starts to cry.

(beat)

Soph Oh, god. Alice, I'm . . . I'm sorry.

(beat)

Alice *(She pulls a letter from her bag).* He left a note.

(beat)

Alice It's addressed to Lily.

(beat)

Soph Lily?

(beat)

Alice And you might as well have these.

She grabs another of the bags and shoves it at Soph.

(beat)

You're the musical one, aren't you?

Soph What is it?

(beat)

Alice His trumpets.

Soph is suddenly very sick, and begins to vomit something up.

Nick Soph? Sophie?!

Alice What . . . God, what is that?!

Lights out.

End of Act One.

Act Two

Scene 1

Some time later. Nick enters from the bedroom. Alice is on the couch.

Alice Still asleep?

Nick She's starting to stir a bit. How many of those pills did you give her?

Alice Just one . . . She asked for it.

(beat)

Nick I still think she should see a doctor.

Alice She doesn't want to. She said.

Nick She's sick!

(beat)

My god! An actual object!

(beat)

People don't go around vomiting up ropes!

(beat)

Alice It's not a rope.

Nick It's a rope! Look at it.

(beat)

Alice Always bringing stuff up no-one's interested in.

Nick There's always a reason.

Alice What do you mean?

Nick For bringing stuff up.

Alice Reason? Of course there is. She's not getting enough attention.

Nick There are easier ways to get attention.

Alice Anyway, it's not a rope, it's a noose. There's a difference, isn't there? A rope's arbitrary. . . . I think we should just get rid of it.

Nick Noose?! *(Picks it up)* God, you're right.

(beat)

Alice Just . . . put it away somewhere, Nick.

(beat)

You don't really know anything about her, do you?

Nick Well, I know she's vomited up a rope! I think we should look at it.

Alice What's to see?

(beat)

Oh, for Christ's sake. She'll be out in a minute.

Alice picks it up, looks around for somewhere to put it and eventually shoves it under the rug. She steps on it to try and smooth it out a bit.

Nick You're kidding, aren't you?

(beat)

Well, that's no good, is it?

(beat)

There's a lump in the rug.

Alice Well, there is if you focus on it.

Nick If I focus on it?! It's right there in the middle of the room!

Alice *(sighs, pushes it down again with her foot)* Glass always half empty too, is it?

Nick What?

Alice Life's about perspective, isn't it? It's how you choose to look at things that's important.

Nick Or choose *not* to look, you mean?!

(beat)

Alice Sophie's always so interminably maudlin, isn't she?

Nick She can be a bit dark.

Alice Always playing the victim. She's completely self-absorbed!

Nick That's a bit harsh.

Alice Harsh?

(beat)

Our father's dead, and . . . and . *She starts to cry.*

(beat)

Nick Shit. Sorry, Alice. I . . . Are you okay?

(beat)

Alice Sorry, it's just the . . the shock.

Nick Yes. Of course. *Nick puts his arm around Alice to comfort her.*

(beat)

Soph enters. We hear trumpeting. She stares at Nick and Alice for a moment then goes to the bin and scoops out a couple of sleepers which she then swallows with wine from the bottle.

Nick *(Moves away from Alice when he sees Soph.)* Soph! You're up.

Soph And away.

(beat)

Nick How are you feeling?

Soph What, do you mean apart from the fact that I've just vomited up a sizeable length of rope? Fine. Throat's a bit tender. . . obviously.

(beat)

Where is it?

(beat)

Alice What?

(beat)

Um, . . I don't . . . remember.

(Pause)

Soph What's that, then?

Alice What's what?

Soph That lump there?

Nick I told you it was a stupid idea.

Alice You didn't say stupid.

Nick I said you could see it. That it was obvious.

Alice Bit of a difference, though, isn't there, between stupid and obvious.

Nick Is there?

(beat)

Alice Shit happens, Soph. Alright? You move on.

Soph Shit happens?!

Nick There's not exactly a protocol for dealing with this sort of thing, is there?

Alice We were just trying to help.

Soph We?

(beat)

When did you two become we? Nick, huh? I thought we were 'we'? But then, no, right, because there's also your wife. That's a 'we' too, isn't it? The capital w, gold band, till-death-do-us-part kind of 'we'.

(beat)

Alice *(laughs)*

Nick I thought you didn't care. 'Nothing serious, nothing exclusive'?

Soph *(to Alice)* Is something funny?

Alice All that weeing.

Soph Christ. . . *(to Nick)* I *don't* care.

Nick Well I do. I don't know what's going on here, Soph. I'm taking you to a doctor.

Soph Swooping in for the rescue, are you? Guess it was only a matter of time.

Nick I'm not swooping. You make me sound like a . . . giraffe.

Alice Flamingo?

Nick Stork?

Alice An eagle.

Nick Falcon!

Soph Stop it!

Nick Something has to be done, Soph. You've just vomited up a rope!

Alice Noose.

(beat)

Nick A noose.

(beat)

Soph Stop it.

Alice No. You stop it.

(beat)

Alice You just can't let the past be, can you?

Nick Am I the only one who finds this all a bit . . . odd?

Soph *(to Alice)* It just came up!

Alice Stop being disingenuous.

Soph Disingenuous?!

Alice You brought it up!

Soph It came up!

Alice Via your mouth!

Soph I can't help it!

Alice Of course you can help it! Just grit your fucking teeth or something!

(beat)

Nick Look, am I missing something here?

Soph Your wedding ring?

Alice A moral code?

Nick Oh, I see. I'm the bad guy. Listen, she was alright until you showed up. Okay? There was no sign of nooses. No rope, no string, no . . . wool, nothing!

Alice Nothing to do with you? You're married, for Christ's sake! You don't think that's going to have an effect on a woman?

Nick I'm just saying she was perfectly fine before you came.

Alice Oh, yes – Soph - *perfectly* fine.

Soph Shut up Alice.

Alice No, I won't. And the pills? What about those?

Nick Pills?

Soph No, they're not/

Alice Oh, tell the truth. For once in your life.

Soph and Alice stare at each other.

(beat)

Nick What about the pills?

Soph Tell me again why you're here?

Alice Our father's dead.

(beat)

Because it's what families do, Soph.

Soph What ‘families’?

(beat)

Alice Someone dies, a family gathers together. It’s normal.

(beat)

Soph And what do they do? The normal, gathering families? . . . With their death?

(beat)

Alice *(starts to cry)* I don’t fucking know.

(beat)

Soph *(starting to cry too)* I don’t fucking know, either.

*(Pause)*They eventually look at Nick.

(beat)

Nick What?

(beat)

You think *I’m* normal?

(beat)

(groans)

(beat)

I don’t know. They drink. And . . . and they eat, and . . . have sex, and try to forget that before too long they’ll be in the box themselves.

(beat)

Soph Numbers 1, 2, and 3.

Nick Oh. . . of course, the list. 1, 2, 3. What else?

(beat)

And they toast to the memories. And cry and, you know, think of all the things they wish they'd said or done while the person was alive.

(Pause)

Soph Well, fuck that, right? . . . Alice?

(beat)

Alice Yes. Fuck it.

End Scene 1

Scene Two

Some time later. Soph is in a childhood memory. She enters with a school bag.

Soph Mum?

She approaches the piano, and plays a couple of notes.

Mum, I'm home.

She throws down her bag, sits down at the piano and plays. We become aware of a persistent creaking noise like rope on a wooden beam. Soph hears it eventually, and stops playing. She turns slowly, and looks over her shoulder.

Mum?

She wakes, frightened. She is on the sofa bed.

Soph Nick?

(beat)

Alice?

Soph gets up and paces. She finds a note.

'Gone to buy food. Somebody has to! Alice.'

(beat)

Nick?

(beat)

Everything has been tidied and rearranged. She has to search to find things. She pours herself a glass of wine. She finds some chocolate in a drawer and eats that, she lights a cigarette. She is now eating, drinking and smoking. She lights another cigarette, then remembers she already has one lit.

Soph Shit!

(beat) The fire alarm goes off.

Shit! Bloody Alice!

She waves at the alarm till it stops and goes out on to the balcony. The elephant is there next to a sad looking pot plant that Alice is trying to rescue. Soph uses it as an ashtray.

It's just normal grieving, isn't it?

She picks up the elephant and stares at it.

(beat)

Normal.

(beat)

They never forget.

(beat)

Don't forget me when I'm gone? Look back? Don't? Don't look back?

(beat)

Never look back.

(beat)

'Keep your eyes on the road, your hands upon the wheel.'

(beat)

Jim Morrison.

(beat)

I went to his grave once. It was Autumn. The leaves skittered through Pere Lachaise cemetery, the dead leaves. In Pere Lachaise, all signs lead to Jim. Graffiti omens. 'This way to Jim'. That's some charisma. Lizard king laid in the earth and a bunch of kids with flowers in their hair all singing and sighing around him. A dead man. Still pulling them in. They do that, don't they?

(beat)

The dead. *(She stubs out cigarette in pot plant)*

FD enters.

FD What was that? A poetic interlude?

Soph It was . . . I'm grieving. It's normal.

FD *(laughs, a bit nasty)* Normal? You? Where'd you get that idea?

(beat)

Soph What?

FD I know who you are.

He plays trumpet. She relaxes. He moves close to her and nuzzles the back of her neck.

She responds.

They don't know you like I do.

Soph *(moving away from him)* Who?

FD Ms Wonderland and the big bad.

Soph Big bad?

FD Wolf, doll.

Soph Wolf?

(beat)

Who, Nick? (*laughs*) Don't be ridiculous.

(beat)

I mean, he's harmless.

FD Oh yes? According to what? Your instinct? And that's always been right, has it?

(beat)

Trust him, do you?

(beat)

Soph Hang on. Is there a wolf in Cinderella?

(beat)

FD There's always a wolf, kid.

(beat)

Soph My instincts *are* a bit off, I have to admit. . . Christ, look at my relationship history. It's like I'm hard-wired for it.

FD You're an artist aren't you kid? It's obligatory.

Soph What is?

FD Mess.

(beat)

Soph Like a necessary consequence, you mean?

FD Absolute obligation.

Soph My life's work?

FD Your oeuvre.

Soph A Mess Manifesto!

FD Take it away, kid.

(beat)

Nick enters. FD disappears.

Nick Oh, you're up.

(beat)

I got you some medication.

Soph Medication?

Nick For nausea. . . . You never know - it might help.

(beat)

The chemist said that this one's especially good for when the patient is vomiting rope and other large objects.

(beat)

Soph He did?!

Nick No, Soph, of course he didn't!

(beat)

Soph Oh.

Nick I don't know what to do here.

(beat)

We need to get you to a doctor.

Soph Don't say 'we'. There's no 'we'.

Nick You're not listening to me, Soph! We need to get you some help.

Soph Nick! I am a mess. It's just who I am. I mean . . . surely you of all people can see?

(beat)

Nick People do strange things when they're grieving I know, but this is . . . I mean, even for you, it's strange. We need to get you checked out. That's all.

(beat)

Soph Oh, I see.

Nick Sorry?

Soph How dare you treat me like a client.

(beat)

Nick I'm not trying to/

Soph Yes you are. Let me guess. It's my mother's fault. I have daddy issues? Problems with authority? An addictive personality? I want someone to save me?

(beat)

Nick You can't tell me it's not part of the attraction.

Soph You see? You're doing it.

(beat)

You think I'm with you because I want saving? And you're here because . . . what? You like cleaning up mess? Is that how it goes?

Nick I'm here because I love/

Soph Do you really think I've never been to a shrink? You think someone like me hasn't ended up at some point in front of someone like you? That someone with my history hasn't laid on a few couches? Desperately hoping that I'll change?

(beat)

Nick Sophie.

(beat) Alice enters during the next line.

Soph You see, because the problem is, nothing changes. We don't change. *I* don't change. I've tried, Nick. I am who I am.

(beat)

Alice Oh, yeah? Who's that? Pop-eye?

(beat)

What?

Soph walks out onto the balcony. She screams in frustration, then re-enters, grabs a bottle of wine and goes back to the balcony. She drinks and smokes and grows more agitated throughout the following conversation.

Alice What's with Janis Joplin?

Nick Just lay off her a bit.

(beat)

Alice She's always like this.

Nick No she's not.

(beat)

Alice Still listing, at least?

Nick Only when she's had too much Tequila.

Alice Oh, a laugh a minute round here, isn't it?

Nick We try.

(beat)

Alice We shared a house once, you know. First time we'd lived together since we were kids . . . well, anyway, we didn't really blend well. She's just so . . . wanton in her self-destruction. Unrelenting.

Nick It's part of the package.

Alice What do you mean?

Nick It's Soph, isn't it? You love someone, you love all of them. Everything.

Alice Is that right, Prince Charming?

Nick It's my opinion. These things are subjective.

Alice You think I don't love her? She's my sister. Of course I love her. It's just, what if that love is harming you? If you get so caught up in their self destruction that you fall in the hole too? You have to stay positive, don't you? Keep a distance. It's how you survive.

Nick She's not though.

Alice What?

Nick Harming.

Alice What?

Nick Soph's not harming me.

Alice Give her a chance, she's warming up.

(beat)

Nick Go on, then. Make your case.

Alice I'm not making a case.

Nick Could have fooled me.

Alice You can't blame me for being defensive. You're not exactly Mr Congenial, are you?

(beat)

Nick Fine. Truce. What happened with the wanton, unrelenting Soph, then?

(beat)

Alice She swallowed a pile of sleeping pills with a bottle of wine . . . Ever tried to clean red vomit out of a rug? Looked like a fucking murder scene. Oh, and the lead up to it. No self control. She just trashed herself. Staying out all night, me wondering where she was. We're not rubbish bins. You can't just keep filling yourself up with shit like that.

(beat)

Nick No. You can't.

(beat)

Alice Some shrink told her to make a list of things she liked or something. She called it 'Reasons for Living'.

Nick I see.

(beat)

Alice She was being ironic.

Nick Of course.

(beat)

What about you?

Alice What?

Nick Do you have a list?

Alice What?! I'm not the one with the problem.

Nick You said you fell in the hole too. It can't have been easy.

Alice Soph and I are different. I'm much more logical . . . disciplined. I don't need *help*.

(beat)

They had an affair, you know?

Nick Who?

Alice Soph, and the shrink.

(beat)

Oh, come on.

(beat)

Did you think you were the first?

(beat)

Soph enters.

Soph I can hear you!

Alice You left.

Soph To the balcony!

Alice I would've been out shortly, to check you hadn't jumped.

Soph Disciplined, are you? Is that what you call it?!

Soph grabs Alice's handbag and tips it onto the sofa.

Ha! Same old Alice.

Alice Give me that back!

Soph holds up mouth freshener sprays, mouth wash and dental floss.

Soph You know there's a word for this? Halitophobia. Delusional Halitosis.
Fear of having bad breath.

Alice Give them to me!

Alice grabs them from Soph and puts them back in her bag.

There is nothing wrong with basic personal hygiene. You could do with a lesson.

Soph Basic hygiene? You're a maniac. . . Nick?

Nick Huh?

Soph Well?

Nick Well, what?

Soph It's not normal, is it?

Nick I think we can be a little too focused on the idea of 'normal'. Probably not relevant in this situation.

Soph You're taking her side?

Nick I'm not taking sides.

Soph Fence-sitting, then?

(beat)

Nick It does seem a bit excessive.

Soph A bit? Three months with her, Pollyanna would want to kill herself.

Alice bursts into tears and exits to the balcony.

Soph Oh, god.

(beat)

That was . . . awful. I just can't seem to control what's coming out of my mouth!

Nick You're human.

She cries. Nick puts his arm around her.

Soph I have to go talk to her.

Nick Yeah. You okay?

Soph I . . . I'll be fine . . . thanks, Nick.

Soph exits to the balcony. Alice is crying.

Soph Alice?

(beat)

I'm sorry.

(beat)

I didn't mean what I said.

Alice Why say it then?

Soph I was angry. It just came out.

Alice Oh, right, that again. No control over your mouth? Has a mind of its own, does it?

Soph It's human. I'm human.

Alice You're selfish and attention-seeking! Why don't you just grow up?

Soph So keeping my mouth shut equals growing up, does it? Is that what you mean? Let's pretend the past didn't happen? Let's just pretend we're fine.

Alice Everyone has a past. Jesus! There's nothing special about us. Forget the past, Soph! Just stop it! I can't stand it.

(beat)

Soph Oh there's nothing special about us alright. We're just run of the mill.

(beat)

Just as imaginative and fresh-breathed as two people can be.

(beat)

Just your everyday, garden variety/

Alice Stop it.

(beat)

Soph Fuck- ups.

(Pause)

Alice Oh, fuck it. *(cries)*

(beat)

You're probably right. About Pollyanna.

(beat)

Soph Alice, that night I . . . It had nothing to do with you.

(beat)

Alice I should have been more . .

Soph More what? Vigilant? You're not a mind reader.

(beat)

Alice 'Sisterly' is the word I was looking for.

(beat)

Daughterly.

(beat)

Soph Hang on. You couldn't have done anything about Mum.

Alice Why not?

Soph No-one could have.

Alice I was old enough to see that something was wrong. I should have . . .

Soph You weren't to know.

Alice I should have done something. I saw the rope!

Soph What? The noose?

Alice No, the rope. In the back shed.

Soph It was a rope in a shed. A rope. A rope's arbitrary, isn't it?

(beat)

 It's not your fault, Alice.

(beat)

Alice I don't know how you did it.

Soph What?

Alice Just . . . disappeared.

Soph Sheer desperation.

(beat)

 You left first.

Alice Not to the other side of the country. Not the 'and was never seen again'
type of leaving. I just moved to the next town.

(beat)

Soph I really thought I could get away.

(beat)

Alice You did.

(beat)

*Alice feels around in her pockets absentmindedly, and pulls out a mouth spray. She
sprays her mouth.*

(beat)

Soph bursts into laughter. A moment later, Alice does too.

(beat)

Alice Soph?

Soph Mm.

(beat)

 What?

(beat)

 Cat got your tongue?

(beat)

 Just say it. Spit it out.

(beat)

Alice Forget it.

Soph Forget what?

Alice Nothing.

Soph Why'd you bring it up, then? Just popped out, did it?

(beat)

Alice What's that supposed to mean?

Soph What?

Alice You arched your eyebrow!

Soph I did not!

Alice You arched!

Soph It twitched!

(beat)

Alice You always do this.

Soph Do what?

Alice This! This . . . brow-arching, sneery kind of . . . you think you're better than me! There, I've said it.

(beat)

Soph Better than you?!

Alice You know what I'm talking about.

Soph No?!

Alice Stupid, tone-deaf Alice.

Soph I can't believe this. You're obsessed.

Alice Yes, I'm obsessed. It was the only way in.

Soph Into what?

Alice The *family*.

(beat)

Soph Did we grow up on the same planet?

Alice You and Mum and Dad.

Soph There's that warm, fuzzy feeling again.

Alice You just don't get it, do you? You would all play music together. At least you had that! I couldn't, Soph! Don't you understand how I felt?

(beat)

Soph It wasn't . . . oh . . . Alice.

(pause) Soph hugs her.

Why did she do it?

(beat)

How could she fucking leave us?

(beat)

With *him*.

(Pause)

Alice It's cold out here.

(beat)

Soph Stony.

(beat)

Poor little match girls. *(They laugh)*.

(beat)

Alice Drink?

Soph Absolutely. Hey, let me try that spray.

Nick is pacing. Soph and Alice enter.

Soph Nick-o-rama.

Alice Nictorine.

Soph Oh! Nic-o-tine! Where's a cigarette?

Alice God, Soph. Do you have to?

Soph Yes, it's the nature of addiction. *(Throws spray back to Alice)*

Nick All's well, then?

Soph Peachy.

Alice Bowl of cherries.

Soph All round fruity, really.

Soph and Alice laugh.

(beat)

Nick Are you sure you're okay?

Soph Fine, let's have a drink.

She finds a bottle of wine.

Nick It's just that . . .

Soph What?

(beat)

Nick Well . . . maybe you should just lay off it for a bit.

Soph What are you doing? What is this?

Alice She's fine. God, let her have some fun.

Soph You see? . . . This. This is what happens. This 'I love you but do this. Do that. *Change.*'

Nick I'm just making sure you're alright, Soph.

Alice Bit late for that.

Nick What?

Alice Made sure you're wife was alright, too, did you?

(beat)

Nick She's fine.

Alice I'm sure she has a different opinion.

Nick I don't want to talk about her.

Alice No, I bet you don't. Poor woman.

Nick She's not a poor woman. Ha. Far from it. She's fine!

Alice Checked lately, have you? Broken-hearted people don't usually bounce back that quickly. We're not balls.

Nick She's not broken-hearted!

Alice You left her!

Nick She left me!

(beat)

Soph What?

(Beat)

 She left you?

(beat)

 When you told her?

(beat)

Nick No. When she . . . fell in love with someone else.

(beat)

Alice Touché.

Nick I'm sick of your snide comments.

Alice I'm sick of your lies.

(beat)

Soph Alice, he's not Tarquin.

Alice Why are you bringing him up?

Soph Jesus, let's hope I don't!

Nick Who's Tarquin?

Soph Alice, you might be, you know, transferring your feelings about your own marriage onto Nick. Just saying.

Alice Oh, save your psychobabble for the couch!

Nick Who is Tarquin? And for that matter, who's Lily?

(beat)

Soph Tarquin is her ex-husband.

Alice Bastard. . . You're cut from the same cloth.

(beat)

Nick You were married to someone called Tarquin?

(beat) Soph and Nick laugh.

Alice Shut up!

Soph Alice. Sorry. It's okay. Nick isn't/

Alice No! I can see whose side you're on, Soph! Anyone's but mine! I don't see why you're always so fucking angry with me! *(She gathers up her bags)* I'm leaving. I don't know what I was thinking. I don't need anything from you. When have I ever had it anyway? I can deal with this myself, just like I always have.

Soph Alice, you're upset. Don't go. Wait until the morning. Where are you going to go anyway?

Alice Here!

Soph What? What is it?

Alice It's your half.

Soph My half of . . . oh my god!

Nick What?

Soph You divided Dad's ashes up? And put them in lunch boxes?!

Nick Christ.

Soph bursts into laughter.

Soph And I'm the crazy one?

Alice rushes towards the door. She trips on the rope. Dad's ashes fly everywhere.

(Pause)

Soph It's alright, we still have my half.

(beat)

Alice cries inconsolably.

(pause)

 It's okay, Alice.

(beat)

 Maybe it's . . . time to read the letter.

Alice nods, cries. Soph helps Alice up. Soph picks the letter up from the table and slowly opens it.

(To Nick) Our mother.

(beat)

 Lily.

Soph looks at the note. She drops it. She becomes sick.

Alice What? What is it?

Nick Soph!

Soph puts her hands over her mouth to stop it. In desperation she looks around for something to stuff into her mouth.

Nick Just let it out, Sophie!

Soph finds a cloth which Alice has been using to clean and stuffs it into her mouth. This is an appalling act. It works. Eventually, she slowly pulls the cloth out of her mouth.

(beat)

Nick Soph.

(beat)

Soph On second thought, I might just lie down for a while.

Soph exits to bedroom.

End Scene 3

Scene 4

Soph is sitting at the piano. FD enters behind her.

Soph Who are you?

FD You really don't know?

(beat)

Soph Why are you here?

FD The situation calls for it.

Soph For what?

FD Drastic measures, kid.

Soph What's happening to me?

FD You just listen to me, doll, and all will be cool.

Soph But everything's coming apart.

FD Well then, keep your trap shut. You have to resist these urges to purge. I mean it, kid, you'll be sorry.

Soph But how? How do I?

FD You *do* what it *takes*.

FD disappears.

Soph But what if I can't? What if I can't keep . .

(beat)

 swallowing?

(beat) She turns, realizes he's gone.

 Wait. Come back!

(beat)

 I need you.

Soph retches. She tries but can't stop it. She vomits up a ring. She looks at it in shock.

End Act Two

Act Three

Scene 1

Same place. Morning. Nick paces, Alice sits.

Alice I said, I don't know!

(beat)

 I told you last night. It's just lyrics to an old song.

Nick You know the song?

Alice It's a jazz standard. My parents used to play it. She used to play it. I don't know! Why do you think *I* know?!

(beat)

Nick How did he die?

(beat)

Alice He was dying anyway.

Nick And . . .

Alice He suicided.

(beat)

Nick Jesus. That's some legacy.

(beat)

 And he left this note? To your mother. Who's dead. 'My Funny Valentine'.

Alice He was losing it. What do you expect? A lifetime of drinking has to have some effect.

Nick Just some sort of dementia then, you think?

Alice Of course. What else? Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to have a shower . . . I've still got ash everywhere.

Nick You look clean to me.

Alice I can feel it still on my skin.

(beat)

Nick I see.

Alice What's that supposed to mean?

Nick It's not supposed to mean anything.

Alice You think I'm obsessing.

Nick What would I know?

(beat)

 We all have our quirks.

Alice What's yours, then? Infidelity? Thought that was more 'bastardry' than quirky, but, you know, you just go ahead and justify your behaviour however you want. I'm not the one in love with you.

(beat) Alice exits to the bathroom.

Nick In love?

(Pause) Nick looks at the note.

Jesus.

(beat) Soph enters from the bedroom.

Both parents.

(beat)

Soph Looks like carelessness, doesn't it?

(beat)

Nick Carelessness?

Soph 'To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like'/'

Nick Carelessness. Oscar Wilde.

(beat)

Soph Sorry. Bad joke.

Nick Come on, Soph, black humour's your specialty. You're the queen. I love that about you.

Soph Well, it's not working now, is it? Everything's so . . . heavy.

(beat)

Nick Like being weighed down by something you can't see.

(beat)

Soph Yes, like that.

(beat)

Nick Something dark.

(beat)

 And . . . unrelenting.

(beat)

Soph Are you okay?

(beat)

(realising) Oh, god. I'm sorry.

Nick What?

Soph We're just dragging this out.

Nick What are you talking about?

Soph You have to leave.

Nick Why?

Soph Can't you see what's happening? Look what I'm doing to you?

Nick *(laughs)* It's such a cop-out, Soph! I'm no good at relationships, so I'm not even going to try! Fuck. We're in love. Do you know how rare that is? How transformative that can be?

Soph They're just fucking pipe-dreams, Nick. Who do you think I am? Cinderella?

(beat)

Nick Sophie, I love you. That's real. I'm not promising happy-ever-after.

Soph No, but you're assuming there'll be happy-some-of-the-time!

(beat)

Nick Reasonable assumption, isn't it?

(beat)

Soph Like I said, I can't do it.

Nick Like I said – 'cop out'.

(beat)

Soph So I'm copping out.

(beat)

Nick No.

(beat)

Soph What?

Nick I said no. It's bullshit.

Soph How fucking dare you?

Nick You're just scared.

Soph How dare you psychoanalyse me?

Nick I'm not psychoanalysing. Jesus, believe me. Anyway, you wouldn't need to be a professional to take a good guess at who you're raging against.

Soph *I'm not fucking raging!!!*

(beat)

Nick Just a bit cranky then.

Soph You're so smug!

(beat)

Did you buy a sports car too?

(beat)

Nick No.

(beat)

I bought a motorbike.

Soph Christ, we're a cliché.

(beat)

Nick Why are you wearing a wedding ring?

Soph holds her hand up and looks at the ring a bit dazedly. Alice enters, and sees the ring.

(beat)

Alice My god, bigamy in action.

Nick You've completely misread the situation, Alice.

Alice Soph, you can't seriously be considering . . . he's married! He'll just chew you up and spit you out. Just like he did to the last one.

Soph Oh, for Christ sake, Alice. Nick isn't Tarquin . . . God, he was a wanker.

Alice At least he wasn't married when I met him! *(To Nick)* You make me sick. And you're *counselling* people! What's your specialty, then – relationships?

Nick No.

Soph Just leave him alone, Alice. You've got this all wrong.

Alice Oh, yes. What is it, then, Nick? I'm curious.

Nick It's post-trauma. Well, it was.

(beat)

Soph What do you mean, 'it was'?

Nick I'm not doing that anymore. I'm . . . gardening now.

Alice Not counselling?

Soph Gardening?

Nick Landscaping.

Alice Just didn't fancy it anymore? Is that it?

(beat)

Oh, I see.

Soph What are you talking about, Alice?

Alice You like the messy ones, don't you? Nice and vulnerable?

Nick What are you implying?

Soph What?

Nick You can stop right now. I mean it. You're wrong.

(beat)

Soph Nick?

Alice Get caught taking advantage, did you?

Nick I said stop it Alice!

(beat)

Soph Why did you quit?

Nick Just trust me, Soph.

Alice Ha! Blind faith. Just keep on believing in something there's no evidence for. Hallelujah!

Soph Nick?

(beat)

We're talking. See? Nick? *Talking.*

(beat)

Nick I . . . had a client.

Alice HA!

Soph Let him finish.

(beat)

Nick I couldn't help her. I decided to do something else.

(beat)

Soph Oh.

Nick It happens.

Soph You're telling me.

Alice You're so naïve.

Soph Fuck you.

Alice Charming.

Soph That's me. All charm. Someone should hang me off a chain for good luck.

Alice I'm just trying to/

Soph I know what you're trying to do, Alice. You never let up.

(beat)

It was shit. No matter how you try to reframe it. We're both broken. Just like they were.

Alice Hang on. Is that Mum's wedding ring?

(beat)

Where did you get that? Why are you wearing mum's wedding ring?

Nick Alice.

Soph I can deal with this myself, Nick. Stop it, Alice.

Alice No. I want to know why you're wearing Mum's wedding ring!

Soph Stop asking questions.

(beat) Soph is feeling sick.

Alice I want to know where you got that ring!

Nick Alice, can't you see she's had enough.

Soph *(clutching stomach)* Oh, no.

Alice Who decided you should have it? What did I ever get from them?

(beat)

Soph *(surprised, realising)* There's something inside me.

(beat)

Nick Soph, listen to me. You have to spit the bad shit out.

Alice What bad shit?

(beat)

Soph It hurts.

Nick Get it out then, Soph.

(beat)

Alice Wait. What's happening?

Soph I'm scared.

Alice She's not going to vomit again? Is she? Nick?

Nick It's okay, Soph.

Soph I don't know what he'll do to me.

Alice Who?

Nick I'll be here.

Alice What who'll do? You're scaring me. Who, Soph?

Soph Shut up. He'll be angry.

Alice Who? I don't understand.

Soph Shut up, shut up!

(beat)

Nick Whatever it was, it's not happening now.

Soph You don't understand. It is! It is happening now.

Soph is in great pain. She falls to her knees and clutches her stomach.

Alice Stop it! Stop it! Don't you dare do that again!

We hear the sound of the trumpet playing 'My Funny Valentine'. Soph becomes very scared.

Soph is sick. She looks around for something to stuff into her mouth.

Soph Help me, I don't know how to/

Soph curls up on the sofa bed. Nick and Alice move away as she goes into a memory. Light goes blue. From offstage we hear trumpet begin to play 'My Funny Valentine'. She puts her hands over her ears. The music stops and FD enters, obviously drunk, staggering a little.

FD Lily. Come here, baby.

He gets onto the bed with her. She turns to him. They embrace. Soph responds to him. The memory finishes, FD gets up. He is no longer drunk. He sits and watches. Soph becomes aware of her surroundings. She is obviously in pain. She holds her stomach.

Alice What, Soph? What do you need? (*She scrabbles in the bin looking for pills*) Sophie?! Tell me what to do, Soph!!

(*beat*)

FD She never could carry a tune.

(*beat*)

Soph Dad? You're not Dad? Are you? You're not him. Are you? Dad? \

FD Guess again, sweetheart. I aint he.

Soph How could you?

Alice What's she saying?

Nick Shut up, Alice.

Soph I'm your daughter.

Alice What's she saying? What are you saying? Dad?

FD I'm just . . . here to help.

Soph I don't understand . . . who are you?

FD You didn't seem to be objecting too much.

(*beat*)

Soph What?

Alice Nick? Who's she talking to?

Nick Just shut up.

Soph (*looks around*) Nick?

FD You didn't seem to be objecting too much when the man came looking for it.

(*beat*)

They don't know you like I do, do they?

(beat)

Don't know what a dirty little whore you are.

(Pause) Soph cries.

FD Prancing around. Flaunting yourself.

She looks at the ring on her finger, cries.

FD You look just like her.

Soph No.

FD Little Lily.

Soph Get away from me.

FD He loved you.

Soph No, he hurt me.

FD You loved him.

Soph Get out!

FD *(laughs)* I aint going nowhere, kid.

(beat)

Soph But he's dead. It's . . . over now.

FD laughs. Soph finds herself laughing too. She puts her hand over her mouth in bewilderment.

(beat)

Soph looks at the ring, at FD.

(beat)

FD/Soph Whore. *(She puts her hand over her mouth again)*

(beat)

Soph Oh, god.

(beat)

 Inside me?

(beat)

 You're inside me?

FD You do like to swallow.

(beat)

Soph Swallow?

FD Baby, you're a bottomless pit. You make me want to spit.

Nick Soph, are you okay? I'm right here.

Nick walks to Soph and puts a hand on her back. At Nick's touch, Soph summons courage.

Soph No.

She makes a decision. She is frightened. She sticks her fingers down her throat, and begins to retch. This is an act of great courage.

FD What do you think you're doing? Keep your mouth shut, you little bitch.

He hits her. She falls to her knees. She continues. He hits her again. She continues etc. She suddenly retches fire. This is spectacular. FD jumps away, he is visibly shaken. His power is diminishing.

FD *(scared)* You stupid bitch! You're making a mistake! You need me. You think you'll be able to survive without me?

(beat) Soph walks towards him.

FD You needed me. I protected you! Look what I did for you! You won't last a day without me. You don't know how to. You're too fucking damaged.

They'll give up on you. Abandon you. They always do. Who could love you? I kept them all away from you. You can't trust anyone else!

Soph puts her fingers down her throat and retches fire at him again. He cowers.

Desperate, he suddenly morphs into her father.

FD Come and sing, Sophie darling. Let's hear that beautiful voice of yours.

Soph is startled, confused. FD starts to play 'My Funny Valentine'. Soph obediently starts to sing. She falls to her knees.

Alice It's that song. What's she doing?

Nick Soph! Sophie!!

At the sound of Nick's voice the spell is broken, and Soph stands up. She rips the trumpet from FD's hands. As she does this the light onstage gets brighter. The effect of this action is to brighten and lighten her atmosphere.

Soph Oh!

(beat)

Nick Soph? Are you alright?

Soph *(very emotional)* It's . . . light. . . Nick.

(beat) Alice begins to feel sick.

(beat) FD cowers.

(To FD) Like I said, there's no wolf in Cinderella. I decide what story I'm telling.

(beat)

You're not the only part of me.

(beat)

Nick Soph?

(beat)

Are you okay?

Alice That's dad's trumpet. Isn't it?

Soph It's mine.

Alice But . . . oh, god, I don't feel well. *(finds mouth spray and uses it)*

(beat)

Nick That was a pretty spectacular show.

Soph What did I tell you about baggage?

Nick That's some unpacking.

(beat)

Are you okay?

Soph Yeah. I think I am.

(beat)

Soph Nick, that girl. Were you in love?

(beat)

It's alright. You weren't the first. You won't be the last.

Nick The last what?

Soph Wolf, doll.

Nick I'm not a wolf.

(beat)

Soph You don't scare easily, do you?

Nick I'm fucking terrified, Soph.

(beat)

Soph It's going to be rough.

Nick Rough? Irregular, you mean? . . . Coarse?

(beat)

Soph Positively uncouth.

(beat)

Nick And fun?

Soph Happy some of the time? Maybe.

(beat)

Soph Are we making a list?

Nick *(considers)* I think we are.

(beat)

Soph What will we call it?

Nick Soph and the Real World?

Soph This aint Wonderland.

They kiss. Alice clutches her stomach.

Alice Help. I feel sick.

She vomits something white up.

Soph goes to Alice and puts her hand on her back. Nick goes too and stands behind Soph.

Alice Oh, god! What is that? A rabbit?

FD moves to join the tableau.

End Act Three

Chapter six: Conclusion

In preparation for this chapter, I went to sleep and dreamed, the exegesis prattling and droning and blowing riffs in my head. It appeared before me (my dream exegesis) as a living thing. It breathed and fluttered and heaved and sighed, the characters jostled, a metronome kept beat, theorists declared and avowed and stated, and out back, some jazz joint flung open its doors and my plural selves poured out into streets of words, drunk on swing. There were cracks in the pages. Someone was nailing jelly to the wall.

The reality of the work is not this. It is a pile of white paper being prepared for submission. The dream functions as a metaphor for what this thesis (both play and exegesis), *intends*. An account of a creative practice must aim to capture the lived experience of that practice. The various chapters, together, provide a sense of the plural, chaotic, dream-inspired, iterative, rigorous, musical and theoretically influenced phenomenon that is this particular writing experience. The exegetical component admits to the impossibility of encapsulating this experience in its entirety, and in doing so allows room for holes and cracks which may divulge further, *other* meanings to the reader.

The exegesis, in attempting to describe certain tacit aspects of my writing process, echoes Barthes' attempt to describe the 'grain' of the voice,

What I shall attempt to say of the 'grain' will, of course, be only the apparently abstract side, the impossible account of an individual thrill that I constantly experience in listening to singing (1977 p181).

My individual 'thrill', that which occurs in the writing, which I have experienced, too, in singing, is what is examined here. Barthes appears to be one of McCrae's 'open' personalities; one who experiences 'chills' (2005 p10), the ideal audience member, the one I most like to sing to (and the thought of Barthes in my audience evokes fascination; a fanciful 'site of bliss'). The exegesis seeks to explicate the 'thrill' in writing, Albee's 'black magic' (2009), my *alchemy*, and to locate the source of that thrill in my embodied memories of performance. In writing the play itself, I was chasing the experience, drawing on these (particularly musical) bodily memories to make the work swing.

Each chapter, then, works to reveal and expose the thrill, the *alchemy*, at the centre of my writing practice. Chapter Two situates the research in the field, defining it as practice-led, creative research which concerns itself with tacit writerly knowledge, what Mottram describes as 'that understanding of how it "feels" to wield the chisel/drape the fabric/draw the connection'

(2009 p24). It shows how this examination of my tacit writing process, as peculiarly musical, sensory and theatrical, fills its own niche in the creative writing research landscape. The chapter follows this with an exploration of those ‘things which sit sideways to the play’³⁸ and crosses disciplines in order to draw connections; connect the dots, so to speak, providing an outline for future chapters to shade in.

The literature review highlights important discoveries I made as I followed various pathways seeking understanding of the process. McCrae’s description of ‘aesthetic chills’; ‘transient emotional experiences’ experienced by ‘very open’ people in response to ‘a sudden dramatic turn in the emotionally charged atmosphere of music or drama’ (2005 p10) is linked with Levitin’s parallel notion that composers imbue music with emotion by manipulating our expectations, resulting in surprises which give rise to the thrills and chills we then experience listening (2008 p111). These ideas were then applied to the theatrical device termed ‘reversals’ giving rise to the epiphany that my writing process was inherently musical in that I was tapping into embodied performance memories and my tacit song writing practice, which includes the intrinsic ability to imbue music with emotion via the thwarting of expectations, to write or compose the play.

The above connections and resultant revelation paved the way for the beginnings of what would become my methodology, showing how my writing is infused with music, and for this particular writing project, with jazz. The literature review displays the iterative and experiential pathways of practice-led research, rendering the journey (as much as is possible) transparent, and demonstrating how questions emerging from the creative process can spark insight, and consequently drive a research journey towards new understandings. Grounded in the subjective experience, these new understandings serve as unique findings and as such represent original research.

Chapter Four shows how I allowed my creative practice to lead the project, and draws on Schon’s ‘reflection in action’ model (1991), and Anderson’s ideas about research as ‘intuitive inquiry’ (2000); essentially mining the playwriting process to ‘custom build’ (Clough and Nutbrown 2007) a methodology specific to this particular project. My method is distilled into the following strategies,

- engagement with sensory experiences and embodied memories (chills, coming alive to the work)
- engagement with dreams and the stuff of the unconscious

³⁸ See page 36

- focused attendance to a sense of rhythm and musicality
- taking a stance to the work (jazz/*swing*)

Distillation here is a simplification, pulling out what can be discerned from a larger and holistic experience, that shimmery tumbling knowing, the inner plurality of my Infinite 'I'. It is tempting, therefore, to regard the strategies as reductive in this respect, to end the work with a statement of the inconclusive nature of research such as this. Like Gannon who titles her concluding chapter '(Not) Arriving' (p323), or Crawford's similar conclusion '(un)ending' (2010 p295), I acknowledge the difficulty of reaching a point of certainty here. Writing remains a phenomenon, and the exegesis (the rectangle I have traced on that wide sky) articulates what it is possible to, and alludes to what is not.

This study was inspired by a longstanding fascination with the writing process. The experience, described in Chapter One, of writing my song 'Francine', where the song had poured out whole in fifteen minutes accompanied by chills and preceded by an uncomfortable excess of energy, followed, a week later, by a chill-inducing performance which produced a similar reaction in an audience member, left me with a strong desire to *understand* the phenomenon. I wanted to write like that all the time, and it seemed to me that understanding how it had happened, and the conditions which allowed it, might help me repeat the experience.

I discovered, of course, over the ensuing years, that no two song writing experiences were alike, that sometimes they poured out and sometimes they didn't, and the circumstances and conditions for writing changed each time. I did, however find that the more aware I became of ideas as they emerged into my consciousness, the more I let go and allowed them free reign, the more likely I was to experience this 'pouring out'. Practicing this attendance to the internal world gradually developed my sense of self awareness; I grew big ears, so to speak, when it came to my own inner soundscape.

As with my song writing, where the conditions and context change somewhat for each writing experience, the conditions surrounding my future play writing processes, I believe, will be similarly changeable, however, the way I *practice* writing, that improvisatory, musical, dream-inspired and sensory stance where the thrill works equally as gauge, as driver, and as quarry in the writing chase, remains constant. This work demonstrates substantial progress toward the understanding of this (my) distinctive practice. This chapter will review the key components of my creative practice with reference to the four research strategies above, in essence looking at the roles played by my body, my Unconscious, and my musicality and how I engage with these when writing by taking a jazz-like stance to the work.

The (my) musical body: chills, thrills and coming alive

The research question asked ‘How will I, using my existing skills with music and prose, write a play, and in so doing, establish a new playwriting praxis?’ What was essentially found was that I write like, and as, a musician. Describing this from the exegetical mode I currently inhabit seems (and can only be), as Barthes describes above, an abstract endeavour. From where I write; here, now, my life as a musician appears far distant and yet, like Krauth and the story in his foot (2010), my many musical performances inhabit me, my body tingles with them. I have long been aware of the visceral nature of my relationship with music; have even referred to it in songs,

And written on my body is the music that you played for me/ I can still
remember every song

(‘The Che Guevara T-Shirt Song’ *Exotic in the everyday* 2003)

Music is inscribed on my body, my flesh remembers every song. I know (remember) well the experience Barthes describes when he writes of,

a muscular music in which the part taken by the sense of hearing is one only of ratification, as though the body were hearing – and not ‘the soul’; a music which is not played ‘by heart’; seated at the key-board or the music stand, the body controls, conducts, co-ordinates, having itself to transcribe what it reads, making sound and meaning, the body as inscriber and not just transmitter, simple receiver (1977 p149).

The exegesis describes the role my body plays in writing, showing it as inscriber, and demonstrating the *musical* muscles I flex as I write. A journey is traced from my initial understandings of my body as a means to gauge if a song is working (chills); something which appeared mysterious, even magical, at the beginning of the project, to an in depth explication of this visceral aspect of my writing process.

The explication of this viscosity is accomplished using a variety of theoretical perspectives. I draw on Grosz’ ideas about the body as ‘the centre of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, [and] agency’ acting and reacting and generating ‘what is new, surprising [and] unpredictable’ (1994 pxi) to situate my body as the central agency in my creative writing practice. Grosz emphasises the ‘animality’ of art,

There’s something about art that is an abundance of excess . . . a revelry in the excess of the energy in our bodies (2005).

Her ideas align with my experience of song writing. Before writing the song 'Francine', I had been unable to sleep, was excessively restless, my body was speaking, desired expression. The song poured out in fifteen minutes and this energy dissipated, was stored somehow in the song, and when performed a week later was palpably present, producing chills in both myself and an audience member. Grosz describes this transmission of energy, suggesting,

there's something about the autonomy of sensation now in that artwork
that is transmitted, at least ideally.

The idea of an art work as a receptacle for and transmitter of energy which is sensed by other bodies and originates in the body of the artist is built on with Anderson's theory of 'intuitive inquiry' (2000). Intuitive inquiry relies on the body's ability to come alive to the work of research, a type of resonance which Anderson describes using the musical metaphor of a cello string being plucked and causing the string of another cello on the other side of a room to vibrate (p33). Just like the resonance between myself and the audience member, where chills are experienced together as a result of the song being performed, researchers 'come alive' to the research of others and use this sensation as a guide for their own research pathways.

Anderson writes too of this 'coming alive' sensation occurring in the act of writing, advising researchers to heed it in order to produce work which will then resonate similarly with the reader. The exegesis examines my own experiences of 'coming alive' where I experience chills, or tingles when listening to music or reading (Bryars 1975, King 2001, Krauth 2010) to build further on this, and my methodology, extending Anderson's ideas, focuses specifically on my embodied memories of musical performance as a key component in the writing of the play.

Further connections are made by a reading of Artaud's theory which sees his ideas of theatre as 'poetry for the senses' (1970 p27) as chill-inducing theatre, an experience which speaks directly to the body of the audience member and posits writing from the body, using chills as a guide, as a valid way of producing theatre which may bypass words and speak directly to the senses. Using my intuitive sense of imbuing music with emotional surprises as guide, and with the understanding that chills are produced by the unexpected, the play may manifest visceral responses in the audience, something which will only be discerned during a live performance of the play.

Chapter three engages with Barthes' *The pleasure of the text* (1975), riffing on the idea of an (and this) exegesis as a 'site of bliss' (p4). Barthes' idea of the 'grain' of the voice (p66) is taken up as a means to express or write the body into the text. The chapter bypasses explanation and highlights the impossibility of describing the tacit, instead placing fragments of personal experience in the form of scripts alongside theoretical concepts and 'cut-up' paragraphs from

the following methodology chapter in order to split the text, to create rifts through which the grain of my own (musical) human voice may become apparent. It performs a series of encounters, each one pressing up against the next, and invites the reader to construct her/his own meaning from the reading experience. In doing this, it asks the reader to bring similar experiential encounters to the reading act in order to impart some understanding of the tacit embodied knowledges at work in the writing of both play and exegesis.

The chapter is concerned with the many ‘losses’ and ‘dissolves’ (Barthes 1975 p7) I experience where my body meets the research, at the nexus between theory and personal experience, between what is intended in writing and what is eventually written, and highlights the plurality and chaotic, ‘cut-up’ atmosphere of my inner world. It also takes up Arnold’s notion of the ‘sous-voice’ (2010), raising the possibility of this unintended writerly revelation and suggests this as a further means to understanding for the reader. The chapter acts as precursor to the following chapters, and as a layer in the response to the research question, providing depth and preventing a closed or facile analysis of my writing practice.

The exegesis features my body as the central agency at work when I write. Reporting this lived experience effectively is akin to performing voodoo for the reader. The work is structured to provide a number of different doorways through which the reader may gain access to this often fugitive knowledge, may glimpse the flash of cat’s eyes in the glow of the readerly torch so to speak, and affords, too, opportunities for building understanding of the how, why and where of this flash; that chills happen, that they happen in my body, and the conditions which produce them.

Dreams and the Unconscious: Engaging the *marvellous*

Dreams are integral to my writing practice, and here they have played equally important roles in both the playwriting and the research. The initial research proposal was written in the moments after waking from a dream which saw me, as the writer, walking a path and picking up discarded things which would, mimicking the visual arts Found Object method, inspire and be incorporated into the work. Upon awaking from the dream, I thought immediately of Duchamp (1917), and further, of Surrealism and Breton’s objectives (1972). These moments after the dream, when I mulled over both method and theory with regard to the art work, reveal the symbiotic nature of my practice. Theory and method were present from the beginning as part of the creative process, and are shown here to be part of my writer’s toolbox, so that they spontaneously arise as integral elements of the emergent creative problem or question.

Like Breton, I regard the Unconscious as a ‘marvellous’ realm (1972 p14), a rich source of possibility which I rely on to enliven and energise my writing practice. Breton writes,

I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams (p11).

When in the midst of some writing project and in that often precarious place of ‘not knowing’ (Woolf 2007), dreams and the stuff of my Unconscious; random thoughts, sounds and images, are relegated a place of importance above and beyond the relative humdrum of my waking mind. I am vigilant in my attendance of these inner flashes of insight and inspiration. I wake in the night and sit bolt upright, thrilling to the possibilities some dream or other has conjured in me, beginning a dynamic engagement with the dream image which often becomes the most compelling element of a creative work.

In an introduction to *Mad Love*, Breton’s classic novel, translator Mary Ann Caws writes,

he expected the inner and the outer experiences to mingle in an ongoing, constant communion . . . providing an extraordinary dynamism of activated images (1987 pxiv).

The exegesis demonstrates the dynamism of my own ‘constant communion’, describing a number of dreams and images, and showing how I engaged with them to produce creative ideas and characters and how the research, too, was influenced. Surrealism, with reference to Freud (1940), provides an effective definition of the Unconscious for the purposes of the project, and contributes to the explication of my creative practice.

The project, however, is not a Surrealist endeavour. Though I believe in ‘that gleam of light that Surrealism seeks to detect deep within us’ (Breton 1972 p126), my objectives for the most part don’t align with Breton’s. I don’t intend here, for example, to ‘combat . . . scholarly research’ (p 129), am clearly deeply occupied with it. Further, this ‘gleam of light’ is what I am intent on researching. I imagine Breton would give a similar reply to this as he did to those others whom he felt compromised Surrealism’s purity,

SHIT (p131).

In the face of Breton’s imagined contempt, I nevertheless am taking here what I want of Surrealism, that is, a suitable and evocative definition of the Unconscious and the notion of a dynamic communion with this realm, and leaving the rest.

My process here is shown to be not only an engagement with dreams in order to build ideas but one, too, of problem-solving where theory and method play their part in the creative process. Turning *trash* into *gold* has not here just been a matter of taking this raw material (Unconscious things that the waking mind might ordinarily dismiss as unimportant; throw away) and placing

it on the page but of transforming it into the play via a combination of influences. Chapter four looks at these influences, or components, in depth, and traces the processes by which the play and the research were undertaken showing how dreams acted to inspire and guide the journey.

Rhythm and Musicality: Chasing *swing*

The revelation that I was writing as a musician represents the most striking finding of this study. Unearthing the creative process was an intuitive investigation, carried out retrospectively, and the image of a metronome surfacing repeatedly as I reflected on what had been happening in that writerly trance sparked the understanding that I was writing to an internal rhythm. My heightened sense of rhythm developed initially from hours of piano practice as a child with a metronome strictly guiding the beat as I played scales. In this way, I gained an embodied sense of not only what to play; my fingers learning their way around the keyboard, but how to play precisely within the confines of a set tempo. After many years of this type of practice, these skills became essential elements of my musician's toolbox, became tacit knowledge. I didn't need to concentrate on keeping to a particular tempo, and instead was able to play within the space of a beat, improvise with it.

This embodied ability to understand and take liberties with the beat of a song is an integral part of singing. It allows for improvisational phrasing; an ability to syncopate and to play intuitively with lyrics, to *swing* the song by emphasising particular words or phrases in certain ways resulting in personal and unique renditions of songs which can differ from one performance to the next. Singers reveal something of themselves in these performances. Harry Connick Jr. says of Sinatra's celebrated ability with phrasing, 'Sinatra swings like no one else. He knows where to put the words. He can take liberties; he never gets lost' (in Nelson 2004 p524), and Bono comments on Sinatra's practice of, 'turning on the right phrase in the right song, which is where he lives, where he lets go, where he reveals himself. His songs are his home, and he lets you in' (p523). Sinatra's skill is in understanding 'the combined value of precise diction and conversational delivery, and no other has ever been more aware that the beat shouldn't necessarily fall where the rhyme does' (Davis 1998 p120).

The ability to *swing* a song in this way is reminiscent of Barthes' ideas about the 'grain of the voice'. Phrasing like this depends predominately on *how* a lyric is sung and not on the meanings of the words themselves; or, to put it another way (and to quote the famous standard), 'it don't

mean a thing/ all you got to do is swing'³⁹. The way the lyric is delivered is paramount. My intrinsic skill with phrasing was the driving factor in writing *Soph and the real world*. Lines of dialogue came usually as rhythms first and I would then locate words which fulfilled that rhythmic imperative. In this way, I infused the play with a sense of that improvisatory fray that characterises the jazz performance experience, giving the 'grain' of the voices value above the meaning of the words.

Swing is not only a rhythmic groove, according to Butterfield but also 'a general rhythmic ethos – a mysterious quality purportedly transcending representation in musical notation' which produces visceral reactions (spontaneous movement) in the audience (2010 p3). Writing to capture this quality, what is seen in the context of this project as a type of coming alive to the writing; chill-inducing rhythmic writing, in order to produce a similar response in the audience, to write the energy into the work in order to transmit it to the audience as Grosz advocates above, is concordant with the ideas I derived from Artaud's notion of theatre as a 'poetry for the senses'. The performance is intended to speak to the bodies of the audience and not just to the intellect, allowing for these bodies to come alive to the work, and therefore, too, for the possibility of transformative experiences.

Taking a stance to the work: jazz/swing

The thesis, comprising both play and exegesis, is a practice-led examination of a writing process. The over-all methodology for the project therefore derives from my creative practice. My playwriting practice is shown to be a predominantly musical endeavour, where my intrinsic skills with rhythm and my embodied memories of live performance drive the creation of the play. The three key strategies outlined above were applied and engaged with via taking a jazz-like or improvisatory stance to the project. The taking of this stance, once consciously enacted, became the means to integrate the creative and exegetic components, harmonising the various elements into a workable whole.

A retrospective examination of the playwriting process revealed the musicality at the heart of my writing practice and further reflection resulted in the understanding that this musicality was evident too in my internal processing of the various elements that contributed to the play. Theory, personal experience, the products of my Unconscious and my musical skills were

³⁹ See Ella Fitzgerald's swinging rendition of this classic
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG71yD8UUuE&feature=share>

improvised with; my inner world resembled that improvisatory fray referred to earlier, where each element had a chance to play its own solo, give its own interpretation of the play, of the exegesis. The elements pushed and pulled against each other, created dynamic tensions within me, and each required reporting in different ways. Intently attending to these various elements, improvising with them, and giving voice to them in both creative and exegetical elements was an intuitive process deriving from my identity and ethos as a musician.

The way the project unfolded is summarised as follows:

- Formulated the research question
- Decided to allow my creative practice to lead the inquiry
- Wrote the play
- Result: Play finished and scheduled for production
- Examined/ Reflected on playwriting practice
- Result: Discovery of and description of my creative practice (dreams, jazz, senses etc)
- Examined the Reflection process
- Result: Discovered the research practice resembled the creative practice
- Integrated the project by formulating a jazz ethos/methodology which applies to both the playwriting and exegetical processes.

The summary shows how I followed the reflection on, and resultant unearthing of, my creative practice with a further reflection on just how this unearthing had been accomplished. It rapidly became clear that the examination or research process mimicked the creative process itself in that I had allowed dreams and random images, such as the one of the metronome, to guide me, and a dynamic communion with these as well as with personal experience and theory had enabled me to formulate and outline a creative methodology. I realised therefore that this methodology was effectively being applied to my research practice as well. I wanted the exegesis to *swing* too and, using my body as gauge, was improvising with various internal elements seeking for what would make the research come alive for the reader.

Jazz/*swing* works as a metaphor here in that it emphasises not only the importance of established skills in the writer but points to the intuitive and improvisatory manner in which these skills must be applied in the moment of writing. A jazz musician isn't just making indiscriminate noise. Mastery of the instrument is imperative, as is knowledge of the song to be played. Likewise, a writer requires a mastery of language, and an understanding of the constraints she is working within. Just as a musician needs big ears, an ability to hear what's going on, so too must a writer practice intent attendance to the inner world. A state of 'not-knowing' is integral to improvisation, both musical and writerly. A jazz musician's knowledge of theory is so ingrained as to be tacit, and the writer or researcher needs a similar intrinsic knowledge of relevant theories to work.

Contributions to current research

The contributions of this project to current research in the field lie in the fact that it examines a subjective writing process and further that this writing process is founded on embodied musical experiences, and the consequent ethos I developed around and because of those experiences.

The unearthing of my creative method reveals the specifics of this musicality, taking up jazz/swing as metaphor for the means by which I process the raw material of my inner world into the finished text, improvising with dreams, theory, memories and the stuff of my Unconscious to produce the play.

The resultant play and exegesis together constitute an original work which forges new connections between the concept of *swing*, Barthes' *The pleasure of the text* (and including here his ideas about the 'grain' of the voice), Artaud's notion of theatre as a 'poetry for the senses', and Grosz' ideas on the origins of art. The exegesis synthesises the above to enhance understanding of creative processes and to demonstrate a different way of inquiry for creative and research practice.

The exegesis focuses on the ways in which I extended my existing musical skills to develop a playwriting practice, and uses jazz, and a *swing* ethos, as metaphor to describe this internal process. The notion of a jazz/swing ethos as applied to playwriting in the current creative writing research environment is a unique one. Jazz-influenced writing exists; most famously as the method proposed by Beat writer Jack Kerouac, however within creative writing research it is underrepresented. My research into the ways my musicality, and specifically, my jazz experiences, have shaped the creative work, therefore fills its own particular niche.

The study, practice-led, is concerned too with practice-led research itself. The exegesis demonstrates how such research may be conducted, and drawing on my creative method, proposes the jazz/swing method as a valid method for inquiry of this type. The exegesis in its various responses to the research question displays a sense of the jazz ethos too; where chapters challenge and answer each other, syncopate, ideas are riffed on and played out, and, like musicians performing a song, all eventually draw to an inevitable (harmonious) end.

The literature review, a web of connections, serves to not only establish a context and niche for the research and weave together theoretical perspectives but illuminates various aspects of the writing process, crossing disciplines to explain such phenomena as chills (McCrae 2005 p10), how the brain processes music (Levitin 2008), and the spaghetti-like profusion of the brain and its resultant ability to connect disparate things (Seung 2010). The chapter also reveals the iterative process that characterises practice-led research.

In Chapter One, I looked at various descriptions by writers of their writing processes, and suggested that there existed some obvious common ground, that writers often see their processes as mysterious, that something *other* was at work. I went on to propose that there was a further parallel in that writers often refer to a visceral element to their writing (Murray 2008, Beresford 2007, Artaud 1975, Barthes 1970). I aimed to uncover something of these elements in my own process, and find ways to reveal these to the reader. The exegesis has been concerned therefore with the tacit nature of writerly practice and presents a variety of ways for the reader to understand or sense some of the tacit elements of my subjective process. It achieves this through detailed descriptions of sensory experience, of personal encounters with theory (Barthes), and, using the jazz metaphor, of the key characteristics of my writing process.

Implications for action

If common ground does exist between writers' experiences of their processes, then my research, in revealing my own process, may have implications for practical application.

In an essay which discusses how tacit knowledge can be communicated through research Ross Gibson defines knowledge thus,

To know is to be in a state of having understood or comprehended something. Knowing—deriving from 'gnosis'—is a state of being imbued with some illumination, blessed with the ability to see into a mystery, to dispel the ignorance (which is the state of i-gnosis, the state of *not* knowing). Knowing is thus an after effect of understanding. Literally, understanding is the process of bringing oneself close to the quandary, to stand under or in proximity to a mystery, to come in from outside its radiation and influence. By coming in and standing under the mystery, you can *comprehend* ('com'—'with'; 'prendre'—to take), you can literally take *this* aspect in hand with *that*, you can combine yourself with the mystery till you and it imbue each other and you *know* it with a glowing, gnostic sense of the rightness of your understanding. And then you need to know what it is that you know. You need to distil the principles of your knowledge momentarily, before using them as a way to re-enter the experience with more focus and with better questions (2010).

I include such a lengthy quote because it resembles so closely my research experience. I *comprehended*, I took *this* aspect in hand with *that*, *imbued* myself with the mystery. I distilled things momentarily, re-entered, focused and questioned. If this process, written down as I have written it, has imbued the reader with a similar sense of her or his own tacit writerly knowing, if this knowing has been brought to the fore in response, distilled somehow, re-entered and questioned, then knowledge and understanding have been produced and communicated.

Gibson goes on to describe how artists work 'in the midst of complexity', writing,

Given that most experts agree that complexity can be understood only by *experiencing it directly*, by imbibing and appreciating it from inside the systematics of its always-unfolding occurrence, then it follows logically that artists are specialists in this major aspect of contemporary life.

In reporting the complexity of my process I have sought to provide what Gibson calls the ‘the best sense of how the system tends to go’,

The best sense—unreliable, uncertain but also ‘divinable’ as one tracks the flow of tendencies.

This best sense, he asserts, is achieved by two ways of knowing, the insider’s tacit awareness, and the critical outside stance. ‘Inside’, he writes, ‘—but also outside—but also inside—but also outside—but also inside’.

If, as Gibson suggests above, artists are specialists in the direct experiencing of complexity, and have some inner knowledge of this ‘major aspect of contemporary life’, the knowledge I have imparted here has implications which range further afield than creative writing research. Throughout this exegesis I have alluded to similarities between creative and scientific research. When, for example, Poincare describes stepping onto a bus and is suddenly aware of an unanticipated solution to his problem (cited in Welling 2005 p21), he reveals something similar to what artists uncover when describing their processes. Within Poincare’s description is a glimmer of a tacit form of scientific knowledge, how it feels to wield the microscope, if you like, or the test-tube. Studies into scientific practice intent on uncovering this form of knowledge, that is, scientists engaged in practice-led studies of their own processes similar to what I am engaged in here, could yield fascinating insights. Equally, artists’ research into their practices could prove as useful for research students from other disciplines as for those involved in creative research.

According to Jenny, in an article which looks at the role of creativity, tacit knowledge, thought styles and language in postgraduate science research skills, ‘there is a particular need for science research students to learn how scientists practise’,

The practical implications coming out of this paper are the suggestions that research students are taught about creativity and the role this has in problem identification and hypothesis creation. They should learn the role of tacit knowledge in learning experimental practice, so that they understand that the key to learning is observation and practice, rather than reading or taking oral instructions (2008 p149).

A pathway towards nurturing practical, that is tacit, research skills, and the awareness of the importance of creativity to those skills, in science research students, and in fact all research students could well be to point them towards Gibson's 'specialists' in the direct experience of complex creative processes; artists, and their research into practice.

For artists, bringing the whole self to a creative problem is standard practice. For a science student this is most likely true as well, yet he or she may be unaware of their own creative processes. During the first year of my research I attended a thesis writing workshop for a number of weeks. When I spoke of my research in this group, I was often met with uncomprehending stares from fellow students from other disciplines. I eventually, and in frustration, pointed out that the great scientific minds were highly creative, making use of imagination and metaphor to unearth and describe their theories, citing Einstein as an example. A biology student responded that Einstein was very rigorous in his work, as though rigour was absent from art. I was fascinated by this and asked her where her research ideas came from, and the insight to solve problems. I suggested that perhaps her dreams were involved. She thought for a moment, and then, as though it were revelatory, answered that, 'Yes, I do dream answers!' She went on excitedly to describe how she would sometimes too, go to sleep with a problem, and wake up somehow knowing the answer, clearly something she'd not consciously acknowledged before. I went on to explain that the process of making art was similar in that those dream or sleep inspired insights would then be critically (and rigorously) engaged with to produce work.

I have pondered this subject much over the last three years. In examining and reporting how I wrote my first play, I have aimed to persuade readers of the value of such an endeavour. I am convinced that the more aware I become of my creative practice, the more productive that process becomes. In writing up the exegetical section of the work, too, there were times when I found myself at dead ends, unable to move forward. In these moments it was only in consciously evoking my creativity via those strategies listed above, that is, my intuitive, musical, dreaming, sensory self, that I was able to locate new pathways and continue to write.

In a conference⁴⁰ paper entitled 'The relationship between critical and creative thinking in postgraduate education', Swedish academic Eva Brodin writes,

⁴⁰ *Educating Researchers for the 21st Century* 13-15 April 2010

As both these phenomena are conceptualized in quite diverging ways, and since their relationship to one another is not clear, we do have a genuine educational challenge in respect to how critical and creative thinking could be developed in postgraduate students. Accordingly, we need to put the contextual meanings of critical and creative thinking into words and find out the different conditions for these faculties to be developed (2010 p101).

Brodin describes a study she is undertaking in which she interviews three doctoral students from different disciplines (music, education and theoretical philosophy) on their own experiences of the development of both types of thought while carrying out their research. Interestingly, though all three students were able to identify the ways in which they had developed critical thinking, it was only the music student who could articulate how her creative thinking had developed,

The doctoral student in musical performance mentions that the opportunity to make theoretical and critical reflections upon her own musical practice has certainly promoted her creative thinking (p108).

My experience of thinking critically and reflectively on my creative writing process has had a similar outcome. If my study, and studies like it, is able to trigger understanding and knowledge in readers about their own creative processes then practice-led creative research has much to offer Post Graduate researchers from other disciplines in the development of, and engagement with, their own creative faculties. And further, my research strategies, distilled from my techniques of practice, have value as possible strategies for enhancing creativity in others.

Valuing creativity

The problem of how to foster creative skills in research students is currently a subject of much academic interest. In his paper, 'Tackling the Wicked Problem of Creativity in Higher Education', Jackson states,

Preparing learners who can engage with the problems that emerge from increasing complexity is higher education's 'wicked problem' and creativity is an important facet of this problem (2008 p6).

Jackson links development of creativity with the student's own 'sense of who they are' (p2), and asserts,

Higher education has a responsibility to help learners develop their understandings and awareness of their own creativities as they develop their own identity – an important part of which is the creative expression of who they are.

My research supports these assertions. In researching my own creative process, I realised that in order to understand the *how* of my creativity, I needed to understand *who* I was as an artist; as creative writer and musician, and as a researcher too. The ensuing insights and awarenesses have led to a greater capacity for creative thought, that is, understanding who I am and how I work has led to an enhanced ability to not only access these skills, but to recognise when they were needed, discovering, of course, that these skills were required as much for the exegetical work as for the play writing itself.

This project represents, amongst other things, a unique account of a researcher building creative capacity via critical reflection on her own subjective process, and as such provides starting points for other researchers intent on the same. To these others I would say; become self aware, build your toolbox, look within, understand the whole self is engaged, observe how you meet the world, allow the Unconscious a say, trust hunches and whims, improvise, come alive to things, and, importantly, become comfortable with not-knowing.

Recommendations for further research

Throughout the research, there were many tangents I didn't follow, confined as I was by the scope of the project, and some of these are presented here as recommendations for further research.

1. A study focused on metaphor; tracing the journey and development of metaphor from dreams through to the artefact, and resultant exegesis
2. A study which traces a specific musical journey from beginning musical atmosphere to how these sounds are developed into a composition (the play), and analyses the specific musical rhythms and the structure in detail. This could even then be translated to music and performed as a musical work.
3. The previous idea could be extended to the following; a study which conducts similar musical analyses of the works of other playwrights with the intention of translating them to performable musical works.
4. A study of the body which looks specifically at the everyday physical journey; sleep patterns, sickness, weather, environment, the cycles of the body, and analyses how these might be traced in the writing.
5. A psychoanalytic study which looks at the psychological journey of a writer, using dreams and their development into artefact as the basis and analysing this process as, for example, Jung would.
6. A study of the history of what could be seen as the repression of 'creativity' in academia from, say, a Foucauldian perspective, or using Cixous' ideas.
7. The writer as cyborg; a study which focuses on the various meeting places between writer and technology, looking at the nature of these conjunctures and their effects on the creative writing process.
8. A subjective case study, in the form of autoethnography, which looks at the influences and affects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on a creative process.

9. A study which writes (creatively) specifically from the body in that it writes literally from scars; those places which hold embodied memories, and which then examines this process of writing.

Conclusion

Haseman presents practice-led research as a new paradigm,

These methodological developments have implications for the whole field of research, for they represent fundamentally different research procedures from those that operate in both the quantitative and qualitative orthodoxies. In fact, there is evidence enough to recognise that we stand at a pivotal moment in the history and development of research. Practice-led researchers are formulating a third species of research, one that stands in alignment with, but separate from, the established quantitative and qualitative research traditions. I believe this shift is as significant as was the development of qualitative research (2007).

I find myself wondering if the practices of researchers working within other paradigms are so fundamentally different, or if it is only that which is admitted about the research which differs. A researcher occupied with quantitative research is bound by traditional protocol to a certain way of reporting that research, leaving no room for dream-inspired beginnings, or thrills, in the finished work. It seems plausible that these *other* things play a role yet, not having experience in any research but mine, I cannot speak with authority on this. The idea is, however, intriguing. Standing at Haseman's pivotal moment, with a third species of research formulating, I feel excited by the prospect of researchers from other disciplines examining their own work from the practice-led perspective (thrilled even).

If these traditions and protocols are prohibiting any trace of the tacit, then they effectively hide or repress the tacit research journey, deleting creativity from their fields of vision, confounding in some way the emergent researcher's learning trajectory. I envision (like the stereotypical Miss World contestant wishing for world peace) the creative and inclusive research environment that might result from the application of practice-led research into tacit processes in other disciplines.

I therefore offer this study to researchers in general as an example of the benefits of a self aware and rigorous examination of the tacit aspects of practice, and present my research strategies as means to accomplish this.

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