Transformational drama: theatre for community and social change

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I, Bridget Mary Aitchison, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Bridget Mary Aitchison
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Transformational Drama is theatre which acts as a catalyst for change in communities and in society. It addresses issues of social importance and changes people’s perceptions, attitudes and reactions to those issues. This thesis explores the foundational theory behind transformational drama, including the use of drama as an applied art as found in the work of Jacob Moreno (the founder of psychodrama), Richard Scheckner and Augusto Boal. It then examines the reclamation of the transformational properties of drama from the behavioural sciences back into the conventional theatre by looking at the community theatre and Theatre-In-Education movements.

Three plays are examined for their transformational effect – *Aftershocks*, *Property of the Clan/Blackrock*, and *Runaways*. Each had their own particular methodology (verbatim, scripted and devised) which leant itself toward theatre which caused social change. Each created transformations in the communities for which they were originally produced but each also went on to affect wider, main-stream audiences.

In researching these three plays, the author combined elements of each, as well as the foundational theory, to create a new methodology for the production of transformational drama. This method was trialled in *Back From Nowhere*, a production based on the issue of youth-suicide. The thesis details the process used to create this play and an analysis of the resulting product.
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CHAPTER 1

DRAMA AS THERAPY: THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND PART I

Every man who is persuaded may persuade. Victor Hugo (Grassner 36)

From the late 19th Century and throughout the 20th there has been manifested a move in Western societies to return to those foundational principles of theatre in and by which it fulfilled not merely a social but a socially therapeutic function, one in which Aristotelian precepts (among others originating in the earliest days in the history of theatre) have been deployed for applications in recent and contemporary situations and contexts. These have ranged from the mobilisation of the processes of classical tragic drama as practised by Greek playwrights and theorised by Aristotle (its ritual structure, its protagonist/antagonist interaction and the narrative trajectory so generated, and its cathartic effect on participants and spectators) in the service of psychologically (and psychiatrically) based individual and social therapies, to a reciprocal adaptation of therapeutic techniques (role playing, improvisation, and ‘encounter’ groups) to participation-oriented educational/developmental uses of drama. In all such uses, drama may be seen as an ‘applied art’, apparently at a remove from the more conventional manifestations of theatrical drama (itself founded on and frequently operating on social therapeutic/developmental principles) but still demonstrating the validity, utility and efficacy of the fundamental concepts and methodologies.

As Maurie Scott reports in Human Drama

There is, in fact, a well established reciprocal relationship between drama (as communication, as craft, as art and as a contributor to the processes of human development) and certain of the activities of psychology, sociology, education and, of course, the ethical, moral and conceptual considerations of philosophy. (Scott 1979. 1)
This relationship can be explained by pointing out that many precepts of actor training draw from psychology, psychiatry and sociology, and in turn, these behavioural sciences draw methodologies from conventional theatre for use as analytical tools – using drama as an applied art. Just as Theatre practitioners such as Stanislavski, Artaud and Brecht brought Freud, Jung and psychology into performance technique which influenced 19th century drama, with further consequences for modernism and post-modernism, these types of theatre in turn influenced the work of Moreno and other behavioural scientists. This symbiotic relationship has contributed to a richness of both psychological methodologies and theatrical practice.

Oliver Fiala presents a useful model of the relationship between the various uses of drama (Scott 1979, 9):
The Aesthetic functions are those usually attributed to drama in its conventional forms as ‘theatre’ whereas drama as an applied art is often thought of in terms of the Utilitarian and Therapeutic functions in Fiala’s model. However, as Fiala notes, drama in all its forms can act as two or more functions at once. Where education (Utilitarian) and the behavioural sciences (Therapeutic) have borrowed from the theatre certain notions (including the efficacy of Aristotelian catharsis in transformational work), a cyclical relationship exists wherein theatre (the Aesthetic) can also be Utilitarian and/or Therapeutic. Common therapeutic practices (especially psychodrama and sociodrama) derive their methodologies (conceptually and practically) from drama, which in turn provides theatre practitioners with new approaches to activities within drama. (Scott 1979, 2).

This chapter will look at the first part of this relationship – drama as applied art – in order to understand the importance this cyclical relationship has in the development of transformational drama.

During the last part of the 19th Century there began a move to once again return to the ideas of catharsis and ritual inherent in earlier theatrical history (Aristotelian catharsis) and harness it for use in mental health or societal change. As noted, not all of those at the forefront of this movement have been theatre practitioners with notable figures from the fields of education and psychology, as well as theatre per se, having recognised the value of the theatrical experience and applied its methodologies to their own fields of expertise to create new ways of learning, working and living – using the power for change, of transformation, inherent in the drama to create new perceptions, new ways of
learning, and new ways of living. Practitioners such as John Hodgson and Dorothy Heathcote have incorporated elements of the drama into more conventional educational methodologies to create the ‘Developmental Drama’ and ‘Drama-in-Education’ movements. In the field of psychology, the most notable use of drama as applied to therapy has been achieved by Dr Jacob Moreno, a pioneer practitioner of psychodrama which has paved the way for the many, varied forms of drama therapy available to psychologists today.

As in the case of developmental drama, the dramatic experience is abstracted from the theatrical context, setting it in the educational arena, while retaining the basic precepts of drama. Issues are explored in a dramatic way but not a theatrical one. The actor/spectator delineation is erased. Everyone takes part in the dramatic experience. As Augusto Boal puts it, the spectator becomes a spect-actor.

The developmental drama movement seeks to accomplish much the same thing as Aristotelian drama – to guide participants along a journey of discovery and insight so that maxims are learned and proper decisions regarding modes of behaviour and thought are arrived at. However, the Aristotelian drama sets this in the framework of what has evolved into the conventional theatre whereas developmental drama exists outside the theatrical framework (physically and institutionally) in the arena of education and psychotherapy.

In this way, Dorothy Heathcote asserts that, “Drama is a means of learning, a means of widening experiences even if we never act in a play or stand upon a stage.” (Hodgson 1977, 158) Further, by returning to the notion of catharsis as an agent for change and
transformation, while at the same time freeing the drama from its theatrical restraints, these practitioners have made it possible for drama to be utilised in and by a wider field of applications. By divesting drama of the actor/spectator delineation (spatially as well as communicatively) its power can be harnessed in a variety of ways for the potential benefit of both individuals and communities.

In the statement that “drama is such a normal thing. It has been made into an abnormal thing by all the fussy leotards, hairdos and stagecraft that is associated with it,” (Drain 1994, 199) Heathcote highlights the notion that the conventional theatre no longer functions in the Aristotelian mode and that such drama has lost its bite as a social force. Educators and therapists are now recognising that the dramatic experience can have value and needs to be kept vital both as a means of helping individuals to establish improved psychological well-being and helping society in understanding, facing and overcoming its problems. (Hodgson 1977, 16) Drama can “deepen and broaden our understanding of the truth even more so than actual events, which often lack form and a frame of reference.” (Hodgson 1977, 57)

Developmental drama sets the dramatic experience in an arena where participants are no longer spectators but willing participants in a process which (it is hoped) will transform them by enabling and allowing re-enactment of problematic experiences, the ‘living-through’ of problematic situations. The consequent insights gained by participants in the experience are the initial steps in the therapeutic process. (Hodgson 1977, 156-157) The dramatic approach enables participants to “think from within a dilemma instead of talking about the dilemma.” (Drain 1994, 200) The dramatic experience allows for insight into both individual actions and feelings and those that we share in common
although we may not realise this or may be unaware of this occurring while the activity is proceeding. (Hodgson 1977, 158)

Proponents of developmental drama have recognised the unique ability of drama to facilitate education and have therefore employed the dramatic experience as part of the developmental/educational process thus returning to the basic precepts of the Aristotelian drama but without the form and constrictions imposed by the twentieth century conventional theatre. Jean-Louis Barrault states, “Drama is as old as man: it is as closely linked to him as his double, for the theatrical game is inherent in the existence of any living being.” (Hodgson 1977, 17)

Not only is this assertion recognised by those involved in developmental drama, but by those involved in the fields of psychotherapy. Besides developmental drama being used in an education context, some twentieth century psychologists, most notably Dr Jacob Moreno, realised that elements inherent in the dramatic art form were especially conducive to psychotherapeutic treatment. As a result of the work of Moreno, and other of his contemporaries, modern psychology now has access to a range of treatments loosely grouped together under the umbrella of ‘drama therapy’. As the 20th century progressed, more and more therapists began to acknowledge the valuable contribution these therapies have made toward mental health - especially with regards to children.

In order to understand how drama therapy works the work carried out and/or observed by Moreno, Augusto Boal and Richard Schechner will be examined.
DR JACOB MORENO

Psychodrama

Jacob Moreno, a Rumanian psychiatrist born in 1892, saw the psychological nature of the dramatic experience and recognised that drama could be a valuable way to gain insight into complex human situations. (Hodgson 1977, 130) Between 1909 and 1911 he began to devise a form of role-playing which eventually evolved into psychodrama. (Landy 1986, 29)

In psychodrama, the protagonists act out situations which are relevant to their problems or needs in a group situation. This helps them to develop new ways of dealing with problems and to become more creative and expressive in everyday life. Whereas in psychoanalysis, the clients recount their experiences, in psychodrama they act them out in a ‘theatre of therapy’ so that they can live more effectively in the ‘theatre of life’. Their perceptions of themselves are acted out and explored so that they can gain a better understanding of themselves.

Psychodrama brings to the surface feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or facets of a situation that clients did not consciously realise existed, thus helping them to find viable solutions to problems. Psychodrama is concerned not only with ‘dark’ emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, resentment, etc) but can also be used for illustration, enhancement or celebration. (Williams 1989, 3-7)

Psychodrama works through a very specific framework. It is set up as a series of role-playing situations with each session depending upon interaction between four elements: the director, who is the therapist; the protagonist, who is the client; the auxiliary egos;
and the doubles. A fifth element is the therapeutic group or audience members who identify with the protagonist's dilemma and share their own similar experiences during the closing, a phase of the process that allows participants to debrief and return to the 'real' world without leaving unresolved issues or feelings.

In each session there is the central protagonist who is the subject of the psychodramatic enactment. "Whether he is acting as client, patient, student, trainee, group member, or other form of participant, when a person portrays his own life situation, he is the protagonist." (Blatner 1973, 6-7) In the conventional theatre, there exists a distance, or binary relationship, between actor and character. This distance can increase or decrease depending on the style of acting being employed - Brechtian vs Stanislavskian, or comic vs tragic, but it is always present to some degree. (Boal, Rainbow 1995, 23-27) For the protagonists in psychodrama, this distance does not exist. They present themselves as the characters. While the protagonist is the 'I', what the protagonist presents on the psychodramatic stage is the 'other-I'. The two Is are seemingly separated in time and space due to the dichotomy produced by the aesthetic space. However, they are actually fused together as one, and the distance between them is conceptually non-existent.

The director acts as therapist - they allow the action to unfold however it will and only gently guides the protagonist and auxiliaries through the psychodramatic process. They do not impose a script, or their own view of how the action should proceed. They are there to gather information as the protagonists move through the session, to look for significant clues, patterns and repeated actions so they can further help the protagonist understand themselves or the situation with which they are faced. The autonomy of the
individual is always present and honoured; the protagonist explores, the director remains as a guide. (Goldman, Morrison 1984, 13)

The auxiliary egos are anyone besides the protagonist and the director who take part in the session. They usually portray someone in the protagonists' lives or another part of the protagonists themselves (Blatner 1973, 6-7) or can represent values, virtues, morals or abstract concepts. (Goldman, Morrison 1984, 11-15)

The auxiliaries are the ‘audience’ which in a psychodrama is never passive - merely watching the drama unfold – but rather become active participants. If not directly involved in the session, then their input is solicited as part of the debriefing or closure.

The psychodrama itself is divided into three basic sections: the warm-up, the enactment and the closing. The ‘warm-up’ is the first step in the psychodrama session and is a vital and integral part of the whole process. Before beginning the enactment, the group must be acclimatised to each other, the director, and the work to be done. It is also just as important for the director to warm-up to his/her role (and to the group) as for the group as a whole to develop a sense of trust with each other. This trust is essential for the group to work well together. If trust in each other and in the director is not established, the session can break down and the protagonist will not achieve anything. The warm-up not only prepares everyone but acts as a stepping stone to the consequences of the action. The goal, or purpose, is for a protagonist to emerge from the group ready to work. It must lead to a concrete situation in which the protagonist finds him/herself "face to face with his fellow man." (Goldman, Morrison 1984, 11-15)
Following the warm-up, the enactment proper can take place during which the scene is acted out with the director looking for clues, patterns, etc. Several different techniques can be used during the enactment to gain insight and understanding of the protagonist's problem and, hopefully, to find a solution.

One technique commonly used in aiding protagonists in discovering an awareness of their own situation is that of role reversal. (Blatner 1973, 11) Here protagonists take the position of someone else who is significant in their lives in order to understand the other person better, sees themselves from a different angle, and move away from egocentricity, becoming more aware of the broader scope. They see themselves as others do and see others that might have been previously judged wrongly in their true (or truer) light. Role reversal removes the blinders and corrects 'tunnel vision'. (Goldman, Morrison 1984, 11)

The essence of these psychodramatic techniques is summed up by Augusto Boal when he says,

> In our daily lives we are the centre of our universe and we look at facts and people from a single perspective, our own. On (the psychodramatic) stage, we continue to see the world as we have always seen it, but now we also see it as others see it: we see ourselves as we see ourselves, and we see ourselves as we are seen. To our own point of view we add others, as if we are able to look at the earth from the earth, where we live, and also from the moon, the sun, a satellite, or the stars. In daily life, we see the situation; on stage, we see ourselves and we see the situation we are in. (Boal, Rainbow 26)

The protagonists see themselves and their situation through the eyes of the auxiliaries and in gaining this valuable perspective - seeing themselves both as themselves and as others see them - they are able to triumph over their situation.

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1 Other techniques include the double, soliloquy, and multiple doubles, all of which help to facilitate the protagonist gaining the same sort of paradigm shift as in role-reversal. (Blatner 10)
The last, and perhaps most essential, phase of the psychodramatic session is the closing. Once the enactment has taken place, support needs to be given. This can be through ego-building, sharing, and the judicious use of physical contact, such as hugging or holding. (Blatner 1973, 82-86)

Of all the techniques, the most important is that of sharing:

It is very important for both group members and the protagonist to have a time of sharing. Not only does this provide mutual support, but misunderstanding which may have arisen during the session can then be clarified through the opportunity for questions and feedback. (Blatner 1973, 85)

During sharing, other members of the group express past or present conflicts of their own that relate to what the protagonist has enacted and the feelings that they too have felt.

The feedback while sharing must focus on support and the self-disclosure of the group members. The protagonist is very vulnerable to judgment in this phase of the psychodramatic process so the director must keep the sharing session from becoming a potentially humiliating analysis of the protagonist.

If a protagonist has left himself particularly vulnerable, the director should make sure the group gives him/her additional support - i.e. an 'ego-building' session where each member of the group tells him/her something he/she likes about the protagonist.

Besides sharing and providing support, the closing session can be used for a variety of things. One is to clear up any unfinished business. It is important that unexpressed feelings be spoken out. It isn't necessary to resolve anything, just express it.
Closing can also be used to deal with separation. Often group members form an emotional bond with each other and may be unwilling to break it. One way of dealing with the separation in closing is to ask the group to form a close circle. Each person then looks at the other and says goodbye. If time is short, they can all do it at the same time, instead of one at a time. During closing, it is important to leave nothing up in the air. All loose-ends must be tied-up. It is here that solutions to the problem, found through the enactment, are solidified, egos are built up, and loose ends tied together. (Blatner 1973, 82-86)

What appears on the psychodrama stage is not a clear, cohesive scene. It is not a linear progression of a scripted occurrence. It is a stop-start process of the working out of a personal situation. The psychodrama enactment is a process, not a result. The result is the protagonist better understanding himself, his situation, and his environment.

**Sociodrama**

Sociodrama is another form of drama therapy developed by Jacob Moreno. Its concept, methodology and outcomes are similar to those of psychodrama, but its focus differs. Moreno believed that each person enacts several roles in his/her life. Those roles are each composed of collective and individual components. The collective components are those things that are common to all people enacting that role. The individual components are those unique ways each individual carries out those roles. The example given by Sternberg and Garcia in *Sociodrama: Who's In Your Shoes* (1989, 5) is that of a police officer.

Police officers fill out parking tickets; they arrest suspects; they attend to crime victims. These are role aspects police officers share. However, while all police learn to perform these common skills attendant to their role, each officer has unique styles of performing these functions. Thus one officer may first attend to a rape victim's physical and
emotional state, while another will move quickly to collect information to apprehend the rapist.

While Moreno developed psychodrama to address conflicts arising from the individual components of the role, he developed sociodrama to address those arising from the collective components. Psychodrama works with real situations that the individual faces; sociodrama works out hypothetical problems that represent a situation that might be common to the group. "At no time in a sociodrama session would the group act out a specific member’s problem or real-life situation. Rather, the group chooses a hypothetical situation to explore its shared underlying issues." (Sternberg, Garcia 1989, 6)

Sociodrama has as its goals three things: catharsis, insight, and role training (in the Morenian sense of the term). When feelings are pent up inside, a person generally has difficulty dealing with a situation which provokes those feelings. By releasing these emotions, there is not only immediate release (and relief) but a greater awareness of and ability to deal with those situations which cause those emotions. The main difference between Aristotelean catharsis and sociodramatic catharsis is that in the former, only the audience experiences the release. In sociodrama, both the enactor and the spectator are transformed.

The second goal of sociodrama is insight. Insight is defined as the 'Aha' experience. It occurs when a participant gains a fresh perspective on an old problem. He/she suddenly realised, in a flash of inspiration, what the problem has been and thus is enabled to deal appropriately with similar situations in the future.

The third goal, role-training, is relatively self-explanatory. This enables people to 'try out' a role before actually undertaking it. The pressures, stresses, and difficulties of
particular jobs are enacted in order to prepare the participant to face them in reality. For example, a prison guard can practice handling difficult prisoners before actually confronting the real situation. (Sternberg, Garcia 1989, 23)

These three goals provide a holistic approach to therapy. Catharsis deals with the emotions, insight with the mind and role-training with the body. Any one on its own can be beneficial, but taken together, they have the power to create significant and lasting change.

***

From these two, related, strands of drama therapy (psycho/sociodrama), we can begin to understand how theatrical conventions may combine with psychology to provide therapists with powerful tools for exploring both individual and communal problems. Dramatic expression enables protagonists to explore problems and develop solutions in ways that transcend the limitations imposed by psychoanalysis.

Arts practitioners and therapists alike have been able to draw upon the legacy left us by Moreno, in the forms of psychodrama and sociodrama, and apply them to their own various fields of practice. The work of Moreno shows us the transformative role drama has taken in 20th century psychology. Therapy has borrowed from theatre and used drama as an applied art to effect change - either social or individual. Other practitioners have taken this concept and applied drama to various forms of therapies with similar outcomes. In each case, though, it has been therapy borrowing from theatre. Eventually the relationship becomes cyclical with theatre borrowing back from therapy but to understand
this relationship, we will look at a continuation of the cycle with the work of Shechner and Boal.

AUGUSTO BOAL AND RICHARD SCHECHNER

Drama therapy works primarily because it makes imagined or possible situations ‘real’ to the protagonist. By working through either hypothetical or actual situations, he/she is able to experience not only the predicament but several possible/probable outcomes and experience the consequences of certain actions. Because most of the senses are engaged, the scene is internalised by the protagonist and becomes an alternate reality wherein variations are safely explored.

The work of both Augusto Boal and Richard Schechner further the relationship between theatre, therapy and transformational processes.

Richard Schechner: The Entertainment-Efficacy Braid

In his book *Performance Theory*, Schechner discusses the close relationship between ritual, theatre and life. He argues that drama and ritual are closely linked and that tribal societies use ritualised dramatic events to define their culture, their values and their way of life - much as drama did for Ancient Greek society. In many cases, a ritualised, dramatic event replaces a ‘real’ event in the tribal culture in order to maintain relationships and cultural differences in safe, protected ways.

One such ritual Schechner observed occurred at Kurmugl, in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. This ritual - which consisted of a pig kill and dance - was established
to inhibit warfare and bloodshed amongst feudal groups while still retaining the antagonism which was vital to each tribes' cultural identity.

The festival consisted of a dance which ritualised and 'replaced' warfare. The celebration took two days - the first included arriving, setting up residences, and digging cooking ovens. All those gathered on the first day were from one tribe (the host). The rival, enemy tribe (the guests) arrived the second day. At the start of the second day, pigs were killed, butchered and the meat cooked. Hosts and guests dressed and adorned themselves in a way that was very competitive. Then came the performance - the dancing.

The ritual of the celebration is quite intricate. It is based on a system of 'payback' (pidgin for fulfilling a ritual obligation). The host is in a debtor relationship to the guests. What they give to their guests (pig meat) must be seen to exceed what they owe. Thus the relationship changes. The guests become debtors to the hosts thus ensuring another ritual will take place and the cycle will continue.

Because of the debtor-creditor system, the guests come to the celebration not as guests, in our Western sense of the word, but as an invading army demanding what is theirs. The dancing and feastng are a ritual enactment of war. During the festival, the status of the groups change:

ACTUALITY 1 —► TRANSFORMATION —► ACTUALITY 2

| Hosts are in debt to invaders | Invaders are in debt to hosts |

(Schechner 1977, 118)
The performance (killing pigs, dancing, giving/taking of meat) both symbolised and actualised the change. The performance was the only process accepted by the tribes besides war itself. When the two groups merge in the dancing circle, there is an equalizing of all differences wherein exchange can take place.

**War Parties**
- Human Victims
- Battledress
- Combat

**transformed into**

**Dancing Groups**
- Pig Meat
- Costumes
- Dancing

**Two Groups**
- Debtors
- Creditors

**One Group**
- Creditors
- Debtors

(Schechner 1977, 119)

The transformations above the line convert dangerous encounters into theatrical enactments. Those below the line effect transformation from one actuality to another. Those below can only take place either by war or by the ritual encompassing those transformations above the line.

All transformations, however, are temporary. The ritual must continue or the war that it replaces will become actual rather than representational. The debtor-creditor system ensures that the performance will occur again next year.

The pig-kill and dance at Kurumugl is a case of ritual theatre replacing actual war. A dangerous situation is replaced by a celebration with a minimum of danger and a maximum of pleasure. Performing was the mode of achieving ‘real results’. The dancing does not celebrate or mark the results; it does not precede or follow the
exchange - it is the means of making the transformations below the line take place. It is the means by which ‘war’ can take place with no actual bloodshed. (Schechner 1977, 106-152)

The purification of evil to save the collective occurs in a theatrical representation, not in reality. ‘Ritual’ replaces ‘factual’. In a tribal society, wrongs can be brought to light and righted through the representational model of the theatre rather than through actual bloodshed.

The festival at Kurmugl, as in psychodrama, acted out potentially dangerous situations in order to discover solutions within a safe atmosphere - without bloodshed, as it were - since several safeguards are built in and solutions are found without liability. In both, we see the ritual (or drama) replacing the actual (war or confrontation) and providing all concerned with acceptable outcomes.

Augusto Boal: Theatre of the Oppressed

In The Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal echoes the notion that drama can replace the reality and facilitate an exploration of that reality that provides solutions and outcomes that, if not real themselves, provide a foundation for the creation of that reality.

Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action! (Boal, Oppressed 1979, 122)

Boal divides theatre into two strands: the Aristotelian and the Brechtian. The poetics of Aristotle’s theatre is one in which the audiences allow the characters on stage to think or act for them. Through this cathartic process, the audience is instructed by the actors as
to how to think, act or feel. In the poetics of the Brechtian theatre, the audience still
delегates this authority to the performers, but also retains the right to formulate their
own opinions, thoughts and feelings. Thus, the Brechtian model serves to awaken the
critical consciousness of its audience.

In Boal's poetics of the Oppressed, however, the audience becomes a part of the action.
No passive role is considered. There is no delegation of authority to act or think for
them. They, themselves, become the protagonists and become integral to the dramatic
action: "[the spectator turned protagonist] tries out solutions, discusses plans for change
- in short, trains himself for real action." (Boal, *Oppressed* 1979, 122)

Boal's plans for changing the spectator into protagonist are outlined in four stages:

1. Knowing the Body
2. Making the Body expressive
3. The theatre as language (further divided into 3 degrees)
   a. Simultaneous dramaturgy
   b. Image theatre
   c. Forum theatre
4. The theatre as discourse  (Boal, *Oppressed* 1979, 126)

While Boal's four stages of transformation were originally designed to empower
oppressed citizens of a revolutionary regime, in them can be seen the same basic
elements that make up Moreno's psychodrama or Schechner's Kurmugl festival.

Boal suggests in his first two stages that our daily roles in life create a muscular
structure which is work specific - different people carry themselves and act differently
depending on the role they play out in their lives. The example he uses is that of an
army general and a cardinal - one walks softly enjoying the 'celestial music' and may be
seen talking calmly to birds, while the other blusters and crashes his way through -
shouting and expecting obedience. Thus their muscular structures become bound to their way of life. For Boal, it is important to first break down this role-specific structure and enable participants to use other areas of their bodies to convey other roles. This is achieved through first getting people to understand their body structures and how they work and then secondly, getting them to use them in different, unaccustomed ways. (Boal, *Oppressed* 1979, 126-131)

'Knowing the body' and 'making the body expressive' are similar to the warm-up and scene setting stages of the psychodrama as well as the arrival, preparation and adornment stages at Kurmugl. Each is concerned with a preparation for the transforming work ahead. To go straight into the enactment without the warm-up or without setting the scene, or to go straight into the dancing and feasting without preparing the food or the body, is relatively pointless. These first stages mentally and physically prepare the protagonists for the work ahead.

A primary part of the 'war' at Kurmugl is the game of one-upmanship the tribesmen embark on by their ritual costuming before the festival proper. This provides an essential conflict which then culminates in a need to 'fight-it-out' - which they do in the enactment of the dance which ritually substitutes for the actual fighting. Without properly setting the scene - preparing the battle ground, cooking the pigs (which, as we've said before, plays an important part in the balance of power therefore ensuring the continuation of the cycle) and ornamenting their bodies - then there is no 'conflict' to 'fight over'
With any sort of work wherein a protagonist must explore his/her inner self with the help of others, it is essential that a bond of trust envelop the group. Without this trust, something will always be held back, rendering the cathartic release or awakening of the self-consciousness improbable. Boal's stages of 'knowing the body' and 'making it expressive' lay essential groundwork both physically and psychically. They provide the means of achieving the bonding and trust necessary to make the group function - as do the warm-up and scene setting in psychodrama and the preparation and ornamentation stages of the Kurmugl festival.

The third stage in Boal's transformation is akin to the enactment in psychodrama and the dancing at Kurmugl. Once the participants are mentally and physically prepared for the work, the enactment takes place. For Boal, this can take one of three forms - each of which build upon the other thus in essence giving participants even more time to become familiar with a strange and new way of working. For Boal, members of the audience either offer suggestions for how the actors should approach the situation and allow the actors to then work through each suggested solution until one is found that the group agrees is appropriate (simultaneous dramaturgy), or a spectator joins the group and physically changes the action as it unfolds - he/she 'sculpts' the scene with images using those present on the stage to tell the story as he/she feels it should be told (Image theatre), or, as in Forum theatre, the spectator him/herself becomes the actor and leads the action in the direction he/she feels it should progress. (Boal, *Oppressed* 1979, 126-142)

For Moreno's psychodrama, the degrees of Boal's third stage are similar to the various techniques at the disposal of the director and auxiliaries. Suggestions can be made by
director or spectators that the protagonist then explores, or similarly auxiliaries can lead the protagonist through words or actions, down avenues of exploration wherein various solutions can be experimented with to ascertain possible consequences of each action.

At Kurmugl, the enactment is the dance - or simulated war - wherein the competition erupts into ‘fighting’ the bloodlust demanded by the feud is sated, honour is restored, and the cycle's continuance is assured.

Boal's fourth stage enables the oppressed people to continue their ‘revolution’ and provides them with the tools for further empowerment, breaking of repression, and deconstruction of unwanted propaganda. It enables them to apply to the real world, what was discovered in the substitute world of the enactment. In the closure of a psychodrama, the group, and especially the protagonist, is reaffirmed and armed with skills to confront their reality and put into place in their everyday lives the steps necessary to achieve the solutions discovered through the session. For the tribesmen at Kurmugl, honour is restored and the feasting begins. Within the structure of the festival is the assurance that at closure, the mechanisms are put into place that ensure the propagation of the cycle.

All three of these examples (Moreno, Schechner, Boal) have at their end an idea of continuation - of solutions being viable in the real world and of skills learned carrying over beyond the physical area of the exercise. The reality is transformed into a ritual replacement. The skills learned in the rehearsal are then transformed back into the reality.
THREE THEORIES OF CATHARSIS

Central to the work of all three men is the idea of transformation, enabled due to some sort of catharsis. Simply defined, catharsis is a purging of an agent of disturbance. Boal’s explanation of catharsis goes beyond this to divide catharsis into four distinct categories, with the idea of purgation, however, being the common factor - medical catharsis, wherein elements or causes of physical, psychological or psychosomatic suffering are purged; 'Morenian' catharsis which is based in the medical use of the term wherein a psychological purgation occurs having as its goal the health and happiness of the individual; Aristotelian catharsis which is centred in audience identification (particularly fear and pity) and catharsis in the Theatre of the Oppressed. (Boal, Rainbow 1995, 70-73) It is the last two which bear closer inspection.

Aristotelian catharsis is tragic catharsis. Its basis lies in the rituals of the Ancient Greek theatre, which have given rise to Western Society’s notion of the conventional theatre - although much of the concept of catharsis has been left behind or ignored. In this form of theatre, a spectator joins the actor on a journey during which spectators identify with the character on stage. They experience and feel what the character experiences/feels so that when they suffer or experience a change of fortune, the spectators endure that same experience but with foresight: dramatic irony. Thus the moral and legal bounds of the society are re-inforced and order is maintained. The problem with this sort of catharsis, according to Boal, is that is is "disempowering and tranquilising - (it) seeks, by means of catharsis, to adapt the individual to society. For those who are happy with the values of that society, obviously this form of catharsis is useful. But are we always happy with all of Society's values?" (Boal, Rainbow 1995, 71-72)
This type of catharsis is obviously not ideally suited to a type of drama therapy that seeks to arm people against oppression - whether that be a person's own psyche preventing them from achieving mental health and/or happiness (as in Morneo's work), or whether is be arming a nation of peasants against an oppressive government regime (Boal), or simply preventing bloodshed (Schechner).

For Boal, the ideal catharsis is of the type which he claims occurs in his Theatre of the Oppressed. It is a "catharsis of detrimental blocks". (Boal, Rainbow 1995, 72) The 'spectators' of Aristotelian tragedy are eliminated and replaced with 'spect-actors' - people who are intimately involved with the process. (Boal, Rainbow 1995, 72) No one thinks or acts in the place of those taking part in the session. What is created is a rehearsal for real action. The blocks are purged and the participants are able to search for and 'try-out' various scenarios until they discover the solution for their situation which they can then put into place in real life. (Boal, Rainbow 1995, 70-73)

In psychodrama, the catharsis is Morenian. A psychological problem, or poison, is purged thus allowing the protagonist to move into a fuller, happier life. For Moreno, the cathartic process in the psychodrama "produces a healing effect – not in the spectator (secondary catharsis) but in the producer-actors who produce the drama and, at the same time, liberate themselves from it." (Hodgson 1977, 139) He asserts that the notion of catharsis underwent a revolutionary change once he began systematic work on the psychodrama by moving away from the written drama (Aristotelian catharsis) and towards the spontaneous drama. For Moreno, as for Boal, the key is the move of the spectator away from merely watching to that of an active participant – from spectator to actor. (Hodgson 1977, 139)
Moreno cites two major influences on the psychodramatic catharsis: the Aristotelian catharsis and a religious catharsis which emerged from the East and Near East. As discussed, the Aristotelian catharsis is a passive one. The religious view is one of needing to ‘do’ something – the “process of catharsis was localised in the actor, his actual life becoming the stage.” (Hodgson 1977, 139). From the ancient Greeks, Moreno drew on the traditions of the stage drama. From the East and Near East, he drew on the notion of catharsis localised within the actor himself. These concepts combined led Moreno to develop the catharsis found in psychodrama – where elements of the drama are applied to therapy to create a situation where the protagonist lives through the experience, creating a cathartic purging within himself, thus creating growth and/or change within his psyche. Catharsis takes place and leaves, in its wake, a process of healing.

For the tribesmen at Kurmugl, the catharsis occurs at the point where the debtor-creditor transformation occurs. The victor is vanquished in the ‘battle’ to the role of conquered. The blood lust becomes satisfied and the tribes are purged of their need to fight. This sort of catharsis aligns itself well with Boal's notion of catharsis in the Theatre of the Oppressed. It is not a psychological impediment to happiness which is removed, nor is it coercive and non-participatory as is Aristotelian catharsis. Instead, the spectators are intimately involved in the festival and what is purged are the blockages to the dynamism of the relationship between the two tribes.
CONCLUSION

These three men - Boal, Schechner and Moreno - have, through varying techniques, created a means by which drama is taken out of its context as conventional theatre - and returned to its more ritualistic roots. By keeping intact the power inherent in the cathartic experience while at the same time stripping the theatre of its coercive actor-spectator relationship, drama is used as an applied art form in which its application to therapy has created a new context, a new form and a new use.

Individuals and groups of people are able to rehearse modes of being and explore consequences of action in a safe and protected environment so that they might discover a practical method of dealing with real-life situations. As Boal says:

The rehearsal of an action is in itself an action, the practice of an action then to be practised in real life. (Boal, *Rainbow* 1995, 72).

People such as Dorothy Heathcote, Dr Jacob Moreno, Augusto Boal, Richard Schechner and many others, have striven to do away with the gap between actor and audience and make the spectator into an integral part of the action, or at least give them back their access to the cathartic process. As Heathcote says,

who knows what energies may be released in us for greater sensitivity, greater comprehension, new knowledge of our society and other men (and even of ourselves) and of new awareness of our relationships with those near to us in the community in which we live. (Hodgson 1977, 159)

The work of these three practitioners has given the fields of therapy and education valuable tools to effect a cathartic, and thereby transformational, process. However, the efficacy of the applied drama is limited to the small groups actively participating in the processes. The Aristotelian notion of theatre as a transformational ritual for society has
a very different scope from that of the smaller, individually focused, sessions of the therapist using applied drama.

Since establishing the effectiveness of drama in therapy/education, other practitioners have continued the cyclical relationship between theatre and therapy or between theatre and education by borrowing 'back' from these arenas to create theatre, in the conventional sense, which is also transformational.

The attempt is being made to once again make the theatre an integral part of our society, and our psyche – to make it work for social well-being and individual mental health. The proscenium arch is being torn down and the drama is being given back its life – which in turn is giving participants and societies, people and communities, back their lives. The effects of the Aristotelian drama have not been lost to our society – we are just rediscovering it in other forms which will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 2
CURRENT PRACTICE IN TRANSFORMATIONAL DRAMA:

THREE MODELS

Theatre allows us to converse with our souls – to passionately pursue and discover ways of living with ourselves and others. We are all artists, and theatre is a language. We have no better way to work together, to learn about each other, to heal and to grow.

(Rohd 1998, xix)

The catharsis found in ancient performances and utilised by 20th century therapists and educators, is again being actively used in contemporary theatrical performances (rather than being a happenstance byproduct of productions). This type of theatre can create the impetus for social change on a broad scale rather than being limited to the direct participants of applied drama. It is theatre that involves the ‘audience’ in a variety of responsive activities short of actual participation and while passive on the physically participatory level; the audience is not inactive on the emotional, attitudinal or intellectual levels. Audience members could leave the theatre having undergone a significant change in perceptions, values and/or ideas – a cathartic response which draws from all three theories of catharsis. This transformation on the individual level, when the process has a collective result, has further effects on the levels of community, society and culture.

COMMUNITY THEATRE

In Great Britain, in response to the turbulence of the times (student protests, the Vietnam War, race riots, and other socio/political concerns), ‘Underground’ theatre groups proliferated, with some pinpointing the movement’s exact origins to the year 1968. By the early 70s, theatres catering to this new form opened seemingly everywhere, thus creating a viable infrastructure for alternative theatre. Secondary to
this infrastructure were two other events – the beginnings of subsidies for alternative theatre by the Arts Council and in September, 1968, the Theatres Act was passed which circumvented the Lord Chamberlain’s role as censor – which enabled alternative theatre (out of which community theatre grew) to become established beyond its conception and infancy into a movement of some consequence. (Craig 1980, 14-16) The new alternative theatre was divided into five categories: political theatre, community theatre, theatre-in-education, performance art and the more vaguely defined ‘companies that perform plays’. (Craig 1980, 20). The division that became defined as ‘community theatre’ gained its footings between 1970-72 with a large number of companies taking theatre outside traditional, or even fringe, venues and into community spaces – senior citizens homes, working men’s clubs, and even streets. The movement was characterised by the various companies’ desire to perform to different, non-theatre audiences, and to engage them in a relationship of sorts. Its qualifying factors have been identified as a group which “should have a base in, identify itself with and be identified with, a certain distinct area” (Craig 1980, 62), a base which is not referring necessarily to a physical building but rather an ideological relationship with the community, and secondly, the group must produce performances with content relevant to the community with that being defined as “bearing upon, connected with and pertinent to.” (Craig 1980, 63)

Picking up on those qualifiers, community theatre can be defined as theatre ‘for’ and ‘in’ the community it serves (Rohd 1998, ix-xi). It can, however, be separated from the notion of the commercial, mainstream, theatre by its relationship to its constituents in that audiences are participatory in some part of the process rather than taking the role of ‘passive consumers’. (Binns 1991, 121) The relationship between the company and community can be defined as a combination of four operational approaches: making
theatre ‘for’; making theatre ‘with’; taking theatre ‘to’; and mounting theatre ‘in’.
(Kershaw 1992, 244). These four methodologies show a need for theatre to connect to
its audiences – to facilitate a cathartic or celebratory process that meets a community’s
needs. The project is born out of an initial desire to celebrate or change the status quo –
a need is identified, a project is embarked on that meets that need, and the result
presented to the community to address that need. Through this process, the community
becomes engaged on several levels – working in, contributing to, and being changed by
the production, a collective change among individuals leading to a community
transformation. The integration between community and theatre company permeates
both process and product, allowing for a theatre, which, by its nature, becomes a
catalyst for change.

In Australia, community theatre grew out of the labour movement – an attempt to bring
art to the workers. (Binns 1991, 19-29). Its link with the Whitlam government, which
created the Community Arts Committee of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1973
(Binns 1991, 19) may seem at odds with the notion that community theatre exists as an
anti-establishment movement. However, in Australia, community theatre is strongly
linked with the government bodies which fund it. As Binns’ purports,

[this] suggests a clearer reason for a deliberate lack of definition of the central term
‘community’ in the battle to have the movement recognized as worthy of a share of the
arts funding dollar. (Binns 1991, 55)

The notion of ‘Community Theatre’ relates to a “shared attentiveness to social and
cultural specificities of a ‘community’, variously defined.” (Binns 1991, 120-121)
“Community [can be] people connected by common oppressions, common struggles
and common goals”. (Rohd 1998, x) therefore ‘communities’ can be defined by
ideological, as well as geographical, borders. Each community has a series of signs,
symbols or codes which all accept as common. Plays, which affect those communities,
make use of those signifiers to communicate at the level of collective consciousness of the community. (Kershaw 1992, 31-35) This system of communication allows for ideological exchanges between performer and audience in a language understood on a deeper level than the cognitive as its framework, with borders and boundaries defined by those signifiers used. An ideological community will have a more open relationship with the production whereas a geographical community – which will incorporate various ideological sub-communities – may have more trouble as the system of signifiers, limited to geography, do not have the same reach as those linked to ideology, especially if the material of the play taps into tensions between opposing ideological sub-cultures of the geographic community. (Kershaw 1992, 245-246)

Whatever signifiers are used (ideological, geographic, social, etc), for community theatre to be effective, the company must rely on the basic definition for ‘community theatre’ – theatre for, by, in, and/or with the community.

CLAIMS FOR EFFICACY OF COMMUNITY THEATRE AND THE TIE/COMMUNITY THEATRE CROSSOVER/NEXUS

Over the history of community theatre in Australia, claims have been made regarding its effects and efficacy. Short-term effects are more easily documented although they rely on immediate audience feedback and consist of mostly anecdotal evidence. Long-term effects are difficult to determine in any quantitative form. Models have so far not been developed to adequately measure and report on the efficacy of community arts projects over a longer time frame. However, there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence, which suggests that there ‘is’ a long-term effect to community arts projects. (Kershaw 1992, 21)
The efficacy of community theatre as cultural intervention works on both micro and macro levels: the micro level causes change to the individual which then filters through those individual experiences to cause change at a macro level to community/society. (Kershaw 1992, 1-3) The collective responses of individuals which are linked to a wider historical or cultural development of their community determine the community response on a cultural or societal level. Collective individual responses – shared experiential transformation – equals a communal transformation affecting the wider group. This is the strength of community theatre that taps into communal signifiers to produce this collective transformation. The efficacy of such transactions is accepted, if not well documented in quantitative formats.

The efficacy of community theatre is related to how we, as humans, learn, as our cognitive processes play into the cathartic process, especially where part of the experiential process of the production is facilitated through education. It is here that the way humans learn intersects with Transformational Drama in that there can exist a cross-over between the genres of community theatre and Theatre-In-Education (TIE) in that Transformational Drama often utilises didactic methodologies to achieve its objectives. The educational component of these genres plays into the general acceptance that exists of the efficacy of community theatre, as established by the work of Heathcote and others through their work in Theatre-In-Education. While separate types of theatre, both community and TIE have a common ground in this approach and in the resulting efficacy.

Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, likens the contemporary educational system evidenced in our schools as mostly based on a banking system of education where students are receptacles for information (bank account) and teachers fill them
(make deposits). It is a system wherein the teacher knows all, the students nothing. It is a system that encourages rote memorisation without any real understanding of how or why. (Freire 1972, 43-47) This is a simplistic analogy and there are myriad educational practices which are beyond this narrow definition, however, Freire makes a point about the standard of education today. There is a tendency to rote learning where the teacher imparts and the students receive. As Freire states, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world.” (Freire 1972, 47) People learn most effectively by doing, rather than being told or shown. (Rohd 1998, xvii). This experiential learning is the foundation of both community theatre and Theatre-In-Education.

The work of Dorothy Heathcote taps into this notion of experiential learning rather than banking learning and furthers it by using drama as the vehicle for experience. There is a recognition that people regularly use drama to cope with new or unsettling experiences by rehearsing in their minds different explorations of scenarios to “learn to live with and accept an experience that has been disturbing.” (Wagner 1999, 4) Heathcote explains that she is “not engaging in creative drama, role playing, psychodrama or sociodrama (the applied dramatic methodologies discussed in Chapter One) but rather consciously employing the elements of drama...to bring out what children already know but do not yet know they know.” (Wagner 1999, 1)

Heathcote, and others like her, use drama as a means of exploration, of trial and error, of rehearsal (much as Boal does in Theatre of the Oppressed) all as a means of facilitating learning. As Wagner says, “Apparently all human beings except the most severely damaged or psychotic have the capacity to identify and through this process to gain new
There is a documented and established recognition that drama can assist the educational process on a level that goes beyond the cognitive to the experiential thereby allowing a learning process that goes beyond intellectual recognition to a possibly cathartic experience that causes not just learning, but transformation through that learning. For community theatre to fulfil its brief to create change within its community, whether it be through empowerment, catharsis, or confrontation, it needs to, at some level, educate its audiences as to what the problem/issue/concept is; why it needs to be changed; and how it can be changed. Through education, in the experiential sense rather than in the banking sense, theatre can transform and so here exists the nexus between the efficacy of ‘Community Theatre’ and TIE, and it is here, in this efficacy, that we see both become Transformational Drama.

**TRANSFORMATIONAL DRAMA**

In looking at community theatre we gain a sense of a theatre that can substantially contribute to or facilitate community change thus completing the cyclical relationship between drama and therapy/education. Transformational Drama, however, goes beyond the ideological or geographical limitations of ‘community’. Community Theatre, TIE, or conventional, mainstream theatre are the ‘forms’ whereas Transformational Drama is the ‘effect’, one which can be achieved by ‘any’ genre or type of theatre. Transformational Drama is theatre which sets out to create change but is not limited to being by, for or with a particular group or community, but rather works on any level – social, community, or wider general population and with any type of theatre.

The key to transformational drama is the notion of intertextuality. Community Theatre is particularly subject to contextuality which, while increasing the efficacy in the
community from which the project emerges, can limit the broader outcomes of transformational drama particularly outside the original community. As Kershaw states, “There are two main ways of describing the shortcomings of a deliberately localised contextuality: either it reduces the appeal of performance to relatively small numbers of spectators; or it prevents performance from successfully travelling beyond its original source.” (Kershaw 1992, 249). He also states that “the context of performance directly affects its perceived ideological meaning.” (Kershaw 1992, 33) in that the same show may have very different effects depending on which community it is presented to. Community Theatre can be transformational for the community for, with and in which it is created. Transformational Drama can go beyond the limitations this imposes through its use of intertextuality. Kershaw defines several strategies to avoid the narrow limitations of contextuality:

1. Construct text so that audiences do not need to be members of the original community to understand its full significance
2. Where individual shows may not transfer to the wider audience, the methodology used to create them may be used as a model for new contexts.
3. Deal with ideological questions which have relevance to communities elsewhere or the culture as a whole. (Kershaw 1992, 249-250).

In essence, these strategies are the starting point for creating a theatre that goes beyond the contextuality of community theatre and reaches the intertextuality of transformational drama.

In order to fully explore this interconnection, we will look at three methodologies of creating community theatre that is transformational in nature – Verbatim Theatre, TIE, and Devised Theatre. Specific plays within each methodology will be presented which show the effects of each on their community. In addition to fitting the profile of ‘Community Theatre’ each example has also made the transference from geographic/ideological specific productions to a general public audience which provides illustration as to the issues involved with the broader scope of transformational drama.
VERBATIM THEATRE: AFTERSHOCKS

On 28 December 1989, an earthquake struck the NSW mining city of Newcastle, causing extensive damage (including the collapse of the Newcastle Worker's Club) and a number of fatalities. While the ensuing chaos affected many lives in a variety of ways, the damage to the Club and the lives lost, seems to stand out as a symbol of the wider devastation of Newcastle physically, socially and emotionally. Part of Newcastle's identity as a community is tied-up with its Union Movement and the Worker's Club as a focus of and for their movement.

While there was a plethora of media coverage of the event itself and the days immediately following the earthquake, not as much has been reported or documented about the year following the disaster. Many people, one year later, were still trying to rebuild homes and lives. The people of Newcastle were still looking for closure but were unable to attain it - with some estimates stating that it would be close to ten years before lives returned to ‘normal’.

Aftershocks was developed for the community of Newcastle to engage the local population in a discourse on the after-effects of the Newcastle earthquake of 1989. The work is a piece of Community Theatre intended originally to be viewed by those people intimately connected with the events portrayed by the play. This sets it up as ‘immediate’ theatre (Brook) as the dramatic events portray real events which have been experienced by the audience. The potential spectators would have the shared experience of the trauma to some degree so they would be positioned to view the dramatic representation from a homogeneous perspective in the first instance. For the people of the Newcastle community for whom this play was first performed, it worked
as an instrument for social therapy. However, *Aftershocks* was also performed in Sydney at the Belvoir Street Theatre, for an audience who did not share so directly in the actual events. This audience were spectators, not connected first-hand with the subject matter, each bringing to the theatrical event very different backgrounds and expectations locating them at a remove, indicating a distinction that could well inhibit or limit identification and emotional participation. The two productions and their notionally distinct audiences will be discussed.

*Aftershocks* was developed employing the principles and practices of 'verbatim theatre'. Dr David Watt (University of Newcastle Drama Department), who was involved with the *Aftershocks* project, defines the verbatim model as "the transcribing of a number of taped interviews with members of a particular community, which [is] then [edited], [spliced] and [arranged] into a coherent shape which then implies a performance mode appropriate to the material and the broad circumstances of performance." (Watt. 9) *Aftershocks* is a very clear example of how this type of theatre operates - both in its genesis and structure and in how the community received it.

The Worker's Cultural Action Committee (WCAC), a Trades Hall sub-committee concerned with cultural development among Newcastle workers and their families, proposed a play about the earthquake that would explore the perspective of the people present at the collapse of the Club. It was decided to use taped interviews with those people as the basis for the script, employing the verbatim model of theatre which is concerned with 'playing back' to a community its own stories in such a way as to bring about a cathartic purging of emotions. This purging is Morenian in that it is designed to help individual psychic healing, and it is also akin to the catharsis which Boal promulgated in that it is intended to facilitate not only an individual healing of each
spectator, but also a collective healing of the community. Those who have shared a traumatic experience also share the feeling in that hearing their own stories returned to them in the drama enables the community to face, reflect upon and put behind them the traumatic events which they have survived. It is intended to bring the community together and enables them to see the ‘where to from here’ - in short, the drama enables closure, resolution and progress.

_Aftershocks_ was prepared for public performance on 12 November, 1991 at the Newcastle Playhouse. From the first reading, a formal draft play script was created with changes resulting from consultation with the audience of the first reading and reflects the views and ideas of those who were part of the actual events and what they felt would be beneficial to the community as a whole. (Brown. 1993, xviii) Directed by Brent McGregor and David Watt, the play was presented simply - six actors playing sixteen characters. There were no costumes - the men wore jeans and shirts with collars, the women black tights and coloured shirts. There were no props, special lighting or sound effects. The set consisted of a black background on which appeared the names of each scene in white, and a few scattered chairs. The performance concentrated on the stories, not on acting or actors. The words were the focus. When a story needed illustrating, such as the character Lyn's rescue from her office, the chairs and the actors themselves became the debris and ladders - ‘epic’ theatrical staging, not unlike that practiced by Brecht - which tends to go hand-in-hand with Community Theatre for its ideological as well as practical and economic reasons. All of these strategies were included to direct audience attention to the stories of the actual people caught in extraordinary circumstances.
Recorded responses from press reports and interviews indicated the therapeutic effects of this would seem to have been quite powerful. A community seemed to have become united in the playing of its collective experience. Individuals were helped to come to terms with the trauma they suffered and see their stories within the context of the whole and the community as a whole was given a new perspective of the earthquake and its impact. This story was 'their' story: not the authority's, not the media's, not Sydney's version, but 'theirs' and as such had the power to change their attitudes and the attitudes of others in the area who were not directly affected by the earthquake. One man initially couldn't talk about his experiences. He had been in the Club and had been badly injured in the collapse, but whenever questioned about his experience, he denied being there and insisted that he was in Queensland. However, after seeing *Aftershocks*, he dealt with his denial and finally was able to talk about his experience in the Club. (Interview, David Watt 9-11-93)

During one performance, an actor gave what David Watt has described as the longest pause in theatrical history. When asked after the performance why, the actor responded that he had been crying. He was relating the story of a person who was sitting a few rows away, a person with whom he had been friends for over twenty years. That is the type of connection and immediacy present between researchers, actors, and the people affected. Even those actors who did not meet the real people they were portraying somehow managed to represent them with a fair degree of accuracy. (Watt. Interview 9-11-93)

*Aftershocks* is an example of the power of verbatim theatre when used within the context of its own community: discovering what story the community needs to be told
and recounting it, playing it back to them, in their own words, has the capacity to liberate, empower, heal, and change the way a community thinks, feels, and acts.

The next question we need to ask is can that type of social change be effected when the play is taken outside of its own community and played to other audiences. Can the same cathartic response be evinced from an individual person or community that does not have the emotional connection or immediacy that the original community would have to its own story? Aftershocks itself may provide us with clues pertaining to this issue.

In August, 1993, Aftershocks was performed at the Belvoir Street theatre under the direction of Neil Armfield with Company B. A cast of professional actors was employed including Lynette Curran, John Jarrat, Gillian Jones, Jacqy Phillips, Jeremy Sims and Jeff Truman. The set design by Brian Thompson resembled a room in a club, complete with wall-to-wall orange motley carpet, beer table, chairs, coffee making facilities and floor to ceiling stacks of chairs along the far wall. The outside of the theatre was covered in builders' scaffolding. The lighting and sound plots were extensive and intensive and served to heighten the drama of the earthquake (strobes and rumblings which made you feel as if you were in the centre of the earthquake at that moment).

The stories were enacted in a naturalistic mode but there was more interaction between characters and more theatricality than was apparent in the Newcastle production. The inherent drama in the story was foregrounded while still attempting to keep the focus on the personal narratives themselves. However, there is some controversy initiated by
those who were involved in the original project as to whether the Belvoir production maintained the aims and intent of the WCAC's vision for the original play.

From the very beginning it was very important to the WCAC that the play be able to travel. They wanted a theatrical work that could convey to audiences outside of Newcastle the true tragedy of the earthquake and its consequences, not just what the media and others were portraying. They wanted those outside to hear the 'real' story - their story. That was the reason for using verbatim theatre - to make a piece of theatre that was similar to a documentary so that the images, ideas, and feelings could be conveyed to those who lived through the tragedy and, perhaps even more importantly, to those not directly connected to the earthquake. (Brown. Interview 15-10-93) Those who were connected with the original production felt that the Belvoir version failed this intent.

Those involved in the WCAC project protested that the Belvoir St production was one "that confirms Sydney prejudices about Newcastle," (Watt. Interview 9-11-93) in that stereotypes of the working class were rife throughout the production - thick ocker accents, flannel shirts and giggle hats, characters who were bumbling and not terribly bright, when it was claimed that the actual interviewees whose stories and character were being portrayed (and who incidentally were known to the researchers on the Newcastle project but not necessarily to those involved in the Belvoir St production) were actually middle class with clear, distinguished accents and, as David Watt puts it, "wouldn't be caught dead in flannel." (Watt. Interview 9-11-93).

The main criticism seemed to be that the Sydney production privileged the performances and performers; not the stories themselves. "The humanity of the people
from the Workers Club has been buried beneath an avalanche of thespian mannerisms.” (Longworth, *Newcastle Herald*, July 16, 1993) The hyper naturalistic mode used in the performance drew attention to itself in that the stories became secondary to the ‘naturalistic performances’ of the actors. There was criticism from David Watt (and he implied that others had expressed similar censure) that the ‘truth’ was lost and Sydney was left not with a cathartic or empathetic understanding but a spirit of voyeurism, and with this, a sense of betrayal. In one humorous anecdote it was noted that the scaffolding on the outside of the Belvoir Street theatre alone cost more than the entire Newcastle budget. (Watt. Interview 9 Nov. 93)

The disparity in opinion about the Sydney and Newcastle productions can be summed up in the following quotes:

In Sydney:

*(Aftershocks)* is important because director Neil Armfield has done it again - crafted a production that enlarges our sensibilities, our cultural vocabulary, our compassion and human contact. (Gauntlet Telegraph Mirror. 17 July 1993)

and in Newcastle:

At the end of the Newcastle production, I wept the tears of a cathartic purging. On Tuesday night in Sydney I wept again but the tears were those of anger at the injustice that has been done to *Aftershocks*, the people of the Workers Club and Newcastle. (Longworth. *Newcastle Herald*. July 16, 1993)

For those involved in the Newcastle production, *Aftershocks* was about giving voice to a community to help them come to terms with a shared tragedy, to enable a 'cathartic purging', and to empower the community in its achievement of closure on the issue. Therefore, the emphasis is on ‘truth’ - on the stories themselves, rather than the stagecraft surrounding those stories - although, to be fair, the WCAC did choose the format of a play rather than, say, simply broadcasting the interviews on radio. In
choosing a theatrical form, it must be assumed that the WCAC must have intended the stories to be told in a dramatic way (dramatic in the sense of theatrical and in the sense of the power of the portrayal of spectacular events to affect people) thus giving the stories an accessibility not only to the Newcastle audience, who can claim ownership of the tragedy, but also a wider audience who are not intimately connected to the tragedy itself in the same way a Newcastle would be once relocated. However, there comes a point when the work is not community theatre if it is not of, by, or for the community - and this is a point of departure for the Belvoir Street Production. If any two of those three elements are present, then it is still community theatre. If only one, or none, of those elements remain, then it is no longer community theatre and therefore loses that element or elements which enable social therapy to take place.

To those who had lived through the horror of the Club's collapse, or those whose lives were affected by the earthquake and for whom the destruction of the Club became a symbol for the devastation in their own lives, a simple re-telling of the stories would be enough to awaken the 'cathartic purging' of which Longworth writes. However, for an audience not personally connected to the tragedy - one that had not experienced it first-hand and therefore does not have any memories which could be summoned and drawn on to fill in the dramatic details and background of a simple, straight-forward re-telling - there must be something more in the presentation of the material to exact a catharsis on the same level as that experienced by those who had been there. Markers of the worker culture were employed in the Sydney production to transport an audience not familiar with that culture into a realm where they can begin to perceive and comprehend just how important the Worker's Club was to the community and why its destruction was such a symbol of the physical and emotional devastation throughout the whole community. The important thing about Aftershocks is the stories themselves, not
necessarily the precise mode by which they are told. Further, for different audiences to be affected by the stories, they may need to be told in different ways - not different words, but different stagecraft and modes of presentation framing those words so that they become accessible to varying audiences with different cultural, historical and social backgrounds as well as varying emotional needs to be met by the production. Works such as Bill Neskovski’s *Conqueror Cole*, Katherine Thompson’s *Diving for Pearls*, and Wendy Richardson’s *Windy Gully*, all located in Wollongong, were presented to the local specific audience by the regional company Theatre South but had wide general productions in other communities due to the universality of their themes and/or subjects. While the term is overworked, and consequently devalued, it is appropriate to this discussion in that it conveys the notion that while the specifics of these plays relate only to the community from which they are derived, the subject matter or themes contained within those specifics deal with issues which are applicable to a wider audience. While the Newcastle earthquake itself, and the subsequent devastation to the Worker’s Club, are specific to the Newcastle community, the broader themes of devastation, loss, grief, shock, and heroism are universal occurrences. This universality of theme enables the play to be of psychological value to audiences outside the Newcastle community, albeit in a different manner to those within that population.

Part of this brings us face-to-face with the issues of ownership and ‘truth’. People in the Newcastle region tend to feel a proprietary connection to the play since it is, after all, their story. There seems to be a need to control the integrity of the project and so the truth of their stories. However, as many historians assert, each person views the same event differently based on a matrix of his or her own history, thoughts, feelings and needs. Truth is very elusive and control can only extend so far. I believe that the reaction of those involved in the Newcastle project to the Belvoir St production stems
from this issue. There is a case for a 'letting-go' so that other communities can explore the material in ways that will have relevant meaning for them, and yet there still exists a responsibility to the integrity of the original project and those that 'own' the original story by right of having lived through the experience and/or being part of the local community that did.

This is not an easy balance to maintain and while I feel that Neil Armfield managed to achieve something approaching it, despite the changes in stagecraft and symbolic reconstruction of the community involved, the stories themselves still remain the primary focus of the production. A Sydney audience lacking in the same social structure which was so much a part of the story and integral to a cathartic experience, were given access to the story and the experience embedded in it while at the same time also given some level of access to the social structure so that they understood 'why' the destruction of the Club acted as a symbol for the devastation in the Newcastle community as a collective as well as of individual lives. It gave Sydney audiences access to the tragedy in a way no news coverage could have.

Further, while Armfield's staging of Aftershocks may be criticised for stereotypical representations of the characters, some stereotyping acts as a signifier for cultural context not familiar to the audience - as signposts, which help the audience 'read' the drama. While the use of stereotypes runs the risk of leading to naturalisation wherein the connectivity of psyche to subject matter and to themes is diminished, the typification of characters which are representative of class and other groupings of people but which can be individuated so that they 'live' as dramatic characters can provide access for audience members to unfamiliar socio-geo-political signifiers in order for the effectiveness of the drama to remain intact.
While the Newcastle production facilitated a catharsis which brought about closure from the earthquake's devastation for Newcastle residents, the Belvoir St production seemed to have evinced in its Sydney audiences not only a deep feeling of compassion and understanding for those who had endured the quake, but touched a deeper need to relate one community's tragedy with other traumas and grief in their own lives. By 'seeing' those involved in the quake to aspire to achieve a closure for the earthquake, they are perhaps led to find ways of coping with and achieving closure with issues in their own lives.

Paul Brown, in his Writer's Notes, which preface the production notes in the Belvoir St production, makes an important point:

There are three voices, speaking always in unison. First the real person, whose story is told. Second the voice that emerged in interview (determined by the relationship across the microphone), and third the voice of the actor, found through an archaeology of text and history but determined by a storyteller's commitment to entertain. Combined, and presented as theatre, these make up what might be termed an unofficial story/truth about the earthquake. Not the crudely distilled version of TV news, not the legalese of the official Inquiry, but something more closely resembling what people near the heart of the matter might want recorded as Australian history. (Brown. 1993 i)

How an audience hears these voices, or how a director needs to stage the play to give these voices the best possible impact on the audience, will be largely affected by which audience the material is presented to. For reasons noted above, the production of Aftershocks in Sydney had to be staged differently than that production which was presented in Newcastle. The theatricality and even the stereotyping present in Armfield's production however, did not seem to detract from the impact of the performance on a Sydney audience, as they appear to have done for Newcastle people who saw both productions. The words are the same, the power inherent in the stories is the same. All that has changed is the methodology behind making the material
accessible for an audience with a different social, historical and emotional connection to the tragedy portrayed.

One of the desired effects at the outset of the project was to provide closure for the community of Newcastle, and it would seem to have achieved this. However, it can also serve to show other communities a history of the tragedy and even enable other audiences a venue for closure on other issues in their own lives. It is here, when the play moves out of its own community, that documentary ‘truth’ becomes less important and universal truths are emphasised. An exact characterisation or faithful reproduction of the original production may have less impact than a production, which is modified to allow accessibility, as Armfield's production did.

This, however, does not release the director from a responsibility to the original material but nor does it confine his or her stagecraft. Similarly, the original community needs to be willing to ‘let go’ of their control over the ownership of a piece so that other communities may reap the benefit of ‘their’ show - even if this entails a reworking of the stagecraft in ways that the original community may not agree with.

The verbatim methodology employed in the formation of Aftershocks places its origins firmly in the arena of Community Theatre. Its effects upon the people of Newcastle, whose most integral shared signifiers included the trauma of the earthquake itself and their connections to the Worker's Club, was transformational. This contextuality of its geographical and ideological roots allowed for a theatrical event that was cathartic in all senses of the word. However, this play also taps into other signifiers which are outside the contextuality of the original ‘community’ and this intertextuality (grief, loss, and trauma) allows this production to also be transformational for audiences not a part of the
original community for which it was intended, thus broadening the influence of the play beyond community health and healing to a wider base of Transformational Drama with effects other than therapy.

**SCRIPTED APPROACH: PROPERTY OF THE CLAN/BLACKROCK**

The second model, *Property of the Clan*, is a scripted, fictional play based on an actual event. *Property of the Clan* was originally conceived as a Theatre-In-Education piece to raise the consciousness of teenagers, boys especially, in how to deal with violent emotions including anger and frustration by coming to an understanding of the root causes of dysfunctional behaviour. It was developed after the tragic and brutal rape and murder of 14-year-old Stockton Beach girl, Leigh Leigh. The play is an attempt to help the community heal the grief and disbelief surrounding the murder as well as to teach those in the target age group how to handle, in a positive way, those intense emotions that could bring about such a tragedy, rather than give in to those feelings in a destructive manner. It is not a play about 'truth', as *Aftershocks* was, and it does not seek to retell a community's story, but rather to educate through an Aristotelian catharsis, a community, specifically adolescents, in the management of intense emotions. Eventually, in a process analogous to the history of *Aftershocks*, *Property of the Clan* was re-written as *Blackrock* for performances to audiences outside the original target audience, and then made a motion picture for wider release. This section of the thesis explores how a theatrical representation, based on fictional 'takes' on factual accounts, rather than the verbatim model, can still be Transformational Drama for its more diverse audience.
Property of the Clan

In 1991, Newcastle's Freewheels Company commissioned Nick Enright to write a play that was to become known as *Property of the Clan*. Freewheels is a Theatre-In-Education (TIE) company – a type of drama which seeks to take issues and present them to target groups with educational, developmental or attitudinal outcomes. Therapy is not necessarily the focus, nor is community catharsis. The central focus is to raise issues in such a way that is educative, using dramatic form because of the ways in which such symbolic enactment defines and emphasises such issues - and because the mode of dramatic action is commonly accessed and understood by its target audience(s).

The idea that it might also provide catharsis and closure for the actual community was not its aim but was a desirable additional outcome.

*Property of the Clan* was designed as a Theatre-In-Education play to be toured around the Newcastle and Hunter Valley areas. The subject matter of the play closely parallels the tragic rape and murder of Leigh Leigh. Unlike *Aftershocks*, however, *Property of the Clan* is not meant to be documentary theatre; rather its aim is to explore the issues of violence among adolescent men and the paradoxical pull between mateship and moral obligations - what happens when a young man is caught between the two opposing poles of protecting his mates and 'doing the right thing.' According to Freewheel's artistic director, Brian Joyce, Leigh Leigh's murder originally was not intended to be the foundation for the play. However, through his work in schools and with adolescents in the area, Joyce realised that this was the subject most affecting the community and therefore the story that most needed telling. "Joyce described the hangover from the tragedy as a 'tear in the communal psyche of these people'."(Squires. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 1995) He felt he himself was too close to the actual events, but felt that Nick Enright, however, could handle the material since he was familiar with the
Stockton, a suburb of Newcastle separated from the main city by Port Hunter, was characterised as a working class enclave. (Bearup. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 19 Oct 1996) Many of the families living there are descendants of those people who worked the first coalmines in the region. The people of Stockton were described as a tough, tight-knit community with their own culture and identity. (Bearup. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 19 Oct 1996) In November 1989, around 100 teenagers gathered for a birthday party at Stockton surf club. "Hey, dudes,' Matthew 'Fat Matt' Webster told his mates as he downed another stubbie. "We are going to get Leigh Leigh pissed tonight and all go through her." (Bearup. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 19 Oct 1996) The next day Leigh Leigh's body was found among the sand dunes, a bloodied rock lay near her head. It appeared that she had been raped by at least four youths but while stumbling back toward the party, Webster found her, raped her again and in the ensuing struggle hit her on the head with a rock - killing her. Webster is now serving a twenty-year prison sentence, but the pain, grief and recrimination continues for the community. The wounds still suppurate; there is no closure, especially considering the sensationalism surrounding the ongoing legal processes resulting from Dr Kerry Carrington's accusations in her report *Who Killed Leigh Leigh*.

In 1996, investigations were reopened into the tragedy. Leigh Leigh's mother, and others in the community, felt that those responsible were still out there, unpunished. The new investigation was ordered by then-NSW Police Minister Paul Whelan after reading a submission by the Newcastle Legal Centre which detailed, among other things, the fact that forensic evidence was not properly catalogued nor investigated (for
example, the blood spatters found around Leigh Leigh's body indicated that the blows had come from several different directions indicating several attackers - evidence which does not tally with Webster's confession), that the investigation had been seriously flawed and that more than sixteen youths who were open to charges had not been properly investigated, nor were the reasons for their not being charged ever recorded.

In 1993, criminologist Dr Kerry Carrington submitted an 18,000-word report along with 300 documents, which addressed the inconsistencies in the case, to Justice Wood's Police Royal Commission. Her reply was a terse letter stating that the case did not fall within the Commission's brief. Associate Professor Dave Brown, of the UNSW Law School and a respected criminologist, said at the time, "It seems the Royal Commission have put it in the too-hard basket even though it clearly falls within its terms of reference." (Bearup. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 19 Oct 1996)

It would seem, from investigations and reports such as these, that the tragedy that occurred that November 1989, has left deep scars on the community. Brian Joyce, recognised this early on and so decided to develop a project that would address the tragedy and allow the community to explore the social pressures and issues that drove those boys to commit the act and how the friends of both the murdered girl and the peers of the boys at fault handled their own feelings in the aftermath. (Squires. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 26 Aug 1995)

*Property of the Clan* premiered in 1992 in the Newcastle region. The title is taken from a psychiatrist's report to the coroner's court, which stated that after being raped, Leigh Leigh stumbled back toward the Club, where "she then became a sexual object - 'property of the clan'." (Squires. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 26 Aug 1995) However,
Enright did not seek to document what happened to Leigh Leigh but rather the issues surrounding her death. (Delvecchio. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 22 Aug 1996) The important difference between *Property of the Clan* and *Aftershocks* is that *Property of the Clan* is *not* Leigh Leigh's story: it is "Enright's examination of the circumstances surrounding such an event, of the psychological effects on the young people involved, of rudderless boys caught between larrikin youth and dangerous manhood, of tribalism and violence." (Squires. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 26 Aug 1995) As Enright says,

Primarily it's a play about the boys. They're caught in this terrible nexus - no one engages with them in a dialogue about how to be a man. No-one talks about how to be a man in relation to women, in relation to other men, in relation to your sexuality, your soft feelings. It's heartbreaking. (Dunne. "Deracinated" *Sydney Morning Herald*. 20 Mar 1995)

Enright's initial interest in the project was personal.

As a gay man, I have the experience of being in a public place and seeing a group of young straight guys, teenagers or early 20s, and my immediate response is fear, or self-preservation. I started to see how much more acute the experience of many women would be. And you start to think, why is it that we are experiencing this fear, and are these guys carrying this around, or are we projecting on the basis of a few experiences? In certain young men there is a level of uncontainable violence and hatred and anger and a lot of it is gender based. It is a very potent force and I want to understand it. It's something that's particular to Australia - we have one of the world's highest rates of sexual assault and domestic violence. The conundrum, that you would hurt someone in a sexual situation, or one of intimacy or a family, is perplexing. (Dunne. "Deracinated" *Sydney Morning Herald*. 20 Mar 1995)

The play does not deal directly with the rape and murder. Instead it gives a voice to the friends and acquaintances of Leigh Leigh, the girls who are demanding closure, and the boys who have closed ranks in mateship's code of silence. It looks at how society "trains boys and constructs masculinity" (Dunne. "Surf, sun, sex" *Sydney Morning Herald*. 9 Sept 1996) and the clear delineation between the reactions of the boys and the girls.

Enright did not undertake original primary research into the murder of Leigh Leigh when writing *Property of the Clan*, using instead the published data as a general outline for the play. The research done in Newcastle by Enright centered on young people in
the community and their attitudes, feelings and emotions when confronted with either the story of Leigh Leigh or the issues of violence and moral responsibility confronted by the story, but no interviews were undertaken with anyone who was present at the party at which Leigh Leigh was assaulted. The original brief from Freewheels, which governed all aspects of the construction of the play script, centred on the question, "what is it like to be one of a group of young people who are on the periphery of such an event?" (Rose. Sydney Morning Herald. 19 April 1997) The object was not to write a play about Leigh Leigh, Stockton or anything connected with the original case. It was supposed to be a generic story, which questioned "how that kind of sexual violence happens and what are the forces that lead to it? And secondly, and in a sense more specifically, what is people's response to it?" (Rose. Sydney Morning Herald. 19 April 1997) Enright felt that

the real subject for a play was the girl's peer group; there were young people in that community whose grief, anger or shame had not been vented...Our first decision was to leave the criminal acts and even the murdered girl off the stage and to develop the drama out of a fatal party, its participants and its aftermath. (Rose. Sydney Morning Herald. 19 April 1997)

Property of the Clan was performed with four actors playing eight roles - youngsters, parents and a teacher who were "all implicated, in different ways, in the rape and murder of a schoolgirl." (Rose) The central character is not the victim but rather a young boy named Jared who witnesses the rape but stays silent about what he's seen because of the strongly felt need to protect his mates whether or not it was morally right. It is his failure of moral courage that the play explores. (Hessey. Sydney Morning Herald. 25 April 1997)

The play provides a scarifying portrayal of the consequences of violence and this failure of moral courage. The effects of the rape and murder go far beyond the grief and rage
felt by friends and family of the dead girl and encompass an entire community in guilt, anger and shame.

*Aftershocks* worked as social therapy in its recounting of community experience of disaster enabled a catharsis and a sense of closure on the tragedy of the earthquake. *Property of the Clan* works as social therapy but utilising a different approach. Rather than helping family and friends of Leigh Leigh, and the community at large, cope with the tragedy, as *Aftershocks* does for those affected by the earthquake, it seeks to educate young people that those modes of behaviour are unacceptable and that they have dire, far-reaching consequences. While *Property of the Clan* serves as a vehicle for raising issues with its target audiences, it may not have provided the emotional healing needed by the community. There is some suggestion in the media that the production reopened wounds and intervened in the natural healing process. Due to the ongoing legal consequences of the events of the rape and murder of Leigh Leigh, the community has not had closure nor been allowed to heal. Some members of the community felt that while it was important to educate adolescents in proper ways of dealing with intense emotional responses, using the story of the incident on Stockton Beach only continued the emotional pain of those involved in the actual events. Some 'necessary' theatre, while achieving its primary intent (in this case, the educational outcomes) may actually reverse the therapeutic process or at least interfere with its natural progression.

*Blackrock*

Wayne Harrison, director of the Sydney Theatre Company, was impressed with the powerful impact he perceived in *Property of the Clan* and asked Enright to consider expanding the script for a run with the Sydney Theatre Company. Instead of developing the existing play script, Enright chose to write a new play loosely based on the events
that took place in *Property of the Clan*, naming the new play after the fictional town in the original play - *Blackrock*. (Rose. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 19 April 1997)

*Blackrock* was developed over a one-year period in a series of workshops with the Sydney Theatre Company and was first performed with them in 1995, returning in 1996 for a second season and winning an Awgie (Australian Writer's Guild Award) for best original stage play. (Cochrane. "The Enright Stuff" *Sydney Morning Herald*. 20 July 1996)

The expanded version explores the relationship between Jared and his mother; the single parent trying to cope with her own life and problems (including a possible breast cancer scare) and trying to maintain some sort of communication with her son. That communication completely breaks down when Jared has to come to terms with the fact that he witnessed the rape and stayed silent. The moral dilemma this imposes on him destroys what relationship he did have, not only with his Mum, but also with friends and the community as a whole. This breakdown of a single young man serves as a sort of metaphor for the breakdown in the community itself. How he manages to piece things together and regain some of what he sacrificed for the sake of protecting his mates, is the story of how the community deals with the trauma of the event tearing at the fabric of the life of the community and how each member functions with relation to each other. In *Blackrock* the mateship's code of silence is broken and all at fault are brought to justice, which is in contrast to the actual events of the Leigh Leigh case. (Waites. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 1 Sept 1995) A 'Hollywood' sense of closure - in which the loose ends are tied up, a resolution is presented, and the result is not at all therapeutic because it provides a convenient closure that leaves the real issues unresolved.
The STC play was aimed more at a mainstream audience, rather than maintaining the educational focus present in the Freewheel’s production and as such is written in an entirely different style. As commercial theatre, it needed to entertain (in the limited conventional sense noted previously) its audience which did not preclude its potential to provide a powerful theatrical experience with the potential to create educational/developmental outcomes similar to the original production. *Property of the Clan* was conceived with the specific purpose of educating young adolescents. *Blackrock* was designed to be a financially and artistically viable theatrical production. That said, it also managed to convey a powerful message to its audiences. James Waites, in the Sydney Morning Herald, states, "What’s terrific about this production is the chance to see the veneer of ordinary Australia pulled back to reveal some darker truths. Tough as it is, it holds attention, and - as a rare study of right and wrong - would be great to take teenage children to.” (Waites. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 1 Sept 1995)

What is interesting about *Blackrock* is that once again, as in *Aftershocks*, what is an essentially theatre specifically targeted in its audiences and purposes (Community Theatre for *Aftershocks* and Theatre-In-Education for *Property of the Clan*) is transferred from its own community to a broader audience. The commercial production mounted by the STC (as *Aftershocks* was by the Belvoir Street Theatre) still managed to retain the powerful emotional pull of the original production. The difference is that *Aftershocks* of course was the same play staged in different ways. *Property of the Clan* and *Blackrock* are completely different play scripts but based on the same event and covering the same issues but written in such a way as to appeal to its varying audiences - one geared toward adolescents as an educational experience utilising the theatre as its mode of expression and the other a commercial theatrical property aimed at a broader audience that crosses age, gender and ethnicity. Both productions (*Aftershocks* and
Property of the Clan/Blackrock) deliver an emotional catharsis to their audiences. Though they may have lost something in the translation, both made the transfer from Community Theatre and TIE to the commercial theatres of a large city.

In its original production *Aftershocks* is Community Theatre concerned with cure – it gives voice to a grieving community in an attempt to alleviate that grief through evoking a cathartic response that is both Morenian and Boalian in its interpretation; *Property of the Clan* is Theatre-In-Education concerned with prevention – an Aristotelian catharsis that instructs young people in how to handle their more violent emotions. From these community-based productions, main-stream productions were developed that still retained the cathartic experience for its audiences albeit in a different format – one that is very much Boalian but without the direct ‘spect-actor’ involvement. It is a catharsis that allows the audience at the least to witness the catharsis the characters undergo, and at best, allows the audience to experience a purging themselves that instructs, heals, and changes. Each production is transformational drama in that each uses theatrical techniques with the intention to educate, liberate and/or empower its audiences as well as the amelioration of a social ill. Such social interactions are the stuff of community, therapeutic and educational theatre, subscribed to regularly by the mainstream as well as the specialist companies. Whatever their form, their effect is transformational.

In *Aftershocks* we have the verbatim theatre model, which creates the cathartic experience leading to change, while in *Property of the Clan* we show how a fictional work can also be transformational drama. In the final case study, *Runaways*, we have elements of both these theatrical types. *Runaways* is a musical based on the personal stories of homeless youth on the streets of New York City. Some of the
monologues/songs presented in the performance are verbatim transcripts of interviews the author conducted with actual runaways. Others are based on ideas or problems gleaned from these interviews and then work shopped by the actors into performable pieces. Unlike Aftershocks or Property of the Clan, Runaways did not originate with the intention to act as a form of social therapy. The author, Elizabeth Swados, wrote the play to be primarily an entertaining piece of theatre and only secondarily to educate the public and change their views on the social problem of homeless youth. (Interview with Swados. New York. 1996.) Runaways accomplished both these objectives. It is a combination of the two previously discussed theatrical types and it worked well as 'necessary' theatre for a broad audience right across all ages, socio-economic groupings, and ethnic and national orientations. While conceived and performed as main-stream theatre, the outcomes from this play, and the elements of community theatre inherent in it, make an exploration of this project worthwhile for our discussion.

DEVEISED THEATRE: RUNAWAYS

Runaways is a concept musical written originally for off-Broadway audiences by Elizabeth Swados in 1978. If differs from our previous two examples in that its goal from the outset was to be commercially viable. It was not primarily intended to be Community Theatre, therapeutic theatre, or TIE, although it achieved all three conditions by its process of creation, production and reception. It combines elements of Aftershocks with Property of the Clan in that it is based loosely on interviews and workshops with actual runaway children as well as became an educational process for the cast as well as audience, however, it was first and foremost designed to entertain (in its several senses) rather than specifically being about therapy or education.
Runaways - Off Broadway

Runaways made its stage debut in 1978 at the Public Theatre in New York City as part of Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival. It would, the following year, move to the Plymouth Theatre for its successful Broadway run. (Gunner, Variety, 1978) The idea for Runaways came to its author, Elizabeth Swados, in 1977 as she read a newspaper report of a group of street kids in New York City who had banded together and formed a 'family'. They took over an abandoned tenement and set down rules - everyone must go to school, everyone must contribute to the household chores, everyone must be home by curfew. If these rules were broken, the youth were not allowed to continue to live as part of that 'family'.

This idea of the formation of surrogate families created by the youth to supplant the dysfunctional family unit left behind intrigued Swados. That theme carried through her own life of the theatrical nomad in as much as being in the theatre meant that you were always travelling to new places and never putting down roots. This notion of always being on the run was reinforced by her mother's suicide when Swados was twenty-one years of age; an event she described as the 'ultimate running away.' (Swados, 1996, interview)

With this history in mind, Swados decided that she wanted to do a show about street kids. For her, 'the moment' at which thought and creativity fused into a single concrete idea, came when she was peering through a fence at a basketball game taking place in one of New York's many cement courts. There a group of kids, mostly homeless or unemployed, were playing the game in a way that Swados perceived as being an allegory for survival. Swados began to understand that for those youth, basketball was survival.
She realised that there existed many creative outlets for young people such as rock 'n roll and games, but that, in her experience, there was no theatre created specifically for young people. There were several artistic venues for voicing the thoughts, feelings and emotions of society’s youngest generation but the theatrical venue – with its ability to create social and psychological change – had not been utilised. She began to wonder what it would be like to work with those kids out there in the streets of New York City in a theatrical situation - to use theatre to give them an outlet and let them explore the problems they were trying to deal with on the streets. From watching the basketball games and reading the news reports, she decided that the ultimate theme of this theatrical project would be survival. (Swados. 1996. interview)

Swados then approached Joseph Papp, the director of the New York Shakespeare Festival, which had also produced *A Chorus Line*. She told him that she only had an idea - no script, no actors, nothing - just an idea. She said that she wanted the funding and space to workshop the idea into a piece of performable theatre. Surprisingly, he agreed. The idea was to collect a group of kids from all over New York and collectively develop a script for *Runaways*.

The casting process was meticulous and long. She went to schools, refuges, and shelters, doing workshops with kids everywhere. When she spotted someone that had the potential she was seeking, she invited him or her to the rehearsal loft set aside by Mr Papp. It was four months before she had assembled her cast. It was another six months of work before the show was ready. (Swados. *Soho Weekly News*. March 9, 1978)
Swados cast a mixture of children and adolescents from all backgrounds. Several of the original cast were actual runaways that she had found in refuges and shelters. Others were school-age children who had never been in a play before. To provide balance for the cast, she also took on board three older cast members (in their early twenties) that she had worked with before. This was to provide a mature, stabilising influence to the others. She also had to cast professional actors in the roles of the youngest characters. They turned out to be the hardest to work with as they brought with them preconceived ideas of acting and primadonna attitudes, whereas it was vital to the success of the project that the actors were “real kids voicing real problems.” To bring the contrived mannerisms of the trained child actor into the mix invited an undermining influence to the aims and ideals of the project. (Gussow, NY Times Magazine, March 5, 1978; Madd, Variety, March 29, 1978).

Once the group was assembled, the workshops and improvisations began. Issues were confronted and the theme of survival was explored. This process was not without its problems. At one point, Swados television set went missing. She asked the young actor who had appropriated it what was more important, the show or the TV? The television set reappeared the next day and rehearsals continued. (Kroll, Newsweek March 27, 1978)

Issues of racial tensions that were explored in the workshop erupted into life. Swados took the hard-line; the cast could call each other anything they liked - nigger, spic, dyke, whatever but they had to work together. The real-life clashes that took place amongst the mostly street wise group of would-be actors, provided the necessary material for the script. Issues and problems were explored, and sometimes even solved, and then turned into workable scenes for the show. (Gussow, NY Times Magazine, March 5, 1978)
A sizeable amount of the workshop/rehearsal process was influenced by Swados’ time working with Peter Brook and Andre Serban. Through the training she received with these two men, her ideas regarding the exploration of material were formed. While not specifically designed to be a therapeutic process, Runaways nevertheless did develop into an essentially therapeutic atmosphere due in part to the influence of Brook and Serban on Swados methodologies. (Swados. Soho Weekly News. March 9, 1978)

What evolved out of these six months is a concept musical similar in style to A Chorus Line. It is a series of tableaux, monologues and songs that are linked together only by their common theme. There is some interaction between characters, but mostly it is simply each individual's story, told direct to the audience. In this sense, Runaways is more a musical collage than a standard piece of musical theatre and follows closely to a formula similar to Aftershocks although the process was somewhat different as Aftershocks was based on taped interviews re-told nearly word for word whereas Runaways is based on a looser, fictionalised re-telling.

The stories of individual ‘street kids’ told in Runaways are not meant to be documentary theatre nor are they a word-for-word re-telling based on transcripted interviews. The primary research conducted by Swados, which included many hours of interviews with runaway youth, was culled for ideas, issues and fragments of stories that were related to the intended universal themes of the play. These segments were then work shopped by the ensemble into theatrical representations of essential core truths but were not ‘truth’ in themselves - rather a fictionalised account based upon themes or ideas generated by the primary, documentary research. Runaways is in this way, a type of documentary theatre but not strictly ‘truth-theatre’ as is the case with Aftershocks.
Runaways developed into a format different to the standard musical with its scripted, linear, plot. It is a collage of songs, monologues and movement that tells its stories in very poignant, and often painful, ways. It confronts its audience with the realities of a situation that most people either choose to ignore completely or rationalise away. This was different fare to what most Broadway audiences were used to and yet it had a successful run including its nomination for five Tony awards in 1979 (publicity letter dated December 1, 1978 on file in the Performing Arts Library, New York City) - a record at that time. It competed against big name, big budget shows such as Ain't Misbehavin' and choreographers such as Bob Fossey. As evidenced by the main reviews by respected critics, Runaways had the desired impact on its audiences in that audiences' perceptions of the plight of those adolescents surviving a life on the streets were challenged and changed. One review notes

Runaways seizes your heart, plays with your pulse, dances exuberantly across the line that separates entertainment from involvement. (Kroll, Newsweek, March 27, 1978)

Runaways was originally developed as a theatrical forum for young people to give voice to the issues confronting them in regards to how runaways survived life on the streets as a means of communicating the idea of survival for adolescents in general. According to Swados, its aim was first and foremost to entertain its audience but also to simultaneously educate and enlighten them with regards to these issues. It also worked in a therapeutic way for its cast - one of the claims made for dramatic activity from informal role-playing exercises to full-scale mainstream drama. (Swados. 1996. interview)

The actual street kids who were part of the original cast were now permanently off the streets - not only did the show tell their story, but also it changed their lives irrevocably.
Swados said that of the five cast members who were actual runaways, three are now professional actors and the other two have jobs and families and essentially new lives. It is a small sample and a slight indication of process of such social therapy, but it's a start and a cause for optimism in regard to the method.

The New York productions of *Runaways* exposed to audiences another side of life - one that many would have willingly liked to have forgotten. In 1970s America, the common thinking was that children ran away from home as part of some power struggle or because they were not getting their own way. They could, of course, return home anytime they wanted and were only on the streets by choice. (Swados. 1996. interview)

*Runaways* showed those audiences that this was far from the truth. It depicts children of lost and broken homes - abused, neglected, damaged. It confronts audiences with images of child prostitutes, drug-pushing pimps, a heroin addict dying of an overdose and the effect it has on the girl who loves him, the senseless rape and murder of a young girl in a playground, the boy who escapes abusive parents by playing basketball (going back to the original trigger for the show of Swados watching a basketball game and realising it was an allegory of survival on the streets), the dreamer who makes up a fantasy life for himself because his own is too harsh to face. (Lucha-Burns 448) Above and through it all is the theme in the final song "Let Me Be A Kid":

It is so hard to be
A mother when you haven't ever had a mother's love
And it breaks my heart to be
Locked into a marriage of adult responsibility

Set me free and let me play out in the playground.
Let me be just a kid out in the playground.
Set me free and let me play out in the playground.
Let me be just a kid out in the playground.
Let me be young before I get old, let me be a kid.
Just let me be young before I get old, let me be a kid.
Just let me be young that's what I am, young.
Oh, let me be young, that's what I am, young.
It's so hard to be
On the receiving end of
grown-ups who demand maturity,
And it breaks my heart to see
Kids who hate themselves because they're not what they're supposed to be

Parents, make up your minds do you want children.
Parents, make up your minds do you want children.

Rep Chorus

Their plea to the audience is to let them be normal children - to have a childhood - not be lost in a world or raw survival - one that is even harsher than an adult world. The poignancy of this musical allowed audiences to be confronted with a very difficult issue in a way that made it slightly more palatable and striking than news coverage or Salvation Army advertisements. As one reviewer noted, “Every parent, every prospective parent, every former kid should see Runaways.” (Gehman, NY Sunday News, March 5, 1978)

The further impact of this production on its New York audiences is reflected by Clive Barnes in his review in the New York Post on March 10, 1978:

It's impact lingers in the mind long after its music is forgotten. It shouts for the unhappy, and bruises with the bruised. In the year 1978 it is perfectly essential seeing - for itself, for the way it has been done, and for what it is crying in the wind.

For the cast, the effects of the show were just as profound. They were forced to come to terms with their own lives, their own families, and their own choices. Issues of prostitution, rape, drug use, abuse, racism, etc were faced and dealt with. This was theatre of them, for them, and by them. It gave voice, not only to the thousands of homeless, lost youth desperate for help, but to children and teenagers everywhere who felt their voice was lost on the adult populations of their communities. (Dullea)
Swados received hundreds of letters from children who had seen the show thanking her for allowing their thoughts and feelings to be expressed. She also received just as many letters from parents vexed at the indictment of the misuse of adult authority and its role in turning out damaged youth. The main criticism of the show was that it placed too much blame on the parents of the runaways. Swados reaction is that in most cases, that is exactly where the blame should be laid. (Swados. 1996. interview)

After its successful run on Broadway, Runaways moved into regional theatre. High schools, summer stock, and amateur theatre groups all over the country picked the show up and performed it either as just a good, innovative piece of musical theatre or as a vehicle to deliver a message to the community. One such high school was in Vermont, in the North Eastern United States. The High School's drama students decided, with their teacher/director, to present this particular play because of the high rate of youth homelessness in their community. However, parents, outraged at both the graphic portrayal of street life and the damning indictment of parental responsibility, moved to ban the production. The School Board was brought in and the students were told to choose another show for their annual play. The students, outraged at the interference in what they considered an important piece of work for their community, took legal action against the school board. The legal system, however, upheld the School Board's decision but made note that were the play performed off school property, the board would have no jurisdiction in the matter. The cast and director then hired outside premises and presented Runaways after all, again with tremendous impact in the community. (NY Times, Feb 21, 1984; NY Times, March 12, 1984).

Runaways, originally a devised, issues-based production designed to give voice (and jobs!) to homeless youth, went on to become something else entirely. Through its
permutations as off-Broadway, Broadway, Regional, and Community Theatre, it retained its transformational effect, providing a catalyst for change in both cast and audience despite the production values, location, or casting of the show. What worked for Joe Papp’s festival and gave actual streetkids a new start, also created significant change for school productions and regional communities. The intertextuality of the story, and the cathartic process enabled by the content, enables this musical to go beyond the narrow confines of its first intentions into the realm of transformational drama.

Preliminary Case Study – Runaways in Australia

Before attempting the major project for this thesis (Back From Nowhere), a preliminary case study, using Runaways, was conducted. The author produced and directed a production that was performed in June 1997 at the Dural Musical Society in Dural, NSW – an affluent outer suburb of Sydney. The rationale for producing the show here was due to basic pragmatism in that they were willing to provide the funding for the project by incorporating it into their 1997 season. There was the additional advantage in that their typical audience were part of a well-to-do community, one that would not have had much exposure to the issues presented in Runaways and therefore fit neatly into the parameters of the exercise - that is, an audience that could be confronted by issues outside their normal range of experiences in order that their perceptions could be challenged and/or changed by that confrontation. The socio-economic community most likely to make up the demographics of our audience was one that would leave much scope for impact, education and change by the production due to the fact that the audience members would not have had much exposure to the issues raised by the production, thus allowing for maximum impact of the show because of its shock value.
The exploration of *Runaways* at Dural provided an opportunity to observe how the process affected the cast as well as how the performance influenced the audience. There were, of course, many problems associated with producing the show outside its original context and social setting (ie the racial groupings/tensions are different in Australia and the script had to be updated from 70s references in the USA to 90s references in Australia) but the basic concept of transformational drama was able to be tested.

**Rehearsal Process**

The rehearsal process varied slightly from the typical amateur rehearsal in that the first few weeks were spent in a ‘workshop mode’ concentrating on improvisational work, characterisation and basic actor training. For example, the cast engaged in a series of theatre games designed to teach basic acting skills. Improvisations such as those built around mimed basketball games, taught cast members about issues faced by their characters including territorial disputes, loyalty/rivalry, and basic survival skills. This time was also used to assess each actor and note their physical and emotional characteristics in order to assign characters from the play which they would best be able to portray with minimal difficulties. Since the majority of cast members had little or no theatrical experience it was imperative that they were cast as characters based as closely as possible to the actual characteristics – physical, emotional and experiential – of the actors themselves so that even those with limited acting experience could adequately portray the character assigned. This typology of casting uses stereotypes to not only enable the actor with little or no experience or training to adequately portray the character, but also provides an access point or guide by which audiences can initially relate to the character. If the actor is skilled enough, then subtle differences that go
beyond type can be brought to the performance. If they lack the necessary skills to accomplish this, then the stereotype stands on its own as a signifier for both actor and audience.

Once the initial period of improvisational and characterisation work was finished, we moved into script work, musical rehearsals and blocking. The rehearsal process was challenging to most of the cast members. This production was difficult to do in that it requires concentration, effort, talent and a willingness to confront issues outside most cast members' normal range of experiences. In having to portray young people trying to survive life on the streets, the cast members had to stretch outside their conventional, middle-class notions of 'good' families, 'good' schools and security to imagine what it would be like if existence was a daily struggle for survival. Issues of prostitution, drug abuse and violence had to be confronted. While *Runaways* was produced with the aim of confronting the audiences' preconceptions of the issues surrounding runaway youth, it also challenged the production's cast and crew. In a way that is analogous to role-playing strategies in educational or developmental drama, the young people involved with the production were forced to confront another side of life not previously encountered which was further internalised into their portrayal of the characters with the result that lessons learned by the characters were then related to the real life situations of the actors. While cast members are not necessarily living the same type of life, many of the lessons and issues are universal and can be applied to varying life styles which is what happened to the cast of *Runaways*. Family relationships and advantages were reassessed and a general feeling of 'maybe we don't have quite so bad as we thought' prevailed. Of course, the degree of struggle for the characters was a very different degree to that experienced by the actors in their lives, but the existence of that struggle and lessons learned by one group can be related to the other. *Runaways* became a
developmental process and experience for the cast as well as having an impact on the community.

CONCLUSION

Each of the methodologies (verbatim, scripted, and devised) in this chapter start from the same point – there is an issue facing a community that is explored through the medium of the theatre with the intended outcomes being a transformation in the thought processes, emotions and lives of the audiences. By taking into account the cathartic approach utilised by ancient dramatic practices and rediscovered by 20th century educators and psychotherapists, and returning it to the conventional theatre where it can challenge the thoughts, emotions, and ideology of audience members, it is possible to create a theatre that becomes transformational for the audience. The conventional theatre therefore becomes more than the quick fix gratification of needs through entertainment, and becomes a factor in creating change in individuals, communities, cultures and societies. It is theatre which goes beyond the geographical and ideological constraints of community theatre – with its limited signifiers and contextuality – to the intertextuality needed for performance to a general public audience while still retaining the ability to facilitate the cathartic processes more often relegated to the realm of behavioural sciences or the fringe theatre. This then, is transformational drama.
CHAPTER 3

TRANSFORMATIONAL DRAMA IN PRACTICE: 
BACK FROM NOWHERE

The previous chapter discussed three case studies outlining various methodologies of play-creation that can be employed to develop theatre that is transformational, as well as looked at the efficacies of each methodology in the context of its original community and a broader, general-public audience. Each of these methods safeguards a particular component of the transformational process, but using each of these elements together in one process provides a powerful combination. From this research, a new group-devised and issues-based methodology for the creation of Transformational Drama was developed. These strategies for performance were then exercised in the production of Back From Nowhere.

DEVISED THEATRE – AN INTRODUCTION

Devised theatre emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the community theatre movement, evolving from a desire to find new ways of creating theatre. In the 70s, devised theatre existed as a reaction to the perceived hierarchy of traditional company structures with its governance by boards of directors, administrators, and the director as the tyrant which controls the process and product. Devised work was seen as democratic (fitting in with the political agenda of freedom of expression and individual rights) and allowing for complete artistic freedom. Today the term has less radical overtones and has ironically moved back towards a more hierarchical structure with the division of responsibilities being once again defined in clearer delineations between actors, director/devisor, and administrator. (Oddey 1994. 4-9)
Devised theatre differs from text-based theatre in that rather than starting with a script, it begins with the interaction between members of the company who choose a starting point which can be absolutely anything – an idea, a poem, a piece of art, a newspaper article, or an issue – and from that starting point creatively move toward a finished product. Because of the artistic freedom and collaborative nature of devised theatre, each project will vary in its working methodology and approach to materials, with traditional roles used in different ways (ie the director becomes a facilitator or the writer becomes a scribe, editor and/or dramaturg). (Oddey 1994 4-25) For a group-devised, issues-based methodology, the director’s role is different to a conventional performance in that they work as a facilitator rather than a leader in the traditional sense. Their job is to facilitate the research and guide the workshop, allowing the company to create the material but maintaining an oversight that keeps the ideas within the established framework.

Both the process and the product will be entirely shaped by the members of the company – their shared beliefs, goals, ideas, etc - will all contribute to the material therefore no two projects, even created under similar conditions with similar themes and with similar desired outcomes, will ever be alike. As Alison Oddey says,

The participants and their life experiences contribute to both process and product. A group statement or policy identifies a particular style, a unique language or vocabulary, shared beliefs or a commitment to why a company wishes to make a specific theatrical product. (Oddey 1994 9)

Further, “A company’s intial intentions or objectives for devising theatre are crucial to how the performer-spectator relationship is set up.” (Oddey 1994 20)
This suggests that devised theatre might be particularly suited to transformational drama in that this unique approach to the material, the collaborative effort, allows for an approach that does not limit what the project has to say to one writer’s viewpoint, but rather is broad enough to encompass an entire community’s viewpoint. What follows is a discussion of the process used to develop this project and its possible transformational outcomes.

GROUP-DEVISED, ISSUES-BASED DRAMA - THE PROCESS

*Back From Nowhere* was a group-devised, issues-based play about the effects of youth suicide and was first performed as a touring production to high schools, churches and community centres in the Sydney Metropolitan area. The tour targeted those audiences most closely connected to the issue (ie adolescent youths and families/friends of young people who have attempted or completed suicide). Following this tour, it was performed at The Sydney Opera House to trial its effectiveness as main-stream, conventional theatre which is transformational for a general public audience.

The creation of the play integrated elements from all three methodologies discussed in chapter two – verbatim, scripted and devised. People’s stories and other primary research carried out by the cast (based on the verbatim methodology encountered in *Aftershocks*) formed a starting point for the project but did not end up in the final product in their ‘word-for-word’ or verbatim format. Where this project differs from *Aftershocks* is that these stories provided the initial research material which through the workshop process was broken down into issues and characters and then refined, fictionalised and merged with other information to become entirely new scenes. The
verbatim stories cannot be recognised in the final script, however the material they provided gave us the major issues and character types to explore so the transformational power inherent in those stories was not lost – just used in other forms. The scripting methodology from Property of the Clan was also integrated into this project. Several scenes in Back From Nowhere were scripted by the director from monologues and transcripts from the improvisations – where there were overlapping themes or characters that could be combined, the director took the raw material and scripted them into dramatic scenes which were then presented back to the cast for approval and reworking. The devised methodology from Runaways was also employed through the process. By combining these three approaches into one – group-devised, issues-based drama – the elements that provide us with the transformational effect are combined thus strengthening the overall efficacy.

Back From Nowhere was performed by a mixed cast comprised of second year Drama Performance students from Wesley Institute for Ministry & the Arts, professional actors who volunteered their services to the project, and several interested amateur actors. The production team also consisted of a mix of students and professionals.

Utilising this mix of students and professionals set its challenges for the project as quality was always an issue to be kept foremost in mind – it was necessary to attain the high degree of professionalism expected by theatre-goers attending events at the Opera House – but also provided a dynamic mix of ideas, experiences and abilities that allowed for exciting work to come out of the workshop process. The team quickly integrated with each other and distinctions between professionals and students soon
faded so that the cast and crew became a company interested in doing the best work they could.

In the semester prior to beginning work on *Back From Nowhere*, the students who were involved in this project took part in workshops run by Maurie Scott, from the University of Wollongong, on the group-devised, issues-based methodology. These sessions acclimatised them to this particular methodology so that there was a working knowledge of the expectations that would be placed upon them. From those workshops, the idea of doing a play on the issue of youth suicide emerged as one of the subjects that would be suitable for a larger project.²

**STEP 1 - DEFINING THE OUTCOMES AND ISSUES**

The first step in the process of developing *Back From Nowhere* was to define the broad issues to be explored by the production (youth suicide) and to define the desired transformational outcomes - education, prevention and healing. The primary objective, education, entailed lifting the taboo that exists in our society about suicide, getting people to talk openly about it, showing the warning signs of suicide, why people miss them and what to do if you spot them (either in yourself or in someone else). The preliminary research suggests that the most important way to prevent suicide is to educate people, and as long as the subject remains closed those who could have been

² While most people involved in the production were drawn from Wesley Institute staff and students, and this is undoubtedly a Christian organisation, the play itself was not intended to be a ‘Christian’ play. The material was drawn from secular sources and developed with no mention of any particular faith, creed or belief. The only time ‘religion’ factored into the process was during several debrief sessions as part of the workshop and rehearsal period where the cast found it helpful to find closure from the day’s work through prayer and song. All of the information regarding suicide, and the play’s approach to suicide prevention, however, was drawn from non-religious, secular sources so that the belief systems of the cast did not factor into the material presented to audiences.
helped will still die. A didactic approach, which has ramifications for the achievability of both healing and prevention objectives, provides a practical end-product which can potentially result in a decrease of some preventable suicides.

The second objective is prevention – to facilitate a recognition and identification process which would allow the suicidal person, or someone close to them, to recognise the intention and act to prevent it. Further, the play was designed to facilitate removal of the tunnel vision often experienced by the suicidal person and allow them to recognise their plight and get help.

The final desired outcome, healing, was dependent on the didactic approach which allowed audience members to perceive the various facets of the grief process for family, friends and acquaintances in the community. By exploring the stages of grief, and providing examples of people who were able to overcome the trauma and move on with their lives, the play provides a point of identification for those in the audience who found themselves in a similar situation and shows them the possibilities available to them. In this way audience members perhaps may undergo a cathartic process, similar to that found in psychodrama, which facilitates the healing process.

By clearly defining, as a first step, the objectives for the project, the cast were given strong guidelines by which to define the issues to be explored as the objectives will necessitate certain specific concerns to be addressed (ie family relationships, the grief-anger-blame cycle, trigger factors, warning signs, and where to get help). Through the research and workshop phases, these were further refined until specific characters and
types of scenes emerge, however this refining process becomes an organic development which is guided by the overriding question of “What do we want to achieve and how can our objectives be best served?”

These objectives, coupled with our project brief - to explore suicide not in its broad terms and contexts but rather limited to firstly, youth suicide and secondly the effects of youth suicide (rather than an actual suicide itself as Department of Education guidelines prohibited this being presented in schools because of the notion that it would actually encourage, rather than discourage, suicide – a contentious issue in itself) immediately put a certain framework into place that guided the rest of the process (certain characters were needed that were necessarily different to those had the defining issues been broader based, certain scenes were necessitated, and a certain format was used). Setting the desired outcomes and defining the broad issues to be covered, and noting any limitations over which the company has no control (such as Department of Education guidelines), allowed for the development of an initial structure which helped facilitate the workshop process, giving it a framework upon which to build rather than a chaotic collection that might have been difficult to pull together into a coherent production.

**STEP 2 - RESEARCH PHASE**

The next stage in the process involved research - the collection, collation and organisation of all the material that ultimately formed the basis for the script. Data was collected from many sources – personal stories (either those of cast members, family and friends of cast members, or those of strangers sent to us anonymously when newspapers carried our request for these stories), newspapers, magazines, journals, books, television, movies, other plays, interviews, personal exploration and evaluation.
The director (myself in this instance), as facilitator, gave the cast guidance as to what sources of data were appropriate to the project and was also responsible for collating all the data gathered by the cast and categorising it into useful, and usable, groupings which were determined by the shape and direction the director wished the project to take. Groupings were based on characters, issues, plotlines, or even chronological or geographical data. Once the material was organised, the company sifted through the research material and extracted from it that which they felt would contribute to the final product.

For *Back From Nowhere*, ads were placed in local papers (via the Cumberland Newspaper Group) asking for people to anonymously send in written stories of their experiences with suicide. These were copied (after any identifying details were removed) and given to the cast to read and an extraction process began wherein the material was discussed with ideas as to character types, issues and scenes being formulated. This part of the process used a brainstorming methodology with ideas and 'notes' of the discussions written on large poster boards which were taped up on the walls, keeping organised what could have been a chaotic, confusing, and overwhelming part of the process.

The research phase for this project also included cast members sharing their own stories of their experiences with suicide (as some cast members had known people who have

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3 Bridget Mary Aitchison spent many years as a professional actor in California in the United States. She later moved to Sydney, Australia where she turned to directing and an academic career. In 1996 she won the Queen’s Trust Award for Young Australians for her work with homeless and unemployed youth. This grant supported the production of the musical *Runaways* which Ms Aitchison produced and directed. She has directed several shows in Sydney, including Artistic Directing the annual Good Friday March and Production (incorporating drama, dance and music) for Wesley Mission.
either attempted or completed suicide) and other cast members, who had no personal involvement with suicide, also shared their perceptions of the issues which was valuable for us to gage a ‘general public’ overview of those ideas – how most people in society might view suicide, as opposed to how those who had been affected by it viewed them.

This contrast was an important discovery as it showed by contrast what we needed to highlight most to achieve the educative objective. One important proviso we put on the material was that anyone sharing a personal viewpoint could not then perform that material. If the cast felt the issue was important enough for inclusion in the improvisation stage, then another actor would have to undertake its portrayal, which acted as an important psychological safeguard as most of the material, and the subject matter itself, is difficult enough on its own to deal with without the complication of re-living, or re-enacting a real-life experience that could perhaps have ramifications for the actor. The danger of depression infiltrating the cast was already inherent due to the nature of the subject matter therefore it was vital to keep some distance between reality and performance, part of which was the emotional safe-guard of not allowing any cast member to re-enact something that they had actually been through. The emotional toll on the company was also dealt with through careful debriefing at the conclusion of each rehearsal session. Because of the shared religious beliefs of the cast, prayer and song formed a part of achieving this ‘closure’ although other methods were also utilised, including group discussions and theatre games allowing for trust and team building to be re-established.

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4 The Cumberland Group is a consortium of local newspapers covering most suburbs in the Sydney Metropolitan Area.
Further research included meetings with people who had been exposed to various facets of suicide including a person who had attempted suicide several times, a police officer who had worked for many years as an expert negotiator in 'self-hostage situations' (the term used by the police force to describe someone who attempts suicide) and Randall Pieterse, the national director of LifeForce, a suicide prevention organisation. These very different and significantly contrasting viewpoints were a rich source of material for the cast.

The area of research which had perhaps the most significant impact on the creation of the play was the workshops conducted by LifeForce, a program which is currently running in New South Wales and Victoria that is funded by Wesley Mission (and supplemented with donations from corporations and the Federal Government). Since their objectives paralleled the production outcomes that we desired, we worked closely with this organisation. Their workshops, research materials, and data provided a wealth of information which became integrated into the final product.

Many ideas came out of the research phase – what sort of characters did we need to tell this story, what did we want to say, what issues were the most important, and so on. We also continued to 'brainstorm' ideas through the research phase. Ideas were all put on large poster boards or A3 sheets on the walls and when certain characters and issues interconnected strongly, lines were drawn between them. This became a key visual aid to the research phase as these connections and similarities provided us with starting

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5 LifeForce is a suicide prevention program, funding by both the federal government and the private sector, and administrated by Wesley Mission. They run educational workshops for schools, businesses and private groups. These workshops outline the background and statistics of suicide in Australia and provide strategies for recognising the warning signs, getting help and preventing suicide. Their SALT strategy, which was incorporated into the play, is widely held as an effective suicide prevention strategy.
points for the shaping of the material into scenes by providing us with links as to which characters were best suited to portraying which issues; which characters interacted best; where the tensions were. It became apparent which types of characters were needed and how they related to each other – ie a group of school students, peers of Simon (the fictional victim), were needed. These were further divided into those who befriended him and those who bullied him. The family members emerged – single mother, brother, sister, with the sister being part of the school crowd who bullied Simon which provides tension/conflict on several levels – her feelings of guilt for being part of what drove him over the edge, the other kids’ reactions to her, and the family’s reaction to her. Other characters, (the strangers, the people in the community such as the police officer, gym teacher, and journalist) who seem at first glance to be unconnected to Simon but are profoundly affected by his death, are developed. The interconnections between characters, the tangling of the lives of seeming strangers which have so much unknown effect on each other, provide the dramatic tensions necessary to any good script.

As characters are identified, they are connected to issues that are best suited to explore (ie Simon’s friends - why didn’t I notice anything was wrong?) The visual links on the posters allow the company to organise scene ideas and characters in a logical way which helps enormously in the workshop phase in that improvisations will have clear starting points – characters A and B will improvise around Issue 3.

STEP 3 - SHAPING THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE MATERIAL

As the research phase concluded, a clear idea as to character types and possible scenes emerged and were posted on the wall of the rehearsal room with possible links already made, giving the group enough material to make decisions regarding the framework
which include genre and style, approximate or ideal length, key issues, plot lines, through lines, characters, etc. The idea of this stage of the process is to develop a structure upon which to guide the improvisational work as a strong, well-organised structure will facilitate the improvisational process and bring order into what could be a chaotic process. Certain mis-en-scene concepts can also be developed here (ie set design can begin to develop). Of course, once the improvisational work commences, this framework may need to be altered to serve the drama. A certain flexibility, or fluidity, is needed as the company may find that decisions made at this stage are no longer be valid in the context of the work created later.

One of the first decisions made was the genre and style of the production as this decision significantly affected the material developed in the improvisation. An absurdist comedy engenders different plot lines, scenes, characters, etc than a naturalistic tragedy. For *Back From Nowhere* the decision was made by the company to use the genre of tragic-comedy with a non-narrative, symbolic presentation style that is not strictly linear; the initial idea being that cast members would each take on a character that was connected to the central victim (ie family members, school friends, and teachers) and tell that person’s story to the audience. It was felt that this style was most conducive to attaining the overall objectives of the production as it allowed for an interweaving of people’s stories, data about suicide, and educational material without being restricted to the conventions of a narrative, or that of naturalistic performance where the constraints of time, place, and person exist. However, while this provided us with a starting point and a frame of reference, it was not a fixed detail but rather one that altered as the material developed so that this initial choice was modified somewhat throughout the improvisational stage.
The ideal length for this production was determined to be ninety-minutes not because of what the material demanded but rather due to pragmatic considerations - its primary function was as a touring production for schools where this is the preferred length. Length was also determined by the available rehearsal time as this limited how much material could be incorporated and refined into a quality production.

Many of the mis-en-scene decisions were made here as well, with the proviso that these decisions could change depending on the needs of the script that emerged from the workshop process. For Back From Nowhere, the director briefed the set designer on the notion of a non-naturalistic presentation. The design sought was one which represented the central emerging theme from the research – the interconnectedness of everyone, that each of our actions affects another. The brief included the idea that gave rise to the play’s title – that we are all on journeys or roads in our lives and these journeys intersect everyone else’s – by reaching out to the suicidal person, whose actions will take their journey out of the reach of others into a nowhere-place, we can bring them ‘back from nowhere’. The designer was also briefed that several areas would be needed for certain scenes to be set in but that they should not literally represent a specific place.

The set design that emerged met the dictates of the brief and served the needs of the play. The concept provided one performance space or was able to be localised (by

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6 The set designer was Joanne Lewis, a recent graduate of NIDA. The assistant set-designer was Sumara Brown. The design actually emerged as a result of the collaboration between Ms Lewis and Mrs Brown in a set design course taught by Ms Lewis at Wesley Institute for Ministry & the Arts, in which Mrs Brown was a student.
lighting) into smaller areas – ie the platforms could be Simon's bedroom or the
bleachers in the school gym, one floor square was either part of a roadway or could
become, with the addition of two chairs, the family's living room. The archway became
the door to the house or a screen beyond which lies the other world of Simon's
existence before and after his death. The floor squares were an artistic representation of
the roads or journeys people were on, laid out in intersecting paths, with contrasts of
light and dark designs on each with those squares closest to the 'grave' being
predominantly darker than those further away – showing the gradation of depression
which deepens as the suicidal person draws closer to death. All of these elements, in
their multiple uses, were symbolic of the various concepts/issues of the play.
While the set was based in a metaphoric style, the costuming followed naturalistic trends. This contrast in styles also reflected the correlating contrast that existed in the performance styles – a contrast which worked well for the play in that it varied audience reception and identification modes to maximise the chance of a cathartic experience, and to heighten the theatricality of the production. All of the mis-en-scene decisions cannot, of course, be made at this stage but those that can should, with basic ideas for others being thought of in rough form.

**STEP 4 - IMPROVISATION: WORKSHOPPING THE MATERIAL**

Once the characters, issues, shape, framework, and style have all been determined, the process advances to the improvisational stage from where the script will eventually emerge. It is here, more than anywhere else, that the role of the director is as a *facilitator* – to allow the actors a dramatic exploration, while making decisions as to where and when to bend or change that framework, and guiding the improvisations to further explore what does work and discard what does not work. This is a process of progressive modification wherein something that may not have worked at one point may turn out to be perfect in a different context further along in the process. The director allowed the actors latitude but also kept an organisational and guiding hand on the proceeds as the facilitator's objectivity allowed her to oversee the bigger picture as it came together - a viewpoint most in the company did not have.

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7 The actors on this production were a combination of two professional actors, second year performance students in the BCA (Drama) at Wesley Institute for Ministry & the Arts, and two interested amateur actors from the wider community. The professional actors were Clive King who had both stage and screen experience in Sydney and Los Angeles and Donna Young Calcandis, who was known as Donna Jean Young during her days as a celebrity stand-up comedienne in Hollywood where she made numerous appearances on Johnny Carson, the Merve Griffin Show, and was a regular on *Laugh-In*. 
During the improvisational work, documentation of the work - either by appointing a scribe to write down what is happening in the workshop, or by videotaping and transcribing the session – became a vital and necessary function as having a written record facilitated both the scripting and editing processes. An improvisation that was discarded at one point might in fact turn out to be useful, therefore having a record allowed it to be incorporated at a later stage. Alternatively, when an improvisation worked particularly well, it was sometimes impossible to get the exact tone, tension, and form in a further enactment so having a record allowed it be transferred straight to the script-in-progress, without losing any of these elements.

Through the improvisation process, characters changed, ideas flowed, issues were discarded and new ones suggested, and a general flow and pace began to emerge. We found it helpful to write suggestions for scenes on posters on the walls with marks as to which ones worked or did not work, and to what extent. Gradually the company took note of which scenes were definitely to be included. These were then given their own poster with a scene title, a brief suggestion as to content, and which characters are likely to perform it. Eventually, these posters were then moved around on the wall so that the company began to develop a running order for the play with the added bonus of allowing the director to see where the gaps were and where further work needed to be done or linking scenes needed to be created. Once the workshopping was significantly advanced, and these posters were in order, the company was given a view as to what still needed to be said and by whom (what issues should still be explored, what types of scenes were necessary, and what characters still needed to be created). Where one of these ‘holes’ was identified, a blank poster was put in place and a brief description of what was needed written on it. These ideas were then workshopped and added to the
script-in-progress. At the end of the workshop process, these posters gave the company the running order for the completed play.

At the beginning of the improvisation phase, several key areas of significant drama, tension, or interest were highlighted by the research that gave the company raw material with which to begin. The Back From Nowhere company identified several areas that they wished to work with – the suicidal mind (why a person feels there is no other answer and the fact that it is not about dying but about stopping emotional pain); trigger factors for suicide (bullying, emotional overload, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness); the grief process for those left behind, especially the grief-anger-blame-guilt cycle; a clear explanation of what the warning signs are; and information on what to do if you suspect someone is suicidal. Once these were written on fresh posters, the cast explored what sort of characters they would like to play that would address those issues. (Here, having the links drawn on the posters between issues and characters was a valuable tool.) Each chose a character from the list compiled during the research phase. These initially included the mother, brother, sister, the victim, the school counsellor, the school cafeteria owner, a journalist covering the story, school friends, and since the cast felt that bullying had a large link with teen suicide, a group of school students known in rehearsals as the ‘cool group’ whose leader was the school bully. Much discussion took place as to what were the major issues concerned with suicide, with the primary research materials referred to and talked over until a clear picture began to emerge. The cast then put our three objectives on the wall and under each listed the areas identified as needing consideration for the play that suited each of those objectives (some suited more than one, of course, since the objectives themselves
Having a list of characters, objectives and issues gave us a specific direction for the guidance of the improvisational work.

Because the decision had been made to have a non-narrative, non-linear presentation, plot lines became of less concern, but through-lines and links between characters took on a greater importance. As the cast looked over the information on the wall they realised that some links already existed - characters had certain relationships with each other (ie the family or the school groups) which needed to be explored in the workshops, and certain ideas or issues formed natural groupings. Through more discussion, a suggestion was made that to have a nameless, faceless, undefined victim could give some audience members an 'escape route' so to speak with cast concerned that without humanising the victim, there would be no specific point of identification and it would be easy to bypass the cathartic response. Therefore to humanise the issue, it was decided to try the idea of having the victim in the play always around, but with no one in the audience knowing he was the dead person until later in the play. Without having a narrative, in the traditional sense, the creation of this character, Simon, provided the anchor point upon which all else could pivot, a central point of reference linking all characters and all issues.

The improvisations began with each cast member creating a short (two to five minute) monologue for the character they wanted to play which would explore the issues relevant to their character. From these monologues, relationships and groupings were identified (such as 'the family' or 'the cool crowd' or 'the friends'), similarities in

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8 Interestingly, the person who made this suggestion had never seen The Sixth Sense although that is the basic idea of her suggestion.
themes emerged (e.g., bullying and the grief cycle) and links between people and issues were recognized. From these monologues, improvisations between two or more characters were carried out which developed into scenes, highlighting and making connections between characters, groupings and issues. The posters showing themes, issues and ideas were constantly consulted for starting offers for the improvisations. For example, the family group — mother, brother and sister — felt that their characters were the most suitable to explore issues of the grief cycle. This led to improvisations based on those issues which eventually developed into the family confrontation and reconciliation scenes (Act I, scene vii and Act II, scene vi — see Appendix). Through this initial work, certain cast members decided to change their characters — the school cafeteria owner became the trusted gym teacher, the school counsellor became the police person who had to break the news to the family. These choices came from explorations of the issues, with the objectives always in mind, which led cast members, facilitated by the director, to realise that certain characters were more suited to certain concerns than others.

Other framework changes that were made included changes in style. The improvisations usually started in a naturalistic style and then developed into the emblematic. For certain scenes, especially the family scenes, it was decided to leave a more naturalistic style of performance as these served the issues and the dramatic function better in that it was felt that most audience members for whom the healing objective would be of most importance could reach that objective by clear identification with the characters themselves — something which might not have been achieved had a symbolic mode of presentation been used as it could have easily detracted from the edge of reality needed for identification and the ensuing Morenian-type catharsis. Other scenes, however,
warranted the metaphoric presentation as the audience needed to identify with concepts, ideas or issues in a more abstract form, rather than being limited to a specific time, place or person.

The workshop process continued for approximately six weeks, which comprised a significant portion of the total rehearsal time allotted. As scenes were transcribed (mostly utilising the video tape method of recording mentioned earlier), they were placed in an approximate order in the script-in-progress as well as placed in order on the posters on the wall. Near the middle of the process the posters were rearranged to reflect a logical running order and identified where further work still needed to be done. Then the company discussed ways of fulfilling these needs and further workshopped scenes that could satisfy the requirements with the result being the eventual creation of a draft script.

STEP 5 - SCRIPTING THE MATERIAL

At the conclusion of the improvisational phase, a draft script was ready. The cast and director assembled and read through this draft discussing where the problems were and how it flowed as a whole, with any problems addressed and the flow and order rearranged and positioned as needed.

Once this occurred, the script was sent to a dramaturg, Donna Abela, for professional assessment. This independent assessment was vital at this stage to identify problems that the company was too close to the material to notice. The dramaturg looked for a
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finished product that had all the key elements from the early discussions – that the objectives were likely to be met, that the important issues were addressed, that the style/genre/form was cohesive and appropriate, and that the characters were sustainable and believable and above all, that the script served the needs of drama – that it was entertaining, fulfilled the needs of an audience and was basically ‘good’ theatre (by which we mean it is of a high standard and degree of professionalism).

After the dramaturg returned the script with her remarks, I, as the director, went through the suggested changes and merged them with my own thoughts to prepare a final script which was then presented to the cast. At this point the process progressed to a more conventional rehearsal methodology.

The dramaturg for Back From Nowhere found several problems in the draft script which were not addressed through the workshop process which included too many thesis statements, not enough clear links between scenes, over-wordiness, and some structural problems such as scene orders that didn’t make sense. One of the more serious problems identified was that since each character knew every other character’s background, scenes were created or an order put together that made sense to the actors but for which an audience was missing vital information that was necessary to understand the scene. The clearest case of this is the ‘Drunk Scene’ (Act I, scene x) and ‘Renee’s Monologue’ (Act I, scene ix).10 In the monologue, Renee tells of when Simon thought they were going out and brought her flowers and she threw them away, rejecting him. In the Drunk Scene, the mother refers to her as Patrick’s girlfriend, then

9 Donna Abela is a professional dramaturg and playwright. She was a founding member of Powerhouse Youth Theatre in Sydney and is a member of the Australian Playwrights Centre.
questions if she was Simon’s girlfriend before. By placing the monologue after the
Drunk Scene, the audience would have no understanding of why the mother would
question the girl having a relationship to both her sons or why that should have the
impact intended by that statement. By moving Renee’s monologue to just before the
Drunk Scene, the flow and sense were re-established.

The director looked over the dramaturg’s suggestions and amalgamated them with her
own view of the overall objectives and ‘look’ of the play. These changes tightened and
enhanced the play into a workable, achievable, and entertaining piece of theatre.11

After the dramaturg’s suggestions were incorporated, the cast was presented with a final
draft of the script which they read through, more minor changes were made according to
any valid suggestions that were presented and the process continued into the rehearsal
phase.

STEP 6 - REHEARSAL

Once the final script was presented to the company, the process continued with a
rehearsal phase akin to that involved in rehearsing a conventional play. For Back From
Nowhere the workshop phase took longer than expected so we had approximately three
weeks to rehearse the final script. By this time, the set design had been finalised so
blocking of scenes was completed with minor changes from the improvisational work.
Other design elements, such as lighting and sound design, were completed once the
final script was available.

10 See script in Appendix A
The company approached these rehearsals as for any other scripted performance with blocking and characterisation being refined. Much of the rough blocking was accomplished during the improvisational work so this part of the process was about sharpening this work with the director looking for ways to bring out the dramatic tensions and improve the actors’ performances and overall theatricality. Minor adjustments occurred, but the company avoided making any major changes to the script at this stage. At the end of this phase, the production is ready for performance.

THE PRODUCT

While the project was intended to be transformational for its audiences, there is some evidence that the process was consciousness-raising for the company, many of whom had been directly affected by suicide – knowing loved ones who had attempted (or tragically, succeeded) in taking their lives, or having attempted suicide themselves. For them, the process became a healing one which allowed them to explore the effects that those experiences had on them in a protected environment and in experiential ways that allowed a greater insight and cathartic process to occur, thus alleviating feelings of guilt and blame much in the way that the psychodramatic or sociodramatic process does for its participants.

There were also several cast members who had never been exposed to suicide or its effects and for them the educational component took prominence in their own transformations. Even those who had experienced the effects of suicide learned a lot.

\[\text{11 For a more detailed look at these changes, see Appendix B.}\]
from the project. The information gathered from LifeForce, guest speakers, and the letters we received, was vital in opening up the topic beyond its taboo status to frank, open and healthy discussions of the realities of the suicidal mind-set, the Australian (and world) statistics, the warning signs, and where to get help. Gaining a full understanding of the depth and scope of the problem changed the perceptions of many cast members towards suicide in a very healthy way.

The realisations for company members that occurred in the process were a good indicator as to whether the production would have the capability to achieve its objectives for its audiences.

At the end of the rehearsal period, the cast themselves had undergone the same transformations we hoped would occur for the audience. We had a product that was finished and ready for presentation to the community. What had started as an idea, a theme, and some guidelines, had become a full-length, scripted play which had every indication of being able to achieve its transformational objectives.

THE PRODUCTION

The Tour

Once the process was completed, the product was ready for touring. This phase allowed us to test the transformational effect as 'community theatre' by allowing us to perform to specifically targeted audiences – an 'ideological community' bound together by a common interest in suicide prevention. The touring production could have been classed as Theatre-In-Education, where performances were presented to high-school aged...
students (church youth groups, community centres and especially high schools themselves) who are in the same peer group, or age range, as those whose death are classed as ‘youth’ suicide and are therefore an important target audience for the educative objective. However, the other objectives of healing and prevention, which are also appropriate for this targeted ‘community’, broaden the production beyond the narrow confines of TIE. While not devised in or with, in the strict sense, although the research material is certainly drawn from, the community, Back From Nowhere was devised by (with most of the cast being of the age-range defined as ‘youth’ by statistics of suicide, namely 15-24 year olds) and for the community, therefore the tour could be classified as ‘community theatre’. The original intent was to tour high schools only but most refused to allow us to present the play to students due to Department of Education Guidelines which prohibit discussion or presentations on the subject of suicide in schools in the fear that rather than help, the subject would be glorified thus causing teenagers to commit suicide in a ‘copycat’ gesture (a contentious issue that I personally disagree with). “As soon as schools hear ‘suicide’ they close down.” (Keenan. Sydney Morning Herald. 9 Nov 2000) The play had been specifically created as an educational tool, with department guidelines known so the material was carefully crafted to be about the effects of suicide, and never show the suicide, or talk about it directly, a paradigm shift originally suggested by the Department as being acceptable. The time, place, and how of Simon’s death is never defined, partly as a result of these

12 The Education Department’s view that if we openly talk about suicide in our schools it will only encourage students to attempt to take their own lives, is one that I disagree with. I believe that it is only by educating people, and removing the taboo status of the subject, that we can begin to turn the tide of Australia’s suicide statistics. Unless people are talking about it, unless they know what to look for, how to recognise suicidal tendencies, and know what to do about it, our youth will continue to cry out for help in this desperate and final way. My view, and one shared by LifeForce, is that talking about the issue does not cause more suicide; it prevents it.

13 For further information on this issue, see copy of Catherine Keenan’s Sydney Morning Herald article in Appendix C.
restrictions, and also partly to enable audience members to relate and identify without limiting to a specific locality or method thus Simon becomes an 'everyman' with audiences able to relate across a range of experiences. Even contacting over three hundred schools through Wesley Institute, only four made bookings, but word of the project spread so that community centres and, surprisingly, churches asked us to perform. Youth workers who had heard of our play asked us to perform for their groups as did churches, who typically do not like to deal with this issue as it somehow shows that their 'faith' is not sufficient to deal with crisis, also asked us to perform for their youth groups and congregations. Unfortunately we were limited in the number of performances we could manage due to the practical considerations of time and money. Even performing up to twice a day, we were unable to satisfy the demand. During the tour, and afterwards, as word of our production spread, we received many requests that we could not fulfil, showing us that we were having an impact and that there was a need for our production within the community.

The tour started with a performance at the Randwick Police and Citizens Youth Club as part of a combined program with a LifeForce Suicide Prevention Workshop. The impact of the production on the adolescents present went beyond the reaction we, or the organisers of the evening, expected. Youth workers had been placed around the room to effectively control any unruliness among the youth but instead of the expected problems, the audience of about fifty disadvantaged young people, most of whom were in high risk categories for suicide, were engrossed by the performances, with many in tears by the end. Randall Pieterse, the national director of LifeForce, was present and his reaction matched that of the audience – tears of empathy. His comments to the cast were that the play taught what he tried to cover in his workshops but in a way that was
possibly even more effective – certainly more ‘real’ in the sense of it being set in experiential rather than cognitive learning (in the sense of shared emotional responses).

An essential element of the touring production was the question and answer time between audience and cast members which allowed the performers to debrief but also allowed for unresolved issues or questions from audience members to be dealt with immediately, and important feedback on the immediate transformational effect to be ascertained. The feedback from this first question and answer session gave us valuable insight, and much needed encouragement, that we had indeed achieved our objectives, at least with that group, and that the production values were of a high standard.

As the tour continued, we realised that the same types of questions were being asked and the same comments were being made in each Q&A session including statements along the lines of ‘if only I had known what to look for before this, I could have saved my friend/relative/etc’; ‘finally someone understands what it is like to be suicidal’ (these people were immediately referred to either Randall, a teacher or youth worker for counselling); or ‘I had no idea my actions could affect someone like that’ (in particular reference to the scenes where bullying was shown to be a contributing factor to Simon’s suicide. This immediate response seemed to indicate that the objectives were possibly being met: education – people were being taught the warning signs and how to get help; healing – audience members who had lost someone to suicide were thanking us for showing them they were not alone and for showing them how to start to move on from their experiences; and thirdly, prevention – audience members whose lives were so desperate that they had contemplated suicide told us that they no longer felt that taking their life was an option and that they would seek help from the channels mentioned in
the play (thus linking back to the educational objective). As a result of people such as this attending the play, we had a trained counsellor (mostly Randall Pieterse) at each performance on the tour.

From the Randwick PCYC we went on to perform at several high schools, churches and a special condensed version for the International Youth Parliament. At each venue, the response in the question and answer session was similar to that at the Randwick PCYC. The church performances proved to be interesting in that the audiences were mixed (youth and adults) and in venues where one would have expected the subject of suicide prevention to be even more taboo than in general society due to the strictures of the faith that point to God as being the answer to all problems and that by virtue of that faith, no one should feel so overwhelmed by their situations as to contemplate taking their life. However, the ministers in the churches that asked us to perform to their congregations realised that anyone is susceptible to suicidal tendencies and that faith alone is not enough to protect their parishioners. They showed great courage in asking us to perform and the responses to our production in these venues were among the strongest we received. At one church, Calvary Chapel, which is located at George’s Hall in Sydney’s West, we had an audience of over five hundred people ranging in age from about ten to over eighty, although the majority of people were in the fifteen to twenty-four year old target age-bracket. This particular church had had several members, or relatives of members, commit suicide over the past few years. Many people expressed their sorrow that they had not seen this play before, or heard any of the information in it, as they felt it would have saved many lives. One elder in the church contacted us a few days after the performance to say that the next day he received a call that his grandson had completed suicide the night before, while the gentleman was watching the play. He
told us that had he not seen the production, he was not sure he could have handled the
news and was very sure he would have been no help whatsoever to his family.
However, because of *Back From Nowhere*, seeing how the family members in it reacted
and interacted, he was able to help his own family deal with the many emotions that
accompany such horrifying news. He thanked us and told us he wanted to make sure
we understood just what we had done for him and his family.

Through the tour, the company were also able to identify where the possible weaknesses
were in production values. The movement piece ending Act I was deemed too long —
while powerful (reducing many audience members, especially the young people, to
tears) its length limited its effectiveness. Between the tour and the opening at the
Sydney Opera House, the music was re-edited into a shorter version and the piece re-
choreographed. In fact, with hindsight, it can be argued that the play works better
without this piece altogether but that is now a choice for future directors to make.

The feedback from the tour enabled us to see what needed to be changed or tightened up
but it also pointed out what we were doing right. By the end of the tour, there was no
doubt that transformations were occurring and that our objectives were attained. The
question remained, however, as to whether the efficacy of the play would remain the
same for a general public audience in a mainstream, conventional theatre (The Sydney
Opera House) or if it only happened as expected for specifically targeted audiences (as
'community theatre').
The Sydney Opera House

The next phase of the performance process entailed removing the play from its secure environment and testing its transformational qualities for a mainstream, general-public audience. We were fortunate in that the management of The Sydney Opera House recognised the value of this production and not only offered us the use of The Studio, but in an unprecedented move, waived all venue hire charges. The venue was ideal as it is a well-established main-stream theatre but still has that feeling of ‘intimacy’ which aids the actor-spectator inter-relation necessary for the cathartic process. As a result of the tour, the production seemed to achieve its objectives for targeted audiences – youth and people who had an understanding and experience of the issues – but this venue allowed us to test the premise that the same production could be transformational for audiences not defined by the boundaries or ideological margins of the community theatre-type performances. Being reliant on public attendance, part of the success of the production, in addition to its transformational effect, was the fact that we ended the run with sold-out audiences, standing ovations, and made a profit.14

The venue itself is a modular space with several configurations possible. The one configuration we wanted for the seating (three sided) was not possible according to venue management, so the audience was instead arranged in a straight end-on bank with the mezzanine seats able to wrap around the 3 sides of the playing space. The same set that we had used for the tour was used in The Studio with no changes or modifications being made. The only mis-en-scene changes were to the lighting design as the touring

14 The play also received the Arts Contribution Certificate in the 2001 Mental Health Matters Awards from the NSW Department of Mental Health, Inc.
equipment did not support the original design by Iain Court\textsuperscript{15}, and the calibre of the
venue demanded certain production standards that were beyond what was supportable
on the tour. The lighting was kept to the metaphoric style of the production with effects
including a wave-effect during the ‘floating’ scene and other effects (a Venetian blind
effect across the journalist during her monologue), and blue lighting and strong
backlighting for the ‘Remembrances of Simon’ scene. For the same reasons, we also
modified our sound design – i.e. for “Remembrances of Simon” we were able to mike
Simon and add echo effects to make his voice seem ‘otherworldly’ which enhanced the
theatricality as well as clarified the meaning of the scene. The other major change made
for the Opera House performances included changes to the song which ended Act I.
The song was edited into a briefer version and the movement piece re-choreographed
accordingly. These were the only significant changes made to the production as we
wanted the mainstream performance to be as close as possible to the touring production
to test its validity as transformational drama outside of the community context.

After spending two days bumping-in and teching, the company performed an open-dress
rehearsal on the Tuesday\textsuperscript{16} night for students and staff of Wesley Institute, as well as
invited guests, then went on to perform five shows over the following three days. There
was a special matinee performance for people who had lost family and friends to
suicide, arranged to coincide with the annual Memorial Service held at the Opera House
(the proximity in location of the two events being a coincidence) as part of National

\textsuperscript{15} Iain Court has been a professional lighting and sound designer for the past 18 years. He has worked for
NIDA, Theatre Nepean, and several dance companies both in this capacity and as a lecturer or director.
\textsuperscript{16} Dress Rehearsal was on the 7\textsuperscript{th} November, 2000. Performances were held on Wednesday, 8\textsuperscript{th}
November to Saturday, 11\textsuperscript{th} November, 2000 at 8.00pm with a Saturday matinee and a special matinee
performance on Thursday, 9\textsuperscript{th} November, 2000 for families and friends who had lost loved ones to
suicide, held in conjunction with the annual LifeForce Memorial Service as part of National Suicide
Prevention Week.
Suicide Prevention Week (which was changed from its usual August date to November specifically to coincide with our production). This was a very special performance and elicited strong responses from the audience, however, it was again a distinctively targeted performance with the audience made up almost solely of people who had lost loved ones to suicide, so its efficacy operated on a different dynamic to what we were exploring with the Opera House performances. Because of the nature of the performances in this space, and the nature of the venue itself, the Question and Answer session was not held following the performances (except for the special Memorial Service performance). This disturbed many cast members as the instantaneous feedback had helped them cope with the emotional stress felt after each performance. The sense of exhaustion, and of being drained, was alleviated by the positive experience of the Q&A which reinforced the quality of the project so not having access to this feedback made it difficult for the cast to debrief. It also made it difficult for us to evaluate the transformational efficacy of these performances, so to compensate, we placed on each seat, prior to the show, information on LifeForce and suicide prevention for audience members to take with them. Included in this information was a request for them to send us their responses to the show. We received many letters in the weeks that followed which did support the perception that the production was as transformational for audiences in a mainstream context as it was in its community-oriented manifestation.

The Sydney Opera House performances were highly successful with later nights being sold out, the cast receiving standing ovations, and the production being covered by the 7.30 Report. Many audience members waited at the stage door to tell cast members how the play affected and changed them. The level of professionalism achieved by the cast, combined with the design elements and the script itself, all contributed to a highly
successful production in a theatrical sense, apart from the efficacy of the transformational process which, according to the letters and other feedback we received, also did indeed take place.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BACK FROM NOWHERE

The Process

The process of creating Back FromNowhere was an attempt to put into practice the theoretical concepts behind the creation of transformational drama. The combination of the three methodologies found to be most effective in the research – verbatim, scripted and devised theatre – proved to coalesce well into a single approach. What emerged from the process are several areas that are vital to the efficacy of such projects and several areas that are potential problems for any theatre company interested in creating this type of work.

Setting the desired outcomes at the start of the process is vital. It gave the focus to and oriented the creation of the work from the very beginning. The intention was to create something that would achieve something specific – that specificity made many of the company’s decisions for them, especially with regard to content and structure. It allowed for an organic creation that flowed naturally through each stage of the process with little conflict as to characters, scenes, staging, and design. It is essential for a company to know from the beginning what they want to achieve.

The early decisions made by the company in regards to style and genre were also important. Having an understanding of the overall ‘look’ of the production had a large
influence on the material that was chosen. It also gave order and a rationale for why some material was chosen and why material was presented in the way it was. Without setting these boundaries, the company could have created a mix of styles that had no framework and no cohesion, which could conceivably have denigrated the value of the production.

The choice of material is also something that will be greatly influenced by the make-up of the company itself. The actors' world view will prejudice their creative process in particular ways. If the company is made of diverse backgrounds, then there is potential for a broader viewpoint being expressed, or alternatively, for unresolvable conflict to arise. In either case, having clear objectives will help to guide the company through these decisions. Where the company come from similar backgrounds (as in the Back From Nowhere cast) then conflict is not as likely but the material can be restrained by the particular viewpoint of the cast members. The bridge between research and workshop needs to be carefully managed by the director so that the material chosen is not limited to a narrow viewpoint but rather encompasses as much diversity as possible while still focussing on the initial objectives of the production.

One of the major problems encountered by this project was the intensity of the emotional content versus the lack of experience by the student actors to cope with this in the context of performance. Professional actors have enough experience to understand the process of de-rolling. They tend to not carry the emotional backlash with them after rehearsals. The students we were working with, however, had not yet learned these coping mechanisms and often experienced sadness, anger and even depression. The director had to program time for closure into each rehearsal session to
help the cast ‘come out’ of the world of the play. Professional counsellors were also brought in as needed. This did create problems in that much time was spent debriefing that could have been used as rehearsal time. A director using this methodology must be aware of the dynamics and emotional levels of the group they are working with. In a project dealing with deep, potentially emotionally damaging, issues, then it would be preferable to work with actors who are able to ‘switch off’ immediately, or else program plenty of time for debriefing. If this is not done, then the emotional cost to cast members may be greater than the good achieved for audiences.

For the most part, the group-devised, issues-based process chosen for this production was a smooth, organic creative process which allowed for a rich exploration of the material by the cast. It allowed for the combination of three different methodologies into one process which created theatre that was transformational.

The Devised Script

One of the strengths of the production of Back From Nowhere lies in what it has to say. The information about suicide – its causes, consequences and prevention - woven into the script is compelling on its own, but presented to audiences in its theatrical package lends it a power beyond reading or listening to the same information in another format. The play brings the issues to life, as theatre is meant to do, and gives dry statistics a human face and human emotions, which is what presentation theatre is meant to do, and this play does it well. When devising the script, the company looked closely at the issues and information available in the research phase and, in fulfilling the primary objective of education, played with ways of making the didactic approach theatrically
appealing. It was decided early on that the essential information centred on what warning signs of potential suicide and the steps to be taken to prevent it. This was at the core of suicide prevention, as 80% of suicidal persons give clear warning of their intentions - signs too often missed or dismissed even they are recognised, most people often do not know what to do. Many of the scenes in the play were built around the notion of showing audiences those warning signs and indicating ameliorative action to be initiated.

Early in the workshop process, this information was presented in a ‘stand and deliver’, monologic mode similar to the training workshops carried out by LifeForce, but this neglected the theatrical concepts and negated the reason for using drama to present the material in the first place. Eventually the material was woven throughout several scenes to provide differing perspectives and ground that information in real people and in real situations. The interview scene in Act II, in particular, provided this information clearly and theatrically. In this scene, the school kids are interviewed by the journalist. They each tell of how Simon’s death affected them and in this clearly define what the warning signs are, and what they could have done to stop him. Earlier versions of this scene had each of them delivering a monologue with this material, but in later sessions, the decision was made to enhance interweave the monologues into a group scene with the journalist as the catalyst to elicit the school kids’ responses. Many audience members, especially those in the same age-group, remarked on how powerful this scene was for them with the information being clearly and effectively communicated in a patently dramatic way.
Aside from the didactic approach, other information was also presented well by this production including how the family dealt with the death of Simon as an example of families’ responses generally. In order to deal with the healing concept central to the play’s didactic intention, identification between audience members and those characters representing the family in the play was required so that the cycle of grief could be engendered in ‘real’ persons which would show audience members that they are not alone in their feelings; that others have been there and that there is a way forward. The way the family react to each other in grief and blame, and the way they each individually deal with their pain - the mother’s dependency on alcohol, the sister’s self-imposed isolation from human connections, the brother’s feelings of anger toward his brother, then blaming everyone else, and finally blaming himself - all portray very real emotions and responses to those emotions which could have a synergy with those in the audience who have undergone a similar experience. The reconciliation of the family, and their resolve to work together in dealing with the trauma, would then show those audience members that there is hope and a way forward, leading to their own acceptance and reconciliation — closure, if you like.

The other important issues covered by the material centre around the notion of what can lead a person to the desperation that precipitates the suicidal act. Family pressures, bullying, the sense of hopelessness and helplessness that can work together to bring the suicidal person to the crisis point, were all clearly explored and defined by the production. In fostering an understanding of the suicidal mindset, the processes that lead a person to that point, and the factors that contribute to the trigger-point, the objectives of education and prevention are accomplished. Providing audiences with an insight into and understanding of the deep emotional/psychological forces at work in the
suicidal mind underpins and reinforces the information provided on warning signs and actions needed.

The group devising process allowed for actors to explore the information and develop a script that presented the important issues and concerns and expounded on them in a theatrically interesting and evocative presentation for the material to be treated in a way that not only humanises it, giving audiences points of identification which allow for the transformations sought to take place, but also replaces the rational, unemotional presentation of the news, psychologically oriented lectures, articles, and books. The theatrical presentation makes the material available to audiences in an experiential, real, and even cathartic way that other modes of presentation do not necessarily achieve.

**Style of Presentation**

In addition to the strengths of the script itself and what it had to say to its audiences, the production used a style of presentation that further enhanced the text. Early in the workshop process, the style followed that of ‘presentation theatre’, involving more or less direct communication of issues within a minimalist mode of portrayal. In further development of the material, however, a mixture of styles emerged which included naturalistic narrative, surrealistic scenes, balletic movement sequences and music, as well as dramatic monologues. This mix of styles, rather than detracting from the message of the play, served to enhance the theatricality while still allowing the production to make its point. As mentioned earlier, the ‘family’ scenes tended to lean toward the naturalistic narrative which was judged by the company to be the most appropriate response to the material, while the scenes involving the dead Simon were presented in a surrealistic mode. Some material covered by the script also, for theatrical
reasons, leant itself well to physical expression such as the song ending Act I, or the 'Floating' scene in Act II. Limiting this play to one type of style would have only detracted from both the material and the theatricality of the production. This type of mixed-presentation theatre which emerged from the workshops enhanced the experience and worked well for this production.

**Actors and Acting**

The professional standard of performance achieved by the company also contributed to the effective communication of the thematic concerns of the play. A mixed cast of student ‘actors in training’, interested amateurs and professionals came together in a unified company which all performed to a very high standard, rather than playing to the lowest common denominator. The style of acting demanded by the script made it straightforward for the actors in some respects as each were playing characters within their own range of age and life experiences. However, this can also be problematic in that the performances can tend to be facile if the actors rely too heavily upon their own reality. The task for the director was then to extend the performances beyond a portrayal of the actors’ own experiences into an exploration of character beyond the constraints of a ‘method’ approach. To this end, much of the rehearsal process (beyond the devising) was spent in extending the acting abilities of student and amateur actors beyond what would normally be expected of them in their second year into a professional standard. This competency culminated in the Opera House performances where the pressure to perform at a high professional standard was enforced by the nature of the venue itself as well as the natural striving for excellence. The level of ability which the actors worked at at the start of the devising process, compared to that
achieved in both the tour and the performances highlights the impact of this project on new learning and their skills acquisition.

Movement patterns

The presentation style chosen for *Back From Nowhere* (especially the metaphoric approach) meant that the patterns of movement on the stage became an important part of the production. The notion of roads and journeys undertaken by people in their lives, and their interconnectedness, were important central themes to the production (although not always put in words, these themes underpinned what was being said in regards to how to deal with suicide). The design itself, with the floor squares laid out in intersecting pathways, influenced the movement patterns undertaken by the actors. The squares were used extensively as either pathways across the stage when lit in groups, or as separated, individual spaces unconnected to others (symbolising isolation) when lit with downlights. Most of the movement through the play centred on the use of these squares as symbolic definition of spaces and relationships. For example, in Act I, scene ii, each character walks to the 'gravesite' to lay their rose in memorial to Simon. They enter on the up-centre-stage square and walk along a pathway of squares to the 'grave' (see design section for more information on the construction of these squares and their meanings). Each part of this pathway is painted with a slightly different design with a varying degree of light or dark colours. Those closest to the start of the path are the brightest indicating hope, happiness, contentment. Those closest to the 'grave' are darker suggesting disillusionment and depression with the candle and rose which represent the memorial being on an almost (but not entirely) black square. Each character walks this pathway from 'life' to 'death' at the start of the play and returns along the same pathway until the reach the 'branch' in the middle which leads to the
mother, Ellen, who is grieving for her son. She is set in the same space which is to later become the family living room (with the addition of two chairs) where the majority of family scenes take place. The movement patterns around the stage, and across, through and over these floor squares, all reinforce the issues expressed in dialogue and action.

Most scenes in which the company are together in large groups, as in Act I, scene iii where they are entwined together or Act II, scene ii where the school kids are interviewed, are performed on the platform which is itself topped with a floor square corresponding to the others. This square is separated from and above the others, making it a place apart – a place where issues and events can be highlighted as to their importance, or scenes of high emotional intensity (such as Act I, scene vii and Act I, scene viii where the family, and then the brother, confront each other and discover their own sense of guilt) can be played. The staging of these scenes on the platforms allows for the separation from the main 'pathway' of people's journeys into a 'place apart' for inner-reflection and discovery. This integration of design with the human mis-en-scene allows the symbolic mode of performance to be explored in its many facets.

**Mis-en-scene**

While the presentation style of the play was a mixture of styles, the design itself was metaphoric. The floor squares and platforms, which have already been discussed, became an important part of the whole production, being used extensively as symbolic reinforcement of the concepts. The other element of the set design which was important to the production is the frame set at up-stage-right which represented for the most part, the division between the present reality of the characters’ lives and that of the ‘other-
world in which Simon exists. In the naturalistic scenes, however, it becomes an everyday object such as the door to the family house or a holder of a basketball hoop.

In addition to supporting the style and content of the play, the set design had to be functional in servicing both the tour and the Opera House. The modular nature of the design facilitated its usefulness in both types of venues as it allowed for the contraction and expansion of the set into the space allocated for performance. The notion of the floor squares as pathways was still valid whether all ten squares could be used, or only six. The minimalist style served the play well in that it did not overwhelm or detract from the production itself, while still creating an intimacy and definition in the larger performance spaces.

Whereas the same set was used for both tour and Opera House, the sound and lighting designs varied due to the availability of equipment. The touring production was limited as to its lighting and sound design. Special effects, backlighting, downlights, etc could not be used so lighting choices for the tour where broad wash, half stage lit, or blackout. Where the full lighting design utilised in the main-stream performances served as a symbolic reinforcement to the content, the limitations on the tour did not necessarily detract from it as the script and performances were strong enough to carry the material on their own. However, when fuller lighting facilities were available, they enabled the lighting design to augment the performances by enhancing mood and metaphor.

The sound design was also limited by similar considerations, but while the lighting design underwent significant changes once the production was moved to the Opera House, the sound design had only minor adjustments including the addition of a
microphone on Simon which allowed for his voice to be modulated by special effects during Act I, scene xi to further emphasise the surrealistic quality of the scene. The sound design is perhaps the one area of the mis-en-scene that should be reworked in future productions: for example, a ‘sound bridge’ could have been used in transitions between scenes instead of uncomfortable periods of blankness and to add layers of mood to scenes of heightened emotion or deep despair.

While most design elements were symbolic, the costume design was naturalistic – for example, the school children wore school uniforms (however the colours were coded to blend with the set with the greys being emblematic of the bleakness of the suicidal mindset) while the others wore normal, everyday clothes. With so much of the design being symbolic, the naturalism of the costume design provided the same contrast in design elements as the different presentation styles did in the acting. It also provided a ‘real’ element in which audiences who found it difficult to relate to the symbolic elements could anchor their identification.

The seating of the audience also played a part in the effectiveness of the production as the integration between design and performance called for extensive use of the floor squares, and actors to perform some scenes sitting, kneeling or even laying down. To maximise the impact of the performances, audiences needed clear sight-lines to the floor area. The effectiveness was also enhanced by seating arrangements that provided an intimate atmosphere. Proscenium-style presentation with rows of seating that reached to the back of a school hall was not the ideal arrangement as it presented inadequate sight-lines to many in the audience. Where possible, raised staging helped in these instances, but still did not allow for the floor design to be sighted. The Studio, at the
Sydney Opera House was ideal for this staging as the theatre, being a large space, still had an intimate feeling. In the stalls, the audience were banked in straight rows but these were tiered above the playing space allowing full view of the floor configuration, and the mezzanine level seats are wrapped around three sides of the performance space which all contribute to the intimate atmosphere allowing greater connections and energy transference between actor and spectator. On the tour, however, the ideal seating was not always available and the company had to work at other ways of achieving the desired intimate relationship.

**Structure**

When working with a devised methodology, the structure of the script often takes time to emerge. For the most part, the running order emerged as an organic part of the process with only minor adjustments needed in the end. The use of the wall posters to make links and create scenes allowed for the running order to be revised and refined during the process. Scenes were moved into place until eventually a logical progression presented itself. Once the script was assembled, only one change was necessary [the exchange of Act I, scenes ix and x.] In the earlier version, Renee’s monologue was delivered after the scene between Renee and Ellen. In the ‘drunk scene’, Ellen makes references to Renee’s relationship with Simon and Renee shows her interest in Patrick, Simon’s brother. Since the audience had not yet heard Renee’s story or how cruelly she treated Simon, Ellen’s references and Renee’s interest in Patrick, did not have the affect they needed to have. By switching the two scenes, the audience understood the character of Renee more and the ‘drunk scene’ made sense.
In addition to the running order needing to be a logical progression, the material itself had to be carefully organised to provide relief for the audience from the emotional intensity of the play. Lighter scenes, designed for 'comic' relief while at the same time still having something important to contribute to the thematic issues, had to be interspersed at the appropriate moments throughout the script to provide a breathing space for the audience. Scenes of heightened emotional intensity were followed by scenes that were lighter in tone and while not necessarily comic themselves, had comic moments in them. The director felt that asking the audience to sustain a journey into heightened emotion for too long would be detrimental and possibly run the danger of spectators overloading and 'tuning out'. At no point was comedy for the sake of comedy introduced, however. Each scene has something important to communicate, no matter what its tone. The most prominent example of this relief is the 'drunk scene'. This emerged out of the workshops when exploring the mother's character and how she deals with her son's death. Stories researched, and known from personal experience, show that a parent can often turn to alcohol or drug dependency as a way of dealing with the grief cycle. When workshopping the idea, a serious portrayal of the alcohol dependency took the play into a side-area that the play was not meant to explore while the comic version allowed for a certain pathos where the family was concerned, and provided comic relief for the audience. This scene is the first 'comic relief' in the play and appears halfway through Act I. By that stage, the audience needed the emotional release. From there, the play could return to the heavier material, having allowed the audience a brief escape.
In a production about issues that are this sensitive, and depressing, the running order becomes very important with logical progression only one aspect and levels of emotional intensity taking on added significance.

In addition to the running order, the overall framework for the production was important—specifically length and use of intervals. The director set the ideal length at ninety minutes as this fit in with the needs of most schools for the tour, with an interval of fifteen minutes between the acts. This interval could be lengthened or shortened depending on the needs of the venue being performed at. In retrospect, this type of production would probably be better run at a slightly shorter length and without an interval. The break between the acts allows the audience too much relief from the emotional journey and breaks the flow of the production. The movement sequence which ends Act I could have been interpreted as a final scene, giving audiences a false impression that the play was over, so without a clear announcement from the stage manager (something that happened on the tour but was lacking in the Opera House performances) some audience members did not realise that this was not the end of the play. In each performance at this venue, some people left at intermission thinking the play was over, which was unfortunate as the scenes with the most information regarding warning signs and those providing closure are in Act II.\textsuperscript{17} In a production that sustains the emotional intensity for long periods of time, as in this case, minor, light relief is needed, but a major break in the flow of the material can be detrimental to audience reception—especially if they leave at interval and are not given exposure to the latter scenes that allow for a completion or closure on the material.

\textsuperscript{17} Several of these audience members who left for this reason were known to us and told us this in the days following the play's closing.
Conclusion

*Back From Nowhere* contained tight integration between the design elements, the mise-en-scene and the script itself with all of those elements working together with the actors’ abilities to present a play that seemed to have a high level of theatricality and professionalism based on the audience feedback we received. The play had something important to say and said it well. It allowed for a cathartic process in the Aristotelian sense through its educational objective (causing an identification with the emotions/traumas of the characters allowing for a purging of similar feelings in the audience) as well as in the Morenian sense (the objective of psychological healing from trauma and grief) and the Boalian sense (the objective of prevention). Each of these can cause substantial transformation on their own, but together, in one production, the effect was amplified. Just as drawing from different transformational methodologies in the creation of the play allowed for a greater effect, so too did combining these different approaches to catharsis. From the anecdotal evidence we have (including letters received and verbal feedback) it seems the production was transformational for some audience members.

**CONCLUSION**

The methodology used to create *Back From Nowhere* draws on the processes of productions that have an accepted efficacy and utilised the best ideas from those processes to create a new methodology applied to a group-devised, issues-based project with its objectives set in a transformational outcome. The assembly of research material based on interviews and stories sent to us by real people (corresponding to the verbatim
techniques in *Aftershocks*) combined with both educative concepts and objectives (similar to that employed in Theatre-In-Education projects such as *Property of the Clan*) and the workshopping of ideas and concepts into a scripted performance (as in *Runaways*) led to the process detailed in this chapter. The process in itself appeared to create transformations in the company. The Question & Answer sessions from the tour provided us with the feedback needed to show that these same objectives were being met for audiences that were members of the ‘community’ that was targeted by the touring production therefore showing the transformational process to be possible in the community theatre-type context. For performances at The Sydney Opera House, there is no way of proving the transformational effect since even with the best audience survey/reader tools available, we can only get an idea of trends. However, available anecdotal information, gathered from the Question & Answer sessions, letters received after performances, and verbal feedback, indicates audience members experiencing realisations that were in the general direction of the objectives.

The results from both the tour and the Opera House performances suggest that *Back From Nowhere* achieved its transformational outcomes both as community and mainstream theatre. While the immediate efficacy of the project has been documented, the long-term effects are, of course, unknown – the ripple from the immediate transformations in individuals present in the audience to a collective transformation at the community and social levels are impossible to determine as no adequate methodologies have been developed to measure long-term outcomes, and many factors, other than the production itself, can combine to create social change. While not directly connected to the production, we do know that there has been a decline in youth suicide statistics and a trend, in the media especially, to talk more openly about suicide with the
result being that the subject is slowly losing its ‘taboo’ status. Perhaps our production played a small part in this by exposing audiences and media to a positive way of dealing with the material, and showing that it must be dealt with.

*Back From Nowhere*’s transformational objectives – education, prevention and healing – have perhaps reached beyond the individual to the collective and are contributing to the social transformations currently happening in this area.
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APPENDIX A

BACK FROM NOWHERE

SCRIPT
Back From Nowhere

A Group Devised Work by
Bridget Mary Aitchison
And the Cast of the Show

Performed at
The Studio, Sydney Opera House
8-11 November 2000

Supported by Wesley Mission, Wesley Institute for Ministry & the Arts, and the Sydney Opera House Trust
© 2000
Bridget Mary Aitchison
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Cast List

Melanie ................................................................. Catherine Bradbury
Ellen ................................................................. Donna Calcandis
Cass ................................................................. Kirsty Erb
Renee ................................................................. Anthea Goddard
Patrick ............................................................... Clive King
Ryan ................................................................. Caine McVean
Mickey ............................................................. Jason Murray
Flick ................................................................. Melissa Passafaro
Reevesby ............................................................ Megan Simpson
Simon ............................................................... Dean Terry
Rachael ............................................................. Lusianna Vuki
Courtney ........................................................... Sarah Warner
Kim ........................................................................ Jayne Wong

Production Team

Executive Producer ................................................ Dr David H Johnston
Producer/Director ................................................ Bridget Mary Aitchison
Associate Producer ................................................. Linden Jones
Lighting/Sound Design ........................................... Iain Court
Set Design ............................................................. Joanne Lewis
Assistant Set Designers .............................................. Marlin Foster, Sumara Johnston
Costume Design ..................................................... Melodie Watt
Dramaturg ............................................................. Donna Abela
Stage Manager ....................................................... Sumara Johnston
Assistant Stage Manager ........................................... Marlin Foster
ACT I

Scene 1: Breaking the News

Dark stage. A police siren is heard. The lights slowly come up to reveal the cast who are scattered around the area.

RACHAEL: I'm very sorry to inform you that your...

REEVESBY: son

FLICK: daughter

CASS: sister

RYAN: brother

MICKEY: mate

RENEE: Simon

ALL VOICES: has been killed tonight by...

KIM: hanging

PATRICK: jumping

CASS: too many pills

REEVESBY: purposely crashing his car

MELANIE: Gunshot

COURTNEY: slitting his wrists.

RACHAEL: We're sorry, but I'm afraid it looks like he's...

MICKEY: killed himself.

ELLEN: What are you saying? Not my so...

RENEE: He's committed...

ALL VOICES: ...SUICIDE (All yell with emphasis on this word)

BLACKOUT

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Scene 2: Memorial

As the lights come up (dimly), the cast appear, one at a time and walk to down-stage-left. Simon is on the platform in a very dim spotlight holding a single red rose and appearing to cry in grief. The first person lights a candle (the lights are dim and diffused by the fog so that we get the effect of an ethereal other world) and lays a red rose next to the candle. Each cast member comes forward and lays their red rose on the pile and moves to stand around Ellen at stage-right (no light on this area). How each person lays their rose should give an indication as to how Simon’s death has affected them. As the second person finishes laying their rose, they start humming Amazing Grace. Each person joins in humming after they have laid their rose. When Courtney lays her rose, she is joined by Patrick. Simon looks at them, shakes his head and walks offstage. As the last person lays their rose, the music cuts out as the MOTHER screams out “NO!” At her scream, the lights come up to reveal the cast gathered around the Mother in support, as at a funeral. The lights snap to black. The dim light, in which Simon has been illuminated through all of this, slowly fades. Note: The candle stays lit throughout the play. The small area of the candle and roses remains dimly lit by stage lighting throughout as well as a constant reminder of the death which this plays centres around. This becomes a symbolic ‘grave site’ for everyone and anyone who has completed suicide.

Order for laying roses: Renee, Rachael, Ryan, Mackenzie, Flick, Kim, Melanie, Reevesby, Mickey, Cass, Courtney, Patrick.

Scene 3: Ellen’s Story

The lights come up; the MOTHER is still seated where she was when she cried out.

ELLEN: Oh no! Someone please! Dear God! This can’t be. Someone please wake me from this dream. Simon – Simon! Oh my darling boy – when he was little he used to love to play hide ‘n seek. Simon! Where are you? Oh, please come to me. Where are you? Why don’t you answer me? Why don’t you answer your mother? What have you done? Ah, Simon. Wasn’t I good to you? Did I say something? Did I do something? If only I could make it up to you. I’d do anything. I’d give anything to have you back.... to have you walk in the room.... to see your smiling face.... To hug and kiss you...to listen to you...to know you...(Breaking up and weeping) Didn’t I know you? I thought we were close (weeping) Where did I go wrong? And now, how am I supposed to carry on? How can I live without you? I’m sorry. I didn’t hear your cry for help. I thought we were close. (crying – long pause) Why?

Scene 4: Dis/Connections

The cast are arranged in a twisted, tangled group on the platforms – all knotted together to show their interconnectedness.

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SIMON: He thought he wasn’t connected to anybody. But what he didn’t realise was that he was connected to all of us.

Everyone falls down one by one, like dominoes. As each person delivers their lines, they get up and walk off-stage. Their lines give the audience an idea as to their relationship to Simon.

MICKEY: I don’t know why he did it. It had nothing to do with me, though.

RENEE: I always thought he was a bit weird, but I can’t imagine him doing this.

CASS: I didn’t know him really well, but I can’t see why he would.

RYAN: Stupid thing to do.

RACHAEL: Why didn’t he reach out to someone?

FLICK: Simon, I cared!

COURTNEY: He seemed so distant.

ELLEN: It was my fault; he needed me.

REEVESBY: I’m determined to make his voice heard.

KIM: It’s too high a price to pay.

MELANIE: I just don’t understand.

PATRICK: I tried to understand him.

SIMON: Nobody understood him.

BLACKOUT

Scene 5: Reevesby

Reevesby starts centre-stage. The squares on the ground, and her movement across them, are used during her monologue to represent her journey in life.

My friend Sharon called me for help, sounding desperate, but I told her I was busy, I was covering an important story and could I call her back?

PAUSE

The last time I heard her voice was that night on the answering machine: “Reevesby, that hard hitting journalistic quality of “matter of fact ness” you’ve got that’s taken you...
so far in your job was a Godsend to me when I couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. But today I just couldn’t see it any more.

I never saw the signs… I thought she was always the happiest one of my friends. I suppose I was too wrapped up in my work to have noticed. I cried myself to sleep that night.

**PAUSE**

My boss knocks me when I come in the next morning. “Reevesby my answer’s no, you won’t be covering that suicide story. It won’t be good for our ratings.” That was it. That was the last straw. “Look,” I said to my Boss, leaning over the desk, “You taught me all I know, and part of that was to dig your heels in whenever you get the scent of a good story and fight tooth and nail to get it. This is an issue that has been taboo for far too long; I won’t be mute to their silent cry. This person is not a nobody, as you’ve just said; he has a name. Simon. I will cover Simon’s story. For Sharon’s sake, and for Simon’s.

**Scene 6: Rachael & Ellen**

*Duologue. Begins with Rachael retracing her path (using the floor squares as a metaphor for that path) leading up to the house on the day she told the news to Simon’s family. Just off Centre stage, toward stage-right is the ‘lounge room’ which is symbolised by two chairs near a floor square. We hear their interactions but the two do not face each other or interact in reality. Delivery is straight to audience.*

**RACHAEL:** Have you ever had to say something you know you don't want to say? Your stomach churns. Your palms are so sticky. You walk up the path in time to the racing beat of your heart. You regain your composure. You reach the door, and what's this family's name? What is that phrase we were taught at the academy for these 'particular' cases? Think...hurry...and before I co-ordinate my body and mind, my hand has pressed the doorbell. I try to breathe slower; that doesn't work, I'm starting to feel dizzy.

*(lights on Ellen)*

**ELLEN:** Oh, hello, can I help you? *(surprised it’s a policewoman).*

**RACHAEL:** *(To Ellen)* Good afternoon. Are you Mrs. .....?

**ELLEN:** *(to the audience)* Wilkinson.

**RACHAEL:** May we come in please?

**ELLEN:** Of course. Forgive me.

**RACHAEL:** I don’t know how to say this but I’m afraid I’ve got some very bad news. I’m sorry to inform you that your son was found....

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ELLEN: What? NO! *(black on Ellen)*

(Silence)

RACHAEL: *(Goes to leave- retracing her steps again: addresses the audience).* I don't care how many times you have to do it...it still hurts as much as that very first time. You gotta be careful you stay close to your own loved ones after you do something like this.

Scene 7: Family Confrontation

Scene starts in Simon’s bedroom – symbolised by a doona and pillow thrown over the top platform. Patrick is sitting on Simon’s bed alone. Courtney walks in.

COURTNEY: How did you get in here? *(looking around in shock)* Oh wow!

PATRICK: Mum found the key – she’s in shock. Look at this...

COURTNEY: I don’t believe it. I haven’t been in here in a year. It’s as though I don’t know him.

PATRICK: So that’s why he kept it locked. Look at these posters! This art! It’s frightening.

COURTNEY: Did he draw these?

PATRICK: No wonder he’s been so secretive.

COURTNEY: He wasn’t like this…what happened? You were always close to him…why didn’t you notice?

PATRICK: Me? What about you? You were always off with dad every weekend. Do you remember when Simon stopped calling him Dad?

COURTNEY: I can’t blame him. You know the way he treated him.

PATRICK: He’s our father, though.

COURTNEY: He didn’t give a crap.

PATRICK: Do you think he cares about you?

COURTNEY: *(blasé)* I don’t know

PATRICK: You’re beginning to sound like Simon.

COURTNEY: What’s that supposed to mean?
PATRICK: Well, if you’re talking like this how do we know if you’re going to follow in his footsteps and kill yourself?

COURTNEY: Of course I am. That’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to go out and kill myself. (pause — they glare at each other and then break away from eye contact) Why did he do it?

PATRICK: I don’t know. (still angry) He was just selfish.

COURTNEY: How can you say that?

PATRICK: Look at who he’s left us with. Why do we have to put up with Mum and he gets to just leave?

COURTNEY: Do you want to take off like our father?

PATRICK: Shut up

ELLEN: (calling from stage right - the family ‘living room’) What’s the fighting about?

(Patrick and Courtney look at each other)

ELLEN: We need to have a chat.

(Courtney and Patrick resignedly walk out of Simon’s room and join Ellen)

ELLEN: Were you in Simon’s room? It’s devastating isn’t it?

COURTNEY: I don’t get it.

ELLEN: Can we try and help each other at this time?


COURTNEY: Patrick don’t.

PATRICK: She cared so much about him. I don’t know why we aren’t already gone...you’d have loved that wouldn’t you? You’d have had Simon. It would have just been you and Simon.

ELLEN: I thought we were all together... a happy family.

COURTNEY: Come off it, Mum. You never listened to a word we said to you. You never listened to Simon. I remember when he tried to talk to us you know. He tried.

ELLEN: Well, I did talk to him.

PATRICK: Where you ever his friend?
ELLEN: Ah yes, of course, I ... I...

PATRICK: Did you know him?

ELLEN: Ah.... Ah...

PATRICK: You always did things for him but you never sat with him, to find out how he was feeling.

COURTNEY: Neither did you, Patrick.

PATRICK: Well, neither did you.

COURTNEY: It’s different.

ELLEN: This is too difficult. I don’t know what to say to you.

COURTNEY: Then don’t say anything. Why do we need to speak about this? *(almost in tears)*

ELLEN: *(to COURTNEY)* I’m sorry.

*(ELLEN and COURTNEY hug)*

PATRICK: That’s a funny change, Courtney. We’re on her side now, are we? You just want to be the favourite now that Simon’s gone, don’t you?

COURTNEY: Why is it always favourites with you?

PATRICK: She’s the one who plays favourites.

ELLEN: Can I just say something please?

PATRICK: No.

ELLEN: Thank you. One minute you’re saying I did nothing for him. Next time you tell me I play favourites. I love you each, for who you are. *(Look at Courtney; then at Patrick)*

PATRICK: He didn’t deserve your love.

ELLEN: Don’t you say that again.

PATRICK: You loved him more... face it!

ELLEN: You wouldn’t say that if you knew what he’s been through.

PATRICK: He was just spoiled ’n sneaky.
ELLEN: Your life was a bed of roses compared to his.

PATRICK: Ah, don’t give me that crap.

ELLEN: Patrick! How I wish it wasn’t, but it’s true.

ELLEN: I wasn’t married when I found out I was pregnant. The guy I was with threatened - it was either him or the baby. I went through a horrendous time, trying to change his mind. In the end I gave up. He took me somewhere to get rid of it. I’m so ashamed, I can’t say any more.

PATRICK: Do you expect me to believe that? How could make up such a story?

ELLEN: Look at someone else’s life for a change! I was in that dirty, dingy room, strapped in. I was so nervous. I was looking around. In one corner I saw a towel stained with blood. I don’t know what happened, but suddenly I had this incredible longing. I knew that no matter what, I had to keep my baby. They tried to sedate me. I let out such a scream. I kept on screaming, “I want my baby. I want my baby.” Finally they unstrapped me. I fought so hard for his life. Why have I lost him now? (a long silence) Why?

PATRICK: Great performance, Mum. I forgot you were an actress. How hard would it have been to stay home?

ELLEN: I had to work to support all of you!

PATRICK: Oh, great excuse.

ELLEN: Your father didn’t provide for you.

PATRICK: Don’t you dare blame Dad...

ELLEN: (Looks at Patrick a while) I have faults and I’m sorry for my mistakes but I didn’t give up on the marriage. Whether you like it or not, your Dad walked out on us. (she leaves stage)

COURTNEY: Come off it Patrick!

(Courtney leaves)

PATRICK: Just leave me alone.

Scene 8: A Brother’s Guilt

Patrick walks into Simon’s bedroom.

You just did this for attention; you’ve always been so selfish... You were always the one who ran up to Mum and dobbed on me and Court, you loved getting us into
trouble ........ I hate you. I hate you because you left us to clean up your mess. Yet again you never cared about anyone but yourself.

I'm glad you're gone. At least now I don't have to look out for you. I don't have to worry about where you are and who's picking on you at school. Some big brother you were. I hated always having to spend my lunch times watching out for you and having you sit with my friends sometimes when all the other kids in your year were out to belt you up. Maybe I should have just let them. Maybe that would have taught you a lesson, and then maybe you wouldn't have...

(Crying). Killed yourself. I'm so sorry Simon. I didn't mean that.... I.... I just.... I need you here.... I never told you this, but I was always jealous of you. I wish we could start all over again, become closer friends, maybe even best friends.... I'm sorry....

I don't know.... I had no idea you were even thinking like this, about ending everything. I guess I never saw the pain inside you, I never thought you had any....

Why? Why didn't you let me know what was going on inside your head, then I could have tried to do something about it.... I should be dead. I'm the one who thinks only of myself. Just look at what I said earlier.... This is not happening.... Maybe it should have been Mum.

Blackout.

Scene 9: Renee

Renee is centre-stage for the start of the monologue. Lights come up once she is in place. She is on a floor square, in a spotlight.

Simon and I would hang outside my house sometimes in the dark. He'd pat my smelly old cat, and just talk. I didn't want to talk too much 'cos he kind of depressed me. I think he liked me but I wasn't sure for a while. He was a bit weird the way he never wanted to come inside but just hang out there in the dark. He never really said anything much. Oh, he'd tell me about his family and his Dad and all that. He'd get a bit upset sometimes but most peoples' parents are divorced anyway, aren't they?

He annoyed me the way he put himself down all the time. He takes everything so seriously, even when we all knew Mickey and the others were only joking. He couldn't take a joke. I tried to tell him he had to stick up for himself and not let them get to him.

One night he told me he loved me. (Laughs.) He was so nervous, and he was shaking as he sweatily took my hand! I laughed. Then I asked him if he wanted to kiss me. He didn't say anything, so I said, "Do you want to kiss me Simon? You do, don't you?" He still didn't say anything; he just looked at the ground. So I leant over and gave him a kiss on the cheek, just to see what he'd do. It was just a peck really. Then I said goodbye and went inside 'cos I had to ring Flick and tell her all about it.

The next day at school Flick ran up and said I should go see my locker. I couldn't believe it. Simon was there with this big bunch of roses for me. I said, "What are you
I didn’t really talk to him much after that. I suppose he got over me.... I don’t know.

Scene 10: Tipsy Scene

The stage is set for the family ‘living room’. A soft spot comes up on Renee walking to the front door of the house which is symbolised by the frame at up-stage-right. We see Ellen drinking, tipsy, drowning her sorrows. We hear the knock on the door. Ellen panics, in shock. She tries to put the bottle somewhere, anywhere. In frustration she puts it under her nightgown and walks nonchalantly to the door, and then looks down. It looks bad. She takes it out frantically looks for another place and takes another drink. There’s another knock on the door, louder this time. She circles the chair as she looks for another hiding place. She gets a hot flush (ad lib a line or two here about being hot) and puts her robe on chair Renee will eventually sit on. She puts the bottle under the other chair. Renee knocks again. Note: This scene is meant to be comic relief for the audience. Ellen needs to be improvisational here and work off the mood of the audience throughout this scene, tailoring the shortness/longness to suit audience needs.

ELLEN: Coming! Hello, sorry to keep you waiting. (Reaching for the flowers Renee is holding)... Oh, they’re so pretty.

RENEE: They’re not for you...

ELLEN: It’s so thoughtful of you. Oh, they smell frag-ah-rent.

RENEE: What?


RENEE: I’m sorry about Simon (Ellen goes into a sad mood and nods) Is Patrick home?

ELLEN: (Sad look.)

RENEE: Excuse me, Mrs Wilkinson, is Patrick home?

ELLEN: (Wait) Oh, I think so – come in – take a seat.

RENEE: (she nods).
(She goes to sit down on chair with bottle under it. Ellen yanks her and gently saunters her over to other chair which has her robe on it...she takes her robe off it before Renee sits down)

ELLEN: Not there...not there...this one's more comfortable. Whee! Besides, this was mine, I was sitting there.

(They are both sitting down, VERY uncomfortable with each other. Ellen, mindful of the bottle near her feet and still holding the flowers. They are silent and uncomfortable. Ellen checks her robe is still over the bottle, casually catching glimpses of it. She feels reassured and slightly jovial. Both are still silent.)

RENEE: Is Patrick home?

ELLEN: Oh, yes, ... your name again was?

RENEE: It's Renee.

ELLEN: I like Rena...

RENEE: It's just Renee.

ELLEN: Renee, oh, it's a beuuutiful name. Rena.

RENEE: Aren't you an actor?

ELLEN: Yes, I am an actress, ah, actor. How could you tell?

RENEE: The kids at school told me.

ELLEN: Oh.

RENEE:
What type of actor?

ELLEN: (She smiles) I do drama but I love musicals! Ooo! I haven't done a musical yet, not since high school. I've gone for a few auditions, but I just haven't landed the big one. Yet, I dunno, it could be just around the corner.

RENEE: Oh, I love musicals too! My favourite musical is The Sound Of Music (she hums "The Hills Are Alive" - Ellen joins her and they hum together). (They keep humming).

ELLEN: (Sings) The hills are alive; with the sound of music...the hills are alive...

RENEE: (Joins her a little) Music....

(Ellen dances around while singing off key. Patrick walks in a bit nervously.)
PATRICK: Oh, hi Renee. I thought I heard someone, ah, singing.

(Ellen is still standing awkwardly.)

ELLEN: (Very tipsy) Honey, Patty boy, your little girlfriend here brought you some flowers. Or were you Simon’s girlfriend? Doesn’t matter. Why don’t you go and put some flowers in your water. Oh, no, I mean put some water in your flowers. No, no, no...then you can put some water in your flowervase (said with long a)...ah, vase (said with “ah” a) as you say in Ozzieland. Hey I said it right, let’s hear it for me! Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!

PATRICK: Mum, are you all right? (He looks at Ellen intently).

ELLEN: What do you mean? (She wobbles and they wobble together, front and back. He smiles a bit but is still authoritative).

PATRICK: Have you been drinking? Mum, you’ve been drinking.

ELLEN: Who me? (Swaying) Ah, maybe just a little.

(Patrick goes to sit down and Ellen sits quickly on the chair before he can.)

PATRICK: Stop making a spectacle of yourself. (He looks at his mother with disdain and embarrassment).

ELLEN: That’s no way to speak to your Mommy. (Patrick stares at her) I wanted to be a cool Mummy, Patty.

PATRICK: Don’t call me that!

(Ellen stands like a little girl, looking at him, and says nothing, like she’s been reprimanded).

PATRICK: Renee, I’m sorry, maybe you should be going.

RENEE: I understand.

PATRICK: I’ll walk you out. I’ll be back in an hour Mum.

ELLEN: Aaahhh, I could get you and Patty some cookies. You don’t have to go so soon.

(Renee feels sorry for Ellen. She gives her a kiss on the cheek. Patrick and Renee leave. Ellen sits, mopping, with her hands on her face. She looks around, to see if they’re gone, takes the bottle from under the chair, takes another sip. Blackout).

Scene 11: Last Contact

School kids are arranged in three groups – Melanie and Cass; Mackenzie, Ryan and Mickey; Flick and Renee. They are talking together – general murmurings.

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Courtney walks past each group. As she enters stage, they all freeze. As she passes each group, she freezes and that group unfreezes and talks. As she passes the last group, she erupts at them.

CASS: I wonder how she’s holding up.

MELANIE: It must be horrible to lose your brother.

CASS: Yeah, it must be awful.

FLICK: Do you think we should ask her over?

RENEE: Maybe but I wouldn’t know what to say.

FLICK: Me neither.

MICKEY: Poor little Courtney.

RYAN: Shame what happened to Simon.

MICKEY: Simon was a pretty great guy. We got along well most of the time.

COURTNEY: Who do you think you are? You didn’t care! You never even tried.

Did it take his death to realize?

It did for me.

When you were cutting him down, he was already dead inside, or just about. He must have been.

I used to think you were it Mickey. The hottest guy in school. I used to imagine you liked me.

Now… I don’t even want to know you!

(Leaving) You’re just faces to me!

School kids are arranged in staggered lines at each side of stage. Simon is silhouetted behind a scrim. Each character walks into the centre stage and has a duologue with Simon who is behind the frame and is backlit so we never really see him. He is on a microphone and his voice is run through sound effects to be ‘otherworldly’. The cast talk straight to audience as if they are face to face with Simon. The overall effect is one of surrealism. They are remembering their last moments with him. As each character finishes, they return to the side and pose again. As each character is returning to their spot on the side, the others make a small but definite change in their position. At the very end, everyone turns to the middle and delivers the group line.

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ELLEN: Honey, I’ve got to go to work now. Make sure....

SIMON: (angry) Mom! You promised!

ELLEN: Sorry darling. This is the last night of the play. And then I’ll have more time. So.... I’ll go with you tomorrow, OK?

FLICK: Simon, Mr Williams said that you and I are paired up for the science project. It’s on natural disasters. I’ve decided that we’re doing a volcano. You can build it and I will type up the report and paint it. Is that all right?

SIMON: (excited) Yeah. Together?

FLICK: We don’t really need to. I don’t care how it looks; I just need to hand something in so I can pass. See you then.

RENEE: What are you doing down there?

SIMON: (dream-like) Looking at my bugs.

RENEE: Why? Making friends with them, are you?

SIMON: (dream-like) I wish I could fly away with them and be.... free.

RENEE: Simon, King of the Cockroaches. (PAUSE. She steps on and squishes a cockroach). You’re weird, Simon.

SIMON: (shocked, loud) You killed it!

RENEE: Sorry.

RACHAEL: What are you doing?

SIMON: (apathetic) Watching cars.

RACHAEL: Why aren’t you at school, mate?

SIMON: (hesitant, guilty) Um, I don’t know.

RACHAEL: I tell you what; if I don’t report you, promise me you’ll go back home?

SIMON: (hesitant) I promise.

RACHAEL: Okay.

MICKEY: Oi, Simon! Why are you in those soccer colours? You’re not thinking about trying out for the team, are you?

SIMON: (defensive) Yeah.
MICKEY: We won the championship in those colours last season. You're not worthy of wearing them, even for tryouts. You're not welcome at the tryouts. Do you hear me? **DO YOU?**

SIMON: *(Angry)* Why not?

MICKEY: You are SIMPLE SIMON. Simple, sad, pathetic, useless Simon. You disgrace those colours by having your stupid ugly head in them. Get them off or else I'll kick your arse.

CASS: Hey, Simon. What's wrong?

SIMON: *(resentful)* Nothing.

CASS: Has Mickey been picking on you again?

SIMON: *(resentful)* Yes.

CASS: Why do you let him pick on you?

SIMON: He's good at it.

CASS: Don't worry about Mickey. He's just a stupid Pom who thinks he's so fantastic.

SIMON: *(threateningly)* He'll get his own.

CASS: Oh, well, see ya.

RYAN: Hey Simon! If you see your sister can you ask her to call me after eight tonight?

SIMON: *(a bit put out)* Call at eight.

RYAN: Don't forget.

SIMON: *(gruff)* I won't.

RYAN: Thanks. See ya.

MELANIE: Oh. Can I sit down?

SIMON: *(friendly)* Sure. What are you eating?

MELANIE: Jam sandwich. Mum made it. So, what have you been doing?

SIMON: *(enthusiastic)* Making a volcano.

MELANIE: Oh, for the science assignment.
SIMON: *(friendly)* Yeah. Have you finished yours?

MELANIE: Half finished. Oh. There goes the bell again. See you.

ELLEN: I've looked everywhere for you. Why are you looking like that? What's wrong?

SIMON: *(depressed, exasperated)* I need...uh, never mind...

ELLEN: Where are the keys to the car? I'm late!

SIMON: *(angry, frustrated)* I don't know.

ELLEN: What do you mean you don't know? Patrick said you had them!

SIMON: *(searching for keys, resentful)* Um, oh, here they are.

ELLEN: Stupid idiot. I'm late!

PATRICK: Hey, Simon, can you do me a favour? Can you ask Mum for twenty bucks for me?

SIMON: *(suspicious)* What for?

PATRICK: Because she won't give it to me. Hey, what were you doing today?

SIMON: *(defensive)* Nothing.

PATRICK: Ha! You were jigging, eh?

SIMON: *(defensive)* I wasn't jigging.

PATRICK: Yeah, like you haven't been sneaking out at night either! I'm telling Mum.

SIMON: *(angry)* You'd better not!

PATRICK: *(pause)* I tell you what. If you can get that twenty bucks, I won't tell her.

SIMON: What will happen if I can't get it?

PATRICK: Then, I'm gonna tell her. I've gotta go. Don't forget my money, hey.

REEVESBY: Hey there! Can tell me why the bus timetables are all torn down?

SIMON: *(hiding something, guilty)* I don't know.
REEVESBY: It might explain why you’re out of school, young man. Would you like to tell me the story?

SIMON: (apathetic) Just sitting here, watching the bugs.

REEVESBY: Bugs?

SIMON: Yeah.

REEVESBY: Bugs. Maybe you can put it in the editorial section for a bit of a laugh. Here’s my number, if you get the inspiration.

KIM: You look depressed Simon. I haven’t seen you in class for two weeks. Is everything okay at home?

SIMON: Yes.

KIM: Tomorrow after class I’d like to see you. Let’s have lunch together.

SIMON: Yeah. No, sorry, I can’t.

KIM: Why?

SIMON: Because I won’t be here.

KIM: Okay, some other time.

ALL: See you Simon. (all turn in to centre and say line together while waving ‘goodbye’). Blackout.

Scene 15: I’m Calling

The cast are grouped in a ‘lump’ on the platforms. This is a choreographed movement piece to highlight the intensity of the song. NOTE: What follows is the full-length song. The Opera House Performances contained an edited version.

AR....AR...I’M CALLING
AR...DOES ANYONE HEAR MY CRY
DOES ANYONE CARE
AR... WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE
OH PLEASE SOMEONE HELP ME
MY HEAD IS REELING
MY HEART IS
MY HEART IS BURSTING
IS THERE ANYONE WHO CAN GIVE ME
GIVE ME A REASON FOR LIVING

IS THERE ANYONE
I’M YOUR BROTHER
YOUR SON

© 2000 Bridget Mary Aitchison
YOUR NEIGHBOUR
YOUR SOMETIME FRIEND

OH HOW I'M NEEDING A FRIEND
NEEDING A FRIEND
SOMEONE WHO CARES AND UNDERSTANDS
CAN ANYONE GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME
I'M SO DOWN I'VE LOST MY WAY
I CAN'T SEE ANYWAY OUT
HOW I'M NEEDING A FRIEND
OH HOW I'M NEEDING A FRIEND

I DESIRE STILL WATERS IN GARDENS GREEN
DEAR GOD
OH, FOR CARING SHARING SO SERENE
BUT AH, THE ISOLATION I AM IN
THIS LONELINESS IS SLOWLY KILLING ME

WILL YOU BE MY REASON
AR, NOT TO END IT ALL
BLOW MYSELF AWAY
SO AGAIN I CRY FROM DEEP WITHIN

OH HOW I'M NEEDING A FRIEND
NEEDING A FRIEND
SOMEONE WHO CARES AND UNDERSTANDS
CAN ANYONE GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME
HELP MY JUMBLED MESS TO RHYME
FROM THE HEART I NEED A NEW START

HOW I'M NEEDING A FRIEND
OH HOW I'M NEEDING, NEEDING A FRIEND
OH, SOMEONE WHO CARES
AR....AR....AR....I'M CALLING

END ACT I
ACT II

Scene 1: Remembrances of Simon

Reevesby is interviewing Ellen for the article on Simon's death. They are in the family 'living room'. Lights come up once they are set. It's as if we've come into the middle of their conversation.

ELLEN: I've really needed someone to talk to.

REEVESBY: Simon's story needs to be told. You were saying what he was like as a boy?

ELLEN: He was very sick when he was young so he didn't fit in at school. Sports were a problem. But he always seemed to have a good attitude. I remember one race he was so proud of himself. For once he didn't come in last! Second to last, but not last. (They both laugh). His legs ran and ran and ran.... We celebrated. We had such a good time on a 30-cent ice cream cone.

REEVESBY: (laugh) How did he handle not fitting in?

ELLEN: I thought he was OK. Obviously he wasn't.

REEVESBY: Were there any recent changes - like in his behaviour or emotions? Did he get involved in drugs; skip school, anything like that?

ELLEN: Drugs? I don't know anymore...I don't know what he was up to. Patrick caught him cutting school the day he...you know... His teachers said he hadn't been there for two weeks. They thought he was sick. I didn't know. I guess there was a lot about my son I didn't know. That last day He hugged me – He didn't let me go. One of those big bear hugs – and lifted me off the ground. He had a beautiful smile on his face. He seemed so happy. Peaceful. Like he knew what he wanted.

REEVESBY: They say that's the biggest sign - the sudden euphoria when they make the decision. Did you see the signs?

ELLEN: I see the signs, now... Oh, God, I wish I'd have seen them before. I wish I'd have seen them before.

(Blackout)

Scene 2: The Gym

Scene opens with the school kids playing a game of netball. Passing throwing and calling out. Melanie finally gets the goal. Towards the end of the game Reevesby appears and Kim signals to her that they won't be long just take a seat. Reevesby sits close to the sideline of the game and watches.
KIM: Game's over, go and get changed, and meet back here as soon as possible, to talk to our guest (signalling to Reevesby).

Girls walk to one side of the stage boys to the other. Kim goes to stand with Reevesby. Girls line up facing the audience pretending to change.

RENEE: That was great Melanie. Hey, if we need you for Saturday's game we'll call you.

FLICK: Hey Renee do you have deodorant.

Nobody responds.

CASS: You could have passed to me you know.

FLICK: Renee got any deodorant?

RENEE: No forgot it.

FLICK: Hey is anyone going to mark or mats party on Saturday?

RENEE: Yep, sure.

FLICK: Which is it Mark or Mat?

RENEE: Does it matter it's a party.

FLICK: I can see us all turning up at the wrong house.

RENEE: No chance, I can smell a party a mile off.

FLICK: Has anyone seen my shoe?

RENEE: Probably over there, How was Melanie's reaction, its not as if I'm going to ask her if she wants to play on Saturday.

FLICK: She wasn't that bad.

RENEE: OK. She can shoot, but the rest of her game she just stood there like… (Renee shakes her body in imitation of Melanie) Just doesn't happen.

CASS: Why don't you put her on the reserve bench?

RENEE: Ya she can sit on the reserve bench the whole time.

FLICK: You're only cut she got past you.

RENEE: Oh anyway I'm going, anyone coming?

FLICK: Wait up
All the students walk back into the centre of stage just hanging around. Cass pulls Melanie aside. Kim is standing back to audience facing Revesby.

CASS: Hey what’s wrong?

MELANIE: Cass I’ve lost something and ........... well, my mum only just got it for me yesterday and I don’t know where it is, I’ve looked everywhere.

CASS: Did you look in your bag?

MELANIE: Yes.

CASS: Well what about in the toilets, maybe you dropped it or something.

MELANIE: I need it.

CASS: It’s probably in one of your bags or something, come on we’ll be late for this meeting.

All the students muck around with a wash of general murmuring covering the stage.

RENEE: Hey, look what I found.

FLICK: Look how small it is.

General teasing from all other students.

RENEE: Here MELANIE, your trophy.

RYAN: you go girl.

MICKEY: It’s lovely MELANIE its just...divine... (Dances around wearing it).

All other students start laughing loudly.

MELANIE: Stop it! Give it back!

Kim comes racing over.

KIM: What’s all the commotion about? What is that on your body?

MICKEY: It’s Melanie’s.

KIM: Take it off. It’s gone too far. Haven’t you done enough already?

MICKEY: Sorry miss.

General sorry from all students.
KIM: I expect good behaviour for our guest. (*signalling for Reevesby to come over*)

REVESBY: Good morning, boys and girls. My name is Martina Reevesby and I'm from the "Daily Metro". I understand that you are all still pretty shaken about Simon's suicide, but my aim is to understand what led him to do this to himself. It would be helpful to fill in the gaps for the people who are left behind. Who wants to start?

*Students all look at each other not knowing what to say or who will go first.*

CASS: I didn’t know him really well. I mean, he was a friend though. Mum heard that he was on medication or something, but it was probably a bunch of gossip. (*Shy*) I don’t know what I’m supposed to say.

REVESBY: That’s ok.

RYAN: Well, like, I never really knew him either, but in a way I kind of sympathize with him because I can relate to what happen to him.

KIM: If any of you here find this too much or too hard, let me know and you can be excused.

REVESBY: (*to Ryan*) When you said you could relate what did you mean?

RYAN: Oh ... um not the you know, but more him as a person.

FLICK: I’ve contemplated suicide. I can relate to Simon I mean. I don’t know the circumstances that brought Simon to such despair, but I’ve felt pain so overwhelming I thought killing myself was the only escape.

REVESBY: Like tunnel vision – you could only see one way out.

FLICK: Well, yeah. I didn’t want to die. I just wanted.... I didn’t want to be depressed and alone anymore. I couldn’t tell anyone because there was no one who would understand. I’d lost control of everything. I just kept thinking that’s how Simon must have felt. I should have seen it, I should have reached out to him.

KIM: Are you okay with sharing this right now? I don’t want to interrupt but I have to make sure you’re okay.

FLICK: I’m fine...I still remember the pain. I don’t feel it anymore. Back then I asked, ‘Why doesn’t anyone care? Why don’t you like me? What’s wrong with me?’ Maybe that’s where Simon was.

RYAN: The way I see it, we all put up walls to stop people hurting us so we are very much the same, I think. We both were aiming for the same thing. But I guess it was me who put up the better fight. But now I’m there I realise it’s not where I wanted to be...and I hate myself for it.

REVESBY: What do you mean? You’re not where you wanted to be?
RYAN: I was too caught up in trends and images and relationships with the right people. To come to person after person and have no one to relate to you in real terms. The sort of stuff REAL friends are made of...REAL ones... So it’s keeping up with the Jones’s type things. Everybody tries to become another wishy-washy, image-chasing loser. Because it’s not an image thing really. All you need is a pair of baggy pants and someone to pick on. And I sacrificed a lot for it.

REEVESBY: Do you think that youth today aim more for an image than an education?

RYAN: I don’t know. I suppose we all get caught up in ourselves without knowing who we are.

MELANIE: Not everybody is the same. Some of us actually want to learn. Even with all the hassle of not fitting in.

REEVESBY: What do you mean by not fitting in? Is that something you have a problem with?

MELANIE: Some days are better than others but it’s rare for a day to go past when you go to bed feeling good.

REEVESBY: Why? I don’t understand.

MELANIE: It just gets hard when you face the same torments every day. And I think that’s how I relate to Simon I guess. We both copped flack for not fitting in.

CASS: Me too.

FLICK: I’ve felt rejection. You know, maybe that’s why Simon did it. To stop the pain.

MICKEY: We all feel pain.

CASS: You cause pain, Mickey. You don’t feel it.

MICKEY: I have a heart.

CASS: Where? Your big toe? Or the same place as your brain; your bum!

Mickey stands up. All the kids laugh.

KIM: OK. OK. That’s enough. Mickey, sit down.

Mickey sits.

RENEE: Careful Mickey, your brain and your heart may get crushed.

All kids burst out laughing.

MICKEY: Yeah well, at least I’ve got em.
KIM: I said that’s enough! Have respect for our guest.

REEVESBY: That’s OK.

KIM: Everybody finished? Can we continue?

All the kids sit quietly.

REEVESBY (To Mickey): What was your relationship with him?

MICKEY: I don’t know. I suppose some people are easy targets. People have to learn to stick up for themselves.

RENEE: That’s not fair.

MICKEY: What?

KIM: It’s true, people don’t have the ability to control their lives but we do have the ability to choose the way we react to our circumstances.

REEVESBY: Would everybody here agree?

All students: Mixed yes and no’s.

REEVESBY: Quite a mixed response.

MICKEY: Well, people have to learn to take control.

REEVESBY: How did you treat Simon?

MICKEY: I pushed him around. The odd jab in the kidneys as I walked past him in the corridor. I mean, compare him to me. I’ve got money; I’m an excellent soccer player, star striker, nice clothes, big group of mates and a sharp tongue. Why wouldn’t I pick on him? I didn’t mean anything by it...I was just having a laugh, you know.

RENEE: That’s so mean.

CASS: No. That’s Mickey.

MICKEY: Shut up!

KIM: Let’s not turn this on each other.

MICKEY: You’re all saying I killed Simon. That’s what you’re all telling me, isn’t it? I didn’t think he’d do this. I didn’t know how bad I made him feel. I just didn’t know. I’m sorry.

REEVESBY: This isn’t about laying blame. It’s just about trying to understand.
KIM: The point is, we cannot direct blame. This was his choice. We are not accountable for his actions, only he is. He made his own choices.

REEVESBY: Interesting. I want to come back to you (pointing to Cass). The pair of you (pointing to Melanie and Cass) (Aimed at Melanie) what was your relationship with him?

MELANIE: I was nice to him. We weren’t all that close but at least I talked to him like a human being; not like some others. They made him feel so worthless. They teased him and pulled him down. I just can’t believe he did it. I mean, it’s not as though the whole world was against him. I wasn’t. What was he thinking? Didn’t he know that he wouldn’t ever come back? Maybe he thought he was in a dream and one day he’d wake up.

REEVESBY: (to Cass) How do you feel now?

CASS: I don’t know. I mean, it’s like; you can’t defend him because it’s supporting what he did. But if you don’t say anything you may as well say, “here you go, kill yourself”. The other day there was a song on the radio. The one they played at the funeral. And I really wanted Mum to turn it off. She thought it was because I just hate the station. (To Kim) When can you say his name and when can you laugh at stuff he did?

KIM: Time is a good healer.

REEVESBY: Did you notice any sign that he was thinking of doing this?

MELANIE: He told me he was thinking about suicide. I thought he was just joking. He gave me his Walkman, his prized possession. He called me before he.... You know. He used to call me; I didn’t really like talking to him. That last phone call.... I was heading out with some friends. I almost didn’t take the call but Mum has this thing about lying to people on the phone. So I took the call.... It was kinda weird. He was almost.... Happy. He said goodbye.... Then hung up. The counsellor that came here said those were big warning signs. I can’t believe I missed them…that I didn’t know. I feel responsible in a way.

FLICK: I keep reliving a conversation in my head that I should have had with him. I could have listened and established a glimmer of hope for him. Nobody should die feeling that worthless.

REEVESBY: (Pointing to Renee) What was your relationship to Simon?

FLICK: They were an item.

RENEE: We were not. Maybe he liked me a bit, but...

REEVESBY: But you didn’t like him.... What, as a boyfriend or just as a friend?

RENEE: I didn’t like him, not like that. I wanted him to stop following me around so I told him. Look, I didn’t lead him on, all right. He didn’t have a hope at all.
(Bell rings)

KIM: (to Reevesby) Thank you very much for coming. I think we would all agree that this time has been very productive and we hope you feel the same.

REEVESBY: Yes, it has and I thank you all very much for your honesty in sharing. (Directed to Kim) I’d like to have a few words with you if I may.

KIM: Of course.

(Students leave).

REEVESBY: What was your reaction to Simon’s death?

KIM: I was shocked, consumed with disbelief. I knew Simon was hurting. The problem is that he hardly displayed his true feelings to anyone. He was just too nice, too polite – never letting anyone see how much he was hurting. I guess there were too many losses in his life to cope with. He had this secret side no one knew about. He hid his depression well. Afterwards, well, they found poems, letters, drawings; all of them showing what he was really feeling. If only he’d talked to someone. He lost sight of all the love around him; never knew it was there. If I’d just pushed that little bit harder, then maybe it could have made the difference. I guess we all feel that way... but in the end it was his choice – he just made the wrong one.

(Blackout).

Scene 3: Cass and Melanie

Melanie is sitting on the ground at centre-stage reading a magazine. Cass enters and sits down to paint her toenails.

MELANIE: (reading) Which famous personality is your man most like?

Cass enters

Hey Cass! Have you seen this test? “How clued up is your guy?” I did it on Mickey. He only got two points.

CASS: (laughing) Hey we should do it on Ryan! Have you got a pen? (She gets up and sits back down). I can’t believe what Renee did today. I don’t know where she gets off.

MELANIE: (gets up) Yeah, and Mickey.

CASS: Are you all right?

MELANIE: (doing her hair) They just think they’re so funny!
CASS: Ten years from now you’ll have a really good job and they’ll be going nowhere. They won’t even have a job!

MELANIE: *(sits with Cass who starts to do Melanie’s hair)* I’m just so sick of being picked on.

CASS: Look, you can’t let it get to you. You’re ten times better than they think you are.

MELANIE: I guess it doesn’t’ matter what they think, does it? I mean, they’re not my friends.

CASS: What they think doesn’t matter. Are you happy with who you are?

MELANIE: Yeah, I’m trying to be.

CASS: Well, that’s what counts.

Scene 4: Floating

Smoke on stage. *(Flick, Ryan and Mickey are floating around in the space – swirling and twirling – as each speaks, they stop and only gently move...each in a different square of the set each time. At the end they are joined by their hands. Simon is also present in the scene...floating around...but never quite connecting with the others. As they come together to hold hands, Simon floats off stage.)*

RYAN: In this life I believe we’re all floating round each other. We have to take a look at who and what we are and who we choose to be close to and whether we’re close to them for our own reasons or for the benefit of others.

FLICK: In this life I believe we all have an abundance of love to give and receive. You can stop the flow of love from you *(Flick stops floating)* but you can never stop the flow of love to you. *(Mickey touches Flick and she keeps floating).*

MICKEY: In this life I believe we’re all connected *(Flick grabs Ryan and they float together)* and my actions have a direct effect on others. I never looked at what effect my actions had on others. *(Mickey breaks connection between Ryan and Flick)* I was too busy trying to be big man Mickey.

RYAN: Hey, that’s really funny – you’re trying to be big man Mickey and I’m trying to be smart man Ryan. Now that I’ve become what my friends and parents want me to be, and realise I’m not the person I want to be.

FLICK: We all have to take responsibility for each other. I’ve had someone reach out to me and now it’s my turn to reach out to others. Simon’s gone but I can reach out to you Mickey – Are you all right? *(Flick reaches out and touches Mickey).*

MICKEY: Not really. When I try and sleep I see his face in my dreams. I just keep apologising. I hate myself for what I’ve done. Why did I do it? Why can’t I show my
real feelings? Why do I pretend to be such a mongrel? That’s not me, not really. I want people to see the real me. I want people to like me for who I am.

FLICK: People look up to you, Mickey. You don’t have to put on a show for them. If you let them see the real you, they’d like you more – I know I do.

RYAN: And then you wake up and realise (light floods the audience for a split second) – real friends are standing right in front of you. You just need to discover them and reach out.

Simon exits.

MICKEY: Reach Out
FLICK: Reach Out
RYAN: Reach Out

Each gets closer until they are touching hands.

ALL: We are connected.

Scene 5: Courtney

(Courtney is sitting at the ‘grave-site’.)

I don’t even know what’s real anymore. I don’t know where to start. You were my brother and I don’t even miss you… But I’m hurting bad, and none of this seems real.

If I could understand you then maybe I’d be able to figure out who I’m meant to be. I know I’m not meant to have figured it out yet, but I can’t stand all this mess, this confusion, it Hurts. Are we all like you? Am I the same, is it in the family? Will I end up, just the same?

Do I even care?

(pause)

I don’t know.

You’ve made me numb. You took my feelings away! I used to know at least that I was confused. Now I’m just numb. Maybe I do know the truth. We’re all STUFFED. We’re all just a waste of space!

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Scene 6: Family Reconciliation

(Courtney is still sitting at the graveside. Ellen and Patrick enter from up-centre-stage and walk along the path of floor squares to her.)

ELLEN: Oh Courtney, I’ve been worried sick. How long have you been here?

COURTNEY: Oh, a while. (standing up).

PATRICK: We’ve been looking everywhere for you. Why didn’t you tell us you were coming here?

COURTNEY: I just needed some space!

PATRICK: You need space? We all need space. I feel like moving out!

ELLEN: (touching him warmly) Oh Patrick. I’m so sorry if I’ve let you down. Please don’t give up on us. We need you.

COURTNEY: I don’t know what I’d do without you.

ELLEN: I’d fall apart without you. As it is – I don’t know what’s keeping me together.

(Patrick turns away)

COURTNEY: We’re not ever going to be the same again without Simon.

ELLEN: Yes, that’s right. There’s gonna be a big hole in our family without him, but this is how we are now. And we need each other. (to Courtney) (they embrace). (to Patrick). Patrick, please.

(All embrace)

Scene 7: The Article

(Rachael is in spotlight, holding a newspaper)

RACHAEL: She didn’t do a bad job on it, that reporter. Seemed to look at the story from different angles.

(Lights come up on group. Each character is standing on stage holding a newspaper. On their line they put the paper down and deliver their line)

CASS: Don’t think it happens to other people living in other places.

FLICK: It is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

MELANIE: If someone is giving you an indication that they are suicidal…
RENEE: Don’t think they’re just trying to get attention: ...

MICKEY: They are crying out for help....

RYAN: We don’t have to understand the problems, we just have to care.

REEVESBY: One person reaching out is enough to bring them Back From Nowhere. (newspapers are snapped up in front of their faces again).

(lights fade to black on group. Rachel is still in spotlight)

RACHAEL: The reporter hit the nail on the head - we just have to care: we just have to connect emotionally. I think of Simon. I should have connected with him and instead I just left him on the road that day. Someone asked me at the funeral why he had done it. There's never just one reason you know...it is a build up of losses and maybe just one thing happens on top of that to trigger them off: like maybe their cat dies or someone tells them they’re worthless...don’t think that these are small issues: if someone is hurting badly, anything additional could...well, they’re looking then to stop the pain. I’ve seen some terrible things in the force - Simon’s face...will always be with me.

Scene 8: Bedtime Dreams

KIM: Suicide costs a life but those left behind die a 1,000 deaths questioning WHY?

Everyone is lying on the floor or propped up against something. They are huddled as in sleep. Each person tosses and turns and calls out “Simon” over and over. They overlap and the sound builds until everyone sits bolt upright screaming “SIMON!”. There is a pause and everyone snaps to lying down again – back “asleep”.

Scene 9: Simon’s Farewell

The play ends with SIMON back on the balcony (or the box). He says something along the lines of:

SIMON: I just needed someone to listen...someone to show they cared. I didn’t mean to die; I just wanted the pain to end. Do you understand? I just wanted the loneliness to end. If I had known...if someone had told me.... I mean, if only...well, I wouldn’t have done it. I was lost and there was no one to show me the way. I didn’t want to die...

Simon lays his rose on the pile and blows out the candle. Black out.

END ACT II

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APPENDIX B

BACK FROM NOWHERE

SCRIPT WITH DRAMATURG’S AND DIRECTOR’S NOTES
ACT I

Scene 1: Breaking the News

Dark stage. A police siren is heard and the police lights move around the stage. As the dialogue starts, the lights dimly reveal cast members one by one (from the shoulders up only). The cast are scattered around area.

RACHAEL: I'm very sorry to inform you that your...

REEVESBY: son

FLICK: daughter

CASS: sister

RYAN: brother

MICKEY: mate

RENEE: Simon

ALL VOICES: has been killed tonight by...

KIM: hanging

PATRICK: jumping

MACKENZIE: too many pills

REEVESBY: purposely crashing his car

MELANIE: Gunshot

COURTNEY: slitting his wrists.

RACHAEL: We're sorry, but I'm afraid it looks like he's...

MICKEY: killed himself.

ELLEN: What are you saying? Not my so...
RENEE: He's completed...

ALL VOICES: ...SUICIDE (Emphasis on this word)

BLACKOUT
Scene 2: Memorial

As the lights come up (dimly), the stage is filled with fog. Out of the fog, the cast appear, one at a time and walk to down-stage-left. Simon is on the balcony (or platform) in a very dim spotlight holding a single red rose and appearing to cry in grief. The first person lights a candle (the lights are dim and diffused by the fog so that we get the effect of an ethereal other world) and lays a red rose next to the candle. Each cast member comes forward and lays their red rose on the pile and disappear again in to the fog. As the second person finishes laying their rose, they start humming Amazing Grace. Each person joins in humming after they have laid their rose. When Courtney lays her rose, she is joined by Patrick. Simon looks at them, shakes his head and walks offstage. As the last person lays their rose, the music cuts out as the MOTHER screams out “NO!” At her scream, the lights come up to reveal the cast gathered around the Mother in support, as at a funeral. The lights snap to black. The dim light, in which Simon has been illuminated through all of this, slowly fades.

Order for laying roses: Renee, Rachael, Ryan, Mackenzie, Flick, Kim, Melanie, Reevesby, Mickey, Cass, Courtney, Patrick.
Scene 3: Ellen’s Story

The lights come up; the MOTHER is still seated where she was when she cried out.

ELLEN: Oh no! Simon please! Dear God! This can’t be. Someone please wake me from this dream. Simon - Simon! Oh my darling boy - when he was little he used to love to play hide 'n seek - Simon! Where are you? Oh, please come to me. Where are you? Why don’t you answer me? Why don’t you answer your mother? What have you done? Ah, Simon. Wasn’t I good to you? Did I say something? Did I do something? Why? Oh my boy... my darling boy... If only I could make it up to you. I’d do anything. I’d give anything to have you back... Oh to see you once again... to have you walk in the room... to see your smiling face.... To hug and kiss you... to listen to you... to know you. (Breaking up and weeping) Didn’t I know you? I thought we were close (weeping) Oh, my son! Where did I go wrong? Where did I let you down? And now, how am I supposed to carry on? How can I live without you? Oh, Simon! Why don’t you answer me? I’m sorry; I failed you. I didn’t hear your cry for help. I let you down. Please tell me how I’ll make it right!
Scene 4: Dis/Connections

SIMON: He thought he wasn't connected to anybody. But what he didn't realise was that he was connected to everybody.

Everyone falls down one by one, like dominoes. As each person delivers their lines, they get up and walk off stage.

MICKEY: I don't know why he did it. It had nothing to do with me, though.

RENEE: I always thought he was a bit weird, but I can't imagine him doing this.

CASS: I didn't know him really well, but I can't see why he would.

RYAN: Stupid thing to do.

RACHAEL: Why the hell didn't he reach out to someone?

FLICK: Simon, I cared!

COURTNEY: He seemed so distant.

ELLEN: It was my fault; I had no time for him.

MACKENZIE: If only I'd...

REEVESBY: I'm determined to make his voice heard.

MELANIE: I just don't understand.

PATRICK: I tried to understand him.

SIMON: Nobody understood him.

KIM: It's too high a price to pay.

BLACKOUT
Scene 5: Reevesby

I really wanted to cover this story. I fought tooth and nail to do it, but my boss was against it from the start, because it was a suicide story and it “wouldn’t be good for the ratings”. Those words my boss said are still ringing in my ears because that week I’d found my friend dead from a drug overdose. Sharon called me for help, sounding desperate, but I told her I was busy, I was covering an important story and could I call her back?

PAUSE

That time never came. The last time I heard her voice was that night on the answering machine: “Reevsby, if this is you... I’m having my talk with you now... You taught me to come to my senses girl, so many times when you didn’t even know I was thinking of it. That hard hitting journalistic quality of “matter of factness” you’ve got that’s taken you so far in your job was a Godsend to me when I couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel... But today I just couldn’t see it any more. I know you’re probably wondering why, but what else could I do?” I keep thinking if I hadn’t ignored her, realised she was crying out for help, she might still be here...

She never gave any indication, any sign... I thought she was always the happiest one of my friends. I suppose I was too wrapped up in covering that ruddy story to have noticed. I cried myself to sleep that night.

PAUSE

Now my boss knocks me when I come in the next morning. “What’s this, Reevesby? It better be important to be interrupting my coffee break...” And my answer’s no, you won’t be covering that suicide story. It won’t be good for our ratings. “Now, what is it? You’ve got two minutes, so make it snappy.” That was it. I just cracked up. “For crying out loud! It’s because of the ratings I’ve lost my friend. If I wasn’t striving to get that other story in this morning’s paper, then she would still be here. Look.” I said to my Boss, leaning over the desk, “You taught me all I know, and part of that was to dig your heels in whenever you get the scent of a good story and fight tooth and nail to get it. Don’t let it backfire on yourself just because you don’t want me to do it. This is an issue that has been taboo for far too long and I won’t be mute to their silent cry. This person is not a nobody, as you’ve just said; he has a name. Simon. I will cover Simon’s story. Simon’s death won’t be ignored this time.”

Then I found myself leaning back from the desk and beginning to pace like I always do when I’ve got a good story going through my mind. “You taught me to be a professional, and no sacrifice was too big for a story. Now it backfires and you haven’t got the courage to let me cover it. Well, I’m going to cover it, for Sharon’s sake, and for Simon’s.

Scene 6: Reevesby and Family

Very short scene. Reevesby knocks on family’s door. Courtney answers. Reevesby asks to interview them. They say Mum isn’t there. Courtney doesn’t want to talk (apathetic). Patrick slams door in Reevesby’s face.
Scene 7: Rachael & Ellen

Duologue. Begins with Rachael retracing her path leading up the house on the day she told the news to (Simon's) family. Ellen's half of the stage is black. Centre stage is the 'lounge room'. It is divided in two. It is set up so that on Ellen's half of CS, the chair sat in by Rachael is empty and so that on Rachael's half of CS, the chair sat in by Ellen in empty. Ultimately we see the story retold from both perspectives. A partition may be used to separate the two rooms but it should be clear regardless, that this is the same living room just from a different angle.

Rachael: Have you ever had to say something you know you don't want to say? Your stomach churns, you get vomit that reaches the top of your throat and then rolls its way back down again. Your palms are so sticky that you could bottle water from the amount of sweat that slicks off them. You get either cold shivers or hot flushes as you approach the driveway. You walk up the path in time to the racing beat of your heart; which echoes so loudly in your ears that there's just no escaping it. You swallow, in an attempt to regain your composure - to no avail because the taste buds on your tongue have become thick as fat and heavy as Ayres Rock. You reach the door, and (Silence). Suddenly, things begin racing through your mind... quick... Quick, remember... How do I word the sentence again? What is that delicate phrase we were taught at the academy in these 'particular' cases? Think... hurry... and before I can co-ordinate my body and mind, my hand has pressed the doorbell - and then... the thoughts won't make sense... I try to breathe a bit slower, but that doesn't work, everything's a blur... I'm starting to feel dizzy and I'm just searching for something to hold onto, anything, and then before I know it, I hear... :

Ellen: Oh, hello, can I help you? (surprised it's a police woman).

Rachael: (to the audience) No... It's too late. I just want to scream inside from the anguish of knowing you can't escape more from delivering this news. IN ES-CA-PABLE. (To Ellen) Good afternoon...(to the audience) the words come out all right (to Ellen) Are you Mrs. .....?

Ellen: (to the audience) Wilkinson. Can I help you?

Rachael: May we come in please?

Ellen: Why yes, of course. Forgive me.

Rachael: (the lights gradually fade on Ellen's side of the stage) I'm sorry to inform you that this afternoon at 3pm, your son was found... (Lights suddenly to black)

Ellen: (lights suddenly up)...OH NO!

(Silence)

Rachael: (Goes to leave- retracing her steps again: addresses the audience). You wouldn't believe what this does to you and I don't care how many times you have to do it...it still hurts as much as that very first time when I had to break the news to that woman. You gotta be careful you stay close to your own loved ones after you gotta do something like this. Suicide cases I mean. It makes you question everything you stand for to. And it's not-like a normal death one either. Yeah, they're sad but with these ones, you think, what would the rest of their lives been like... makes you Script Ideas

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wonder about where you came from...where you going...makes you think life's a gift. At least that's the good thing I try to draw out of it. Otherwise it near drives you nuts.
Scene 8: Family Confrontation

Courtney is sitting on Simon's bed alone. Patrick walks in.

PATRICK: Why are you in here?

COURTNEY: I don't know.

PATRICK: What are you doing?

COURTNEY: (sitting.) What are you doing?

PATRICK: Saw the light... I thought I'd come in. Mom said no one's allowed to come in here.

COURTNEY: So what?

PATRICK: You know what she's like. You've argued with her all your life.

COURTNEY: And you haven't?

PATRICK: Court come here. Look, I never came in here, eh? I've never even seen the pictures. He's got in here. Some of them are really frightening. I'd have never thought...

COURTNEY: He wanted us to be a cardboard cut-out family... we weren't... We weren't anything like that.

PATRICK: Can't blame him though... and you were always off with dad every single weekend.

COURTNEY: None of us really took the time to know how she was feeling.

PATRICK: Not even Dad. Do you remember when Simon stopped calling him Dad...

COURTNEY: I can't blame him.

PATRICK: What?

COURTNEY: You know the way he treated him.

PATRICK: He's our father, though.

COURTNEY: He didn't give a crap. He doesn't care.

PATRICK: Do you think he cares about you?

COURTNEY: I don't know.

PATRICK: You're beginning to sound so much like Mum. Court... You're scaring me more than what Simon did.

COURTNEY: What's that supposed to mean?
PATRICK: Well, if you're talking like this how do we know if you're going to follow in Simon's footsteps and kill yourself?

COURTNEY: Of course I am. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to go out and kill myself.

PATRICK: That's not funny, Courtney.

PATRICK: What are we going to do?

COURTNEY: What do you mean?

PATRICK: With mum. Things are going to get even worse around here. I can tell.

COURTNEY: Why did he do it?

PATRICK: I don't know. He was just selfish.

COURTNEY: How can you say that?

PATRICK: Well, look at it! Look at who he's left us with. Why do we have to put up with her and he gets to just leave?

COURTNEY: Oh, what are you saying? Do you want to take off like our father?

PATRICK: Shut up.

ELLEN: What's the fighting about? Can you in Simon's room?

(Patrick and Courtney look at each other)

ELLEN: Can we have a chat? Can we help each other at this time?

COURTNEY: Patrick don't.

PATRICK: She cared so much about him. I don't know why we aren't already gone......you'd have loved that wouldn't you? You'd have had Simon. It would have just been you and Simon. Not us. We wouldn't have been in your hair.

ELLEN: I can't believe you're saying this.

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Back From Nowhere

PATRICK: It's news to you, isn't it, Mum? Oh, you loved us so much. Through all these years we've been surrounded by love. Oh, Courtney, how does it feel to be so loved?

ELLEN: I thought we were all together... a happy family.

COURTNEY: Come off it, Mum. You never listened to a word we said to you. You never listened to Simon. Simon always tried to talk to us you know. He was always trying.

ELLEN: Well, I did talk to him.

PATRICK: You always did things for him but you never sat with him, to find out how he was feeling.

COURTNEY: Neither did you, Patrick.

PATRICK: Well, neither did you. You're quite happy to pass the buck.

COURTNEY: It's different.

PATRICK: Oh, how? You were really in here helping him. You want to blame me? Look at yourself.

ELLEN: You, you really don't know where I am! This is too difficult. I don't know what to say to you.

COURTNEY: Then don't say anything. Why do we need to speak about this? (almost in tears)

ELLEN: (to COURTNEY) Come here, darling. I'm sorry.

(ELLEN and COURTNEY hug)

PATRICK: That's a funny change, Courtney. We're on her side now, are we? You just want to be the favourite now that Simon's gone, don't you?

COURTNEY: Why is it always favourites with you?

PATRICK: She's the one who plays favourites.

ELLEN: Can I just say something please.

PATRICK: No.

ELLEN: Thank you. One minute you're saying I did nothing for him. Next time you tell me I play favourites. I love you each, for who you are. (Look at Courtney; then at Patrick).

PATRICK: You loved him more! Did you really know him? He didn't deserve your love.

ELLEN: You wouldn't say that if you knew what he's been through.

PATRICK: He was just spoiled 'n sneaky.

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ELLEN: Your life was rosy compared to his.

PATRICK: Ah, don’t give me that crap.

ELLEN: Patrick! How I wish it wasn’t, but it’s true.

ELLEN: I wasn’t married when I found out I was pregnant. The guy I was with threatened – it was either him or the baby. I went through a horrendous time, trying to change his mind. In the end I gave up. He took me somewhere to get rid of it. I’m so ashamed, I can’t say any more.

PATRICK: Do you expect me to believe that? How could make up such a story?

COURTNEY: How could you be so cruel? Oh, Mum, I had no idea. (Ellen and Courtney hug)

PATRICK: You don’t believe that happened? I’m sick of your excuses. I can’t stand you.

ELLEN: You have such anger! I was in that dirty, dingy room, strapped in. I was so nervous. I was looking around. In one corner I saw a towel stained with blood. Then, I don’t know what happened, but suddenly I had this incredible longing. I knew that no matter what, I had to keep my baby. Nobody was going to take it from me! They tried to sedate me. I let out such a scream. And I kept on screaming and shouting, “I want my baby. I want my baby.” Finally they unstrapped me. I fought so hard for his life. Why have I lost it now? (a long silence)

PATRICK: Great performance, Mum. I forgot you were an actress. How hard would it have been to stay home? You didn’t care!

ELLEN: I had to work to support all of you! Your father didn’t provide for you!

PATRICK: Oh… great excuse.

ELLEN: It was your father’s fault. He left us...

PATRICK: Don’t you dare blame Dad...

ELLEN: I didn’t want to tell you...

PATRICK: Didn’t want to tell me what? Another sob story? More lies?

ELLEN: (Looks at Patrick a while) I know that I have faults and I’m sorry for my mistakes but I didn’t give up on the marriage. Whether you like it or not, your Dad walked out on us. (she leaves stage)

COURTNEY: Come off it Patrick! Why don’t you grow up!

(Courtney leaves)

PATRICK: Just leave me alone.
Scene 9: A Brother's Guilt

PATRICK SITS ALONE ON THE BED FOR A SHORT WHILE AND THEN SIMON APPEARS BEHIND HIM. PATRICK GETS A SHIVER DOWN HIS SPINE AS SIMON PUTS HIS HAND ON PATRICK'S SHOULDER. PATRICK LOOKS UP.

Sim, I'm sorry. I had no idea you were thinking about this. I feel weird... I can't believe that I will never see you again... I wish you were here and I want to know why, why you did it... you knew I was trying as hard as I could to hold everything together. It's not as though I had a choice: I didn't want to be the man of the house but I had to. I had no choice. I had to do it. Mum was hardly around enough to look after you and Court... None of this would have happened if you had talked to me, you know as well as I do that I was always trying to get you to open up. I was always there for you. No matter what I did, you fought me on everything. I know you just did this for attention; you've always been so selfish... You were always the one who ran up to Mum and dobbed on me and Court, you loved getting us into trouble......... I hate you. I hate you because you left us to clean up your mess. Yet again you never cared about anyone but yourself.

PATRICK LOOKS OVER TO THE SAME PHOTO THAT COURTNEY SPOTTED.

-You were just one great big looser, Sim, and in fact, I'm glad you're gone. At least now I don't have to look out for you. I don't have to worry about where you are and who's picking on you at school. I wish I'd never stuck up for you. I hated always having to spend my lunch times at school watching out for you and having you sit with my friends sometimes when all the other kids in your year were out to belt you up. Maybe I should have just let them. Maybe that would have taught you a lesson, and then maybe you wouldn't have...

PATRICK FALLS TO THE FLOOR, REALISING WHAT HE IS SAYING. THE WHOLE TIME HE HAS BEEN BAD MOUTHING HIS BROTHER, IT WAS TO HIDE HIS PAIN AND FRUSTRATION AND SELF-ACCUSATIONS.

(Crying). Killed yourself. I'm so sorry Sim. I didn't mean that... I... I just... I just wish you hadn't left us. I need you here.... Bro, I never told you this, but I was always jealous of you. I mean, you were always so nice to everybody and I was just interested in being popular at school.... Bro, I wish you were here so we could start all over again... I wish we could become closer friends, maybe even best friends...... I know you always wanted for me to just take the time to acknowledge you and I never did. I'm sorry....

PATRICK SITS AND THINKS FOR A WHILE.

Hey, Bro... if you're somewhere that you can hear me, I'm sorry for what I said earlier... Hey... I just... I don't know... It's just really hard... I had no idea you were even thinking like this, about ending everything. I guess I never saw the pain inside you, I never thought you had any....

I'd give my life if you'd just come back. Why? Why didn't you let me know what was going on inside your head, then I could have tried to do something about it.... I should be dead. I'm the one who thinks only of myself. Just look at what I said earlier.... This is not happening... Maybe it should have been Mum. We would have coped, we'd have worked something out. God, I don't get it. Everybody says you're full of love.... Yeah, well I don't get it, I don't understand. If all of this is just your sense of humour, then I'm sorry, but I don't find it very funny... I'm sorry, Sim... What is going on? Why did you kill yourself?
Scene 10: Tipsy Scene

Throughout the end of Patrick’s monologue the lights on stage right dim to black. A soft spot comes up on Renee walking to the front door of the house. We see Ellen drinking, tipsy, drowning her sorrows. We hear the knock on the door. Ellen panics, in shock. She tries to put the bottle somewhere, anywhere. In frustration she puts it under her nightgown and walks nonchalantly to the door, and then looks down. It looks bad. She takes it out frantically looks for another place and takes another drink. There’s another knock on the door, louder this time. She circles the chair as she looks for another hiding place. She puts it under the chair, takes her robe off and drops it over the bottle. Renee knocks again.

ELLEN: Coming! Hello, sorry to keep you waiting. Reaching for the flowers Renee is holding... Oh, they’re so pretty.

RENEE: They’re not for you...

ELLEN: It’s so thoughtful of you. Oh, they smell frag-ah-rent.

RENEE: What?

ELLEN: Fragrant - they smell nice. Oh, sweetie-plum! (Pinches Renee’s cheek).

RENEE: I’m sorry about Simon (Ellen goes into a sad mood and nods) Is Patrick home?

ELLEN: (Sad look.)

RENEE: Excuse me, Mrs Wilkinson, is Patrick home?

ELLEN: (Wait) Oh, I think so - come in - take a seat.

RENEE: (She nods).

(She goes to sit down on chair with bottle under it. Ellen yanks her and gently saunters her over to other chair). (Ellen has her robe on it. She takes her robe off it).

ELLEN: Not there... not there... this one’s more comfortable. Whee! Besides, this was mine, I was sitting there. Messy — left my robe on it.

(They are both sitting down, VERY uncomfortable with each other. Ellen, mindful of the bottle near her feet and still holding the flowers. They are silent and uncomfortable. Ellen checks her robe is still over the bottle, casually catching glimpses of it. She feels reassured and slightly jovial. Both are still silent.)

RENEE: Is Patrick home?

ELLEN: Oh, yes, of course... and your name was... again?

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RENEE:
-It's Renee.

ELLEN:
I like Rena...

RENEE:
It's just Renee.

ELLEN:
-Renee, oh, it's a beuutiful name. Rena.

RENEE:
Aren't you an actor?

ELLEN:
Yes, I am an actress, ah, actor. How could you tell?

RENEE:
The kids at school told me.

ELLEN:
Oh.

RENEE:
What type of actor?

ELLEN:
(She smiles) I do drama but I love musicals! Ooo! I haven't done a musical yet, not since high school. I've gone for a few auditions, but I just haven't landed the big one. Yet, I dunno, it could be just around the corner.

RENEE:
Oh, I love musicals too! My favourite musical is The Sound Of Music (she hums "The Hills Are Alive" - Ellen joins her and they hum together). (They keep humming).

ELLEN:
(Sings) The hills are alive; with the sound of music...the hills are alive...

RENEE:
(Joins her a little) Music....

(Ellen dances around while singing off key. Patrick walks in a bit nervously.)

PATRICK:
Oh, hi Renee. I thought I heard someone, ah, singing.

(Ellen is still standing awkwardly.)
PATRICK:
-Are you all right Mum?- 

ELLEN:
(Very tipsy) Don't I. look all right? Don't answer that. Honey, Patty boy, your little girlfriend here brought you some flowers. Or were you Simon's girlfriend? Doesn't matter. Why don't you go and put some flowers in your water. Oh, no, I mean put some water in your flowers. No, no, no...then you can put some water in your flowervase (said with long a)...ah, vase (said with "ah" a) as you say in Ozzieland. Hey I said it right, let's hear it for me! Yay, yay, yay!

PATRICK:
Mum, are you all right? (He looks at Ellen intently).

ELLEN:
What do you mean? (She wobbles and they wobble together, front and back. He smiles a bit but is still authoritative).

PATRICK:
Have you been drinking, Mum?

ELLEN:
(Silent for a while) Nah...nah... aha... (Laughs) Well, Patty boy.--

PATRICK:
Mum, you've been drinking.

ELLEN:
Who me? (Swaying) Ah...maybe just a little.--

(Patrick goes to sit down and Ellen sits quickly on the chair before he can.)

PATRICK:
Stop making a spectacle of yourself. (He looks at his mother with disdain and embarrassment).

ELLEN:
That's no way to speak to your Mommy. (Patrick stares at her) I wanted to be a cool Mummy, Patty.

PATRICK:
Don't call me that!

(Ellen stands like a little girl, looking at him, and says nothing, like she's been reprimanded).

PATRICK:
Renee, I'm sorry, maybe you should be going.

RENEE:
I understand.
PATRICK:
I'll walk you out. I'll be back in an hour Mum.

ELLEN:
Aaahhh, I could get you and Patty some cookies. You don’t have to go so soon.

(Renee feels sorry for Ellen. She gives her a kiss on the cheek. Patrick and Renee leave. Ellen sits, mopping, with her hands on her face. She looks around, to see if they’re gone, takes the bottle from under the chair, takes another sip. Blackout).
Scene 11: Renee

Simon and I would hang outside my house sometimes in the dark. He'd pat my smelly old cat, and just talk. I didn’t want to talk too much 'cos he kind of depressed me. But I let him come over and just chat. You know, I think he liked me but I wasn’t sure for a while. He was a bit weird the way he never wanted to come inside but just hang out there in the dark. He never really said anything much. Oh, he’d tell me about his family and his Dad and all that. He’d get a bit upset sometimes but most peoples’ parents are divorced anyway, aren’t they?

He annoyed me the way he put himself down all the time. He takes everything so seriously, even when we all knew Mickey and the others were only joking. He couldn’t take a joke. I tried to tell him he had to stick up for himself and not let them get to him.

One night he told me he loved me. (Laughs.) He was so nervous, and he was shaking as he sweatily took my hand! I laughed. Then I asked him if he wanted to kiss me. He didn’t say anything, so I said, “Do you want to kiss me Simon? You do, don’t you?” He still didn’t say anything; he just looked at the ground. So I leant over and gave him a kiss on the cheek, just to see what he’d do. It was just a peck really. Then I said goodbye and went inside 'cos I had to ring Flick and tell her all about it.

The next day at school I came and Flick ran up and said I should go see my locker. I couldn’t believe it. Simon was there with this big bunch of roses for me. I said, “What are you doing?” And Flick said, “Aren’t you going out with him? He said you were.” And I said, “No—What gives you that idea?” I said I wouldn’t be caught dead with him.” I guess that was a bit mean, but everyone was hanging around and watching and I was so embarrassed. He just dropped those flowers in the bin and walked away. I saw him later at the bubblers and said I was sorry and he could still come around if he wanted. But he didn’t.

I didn’t really talk to him much after that. I suppose he got over me.... I don’t know.
Scene 12: Last Contact

School kids are arranged in three groups – Melanie and Cass; Mackenzie, Ryan and Mickey; Flick and Anthea. They are talking together – general murmurings. Courtney walks past each group. As she enters stage, they all freeze. As she passes each group, she freezes and that group unfreezes and talks. As she passes the last group, she erupts at them.

CASS: I wonder how she’s holding up.

MELANIE: It must be horrible to lose your brother.

CASS: Yeah, it must be awful.

MICKEY: Poor little Courtney.

RYAN: Shame what happened to Simon.

MACKENZIE: yeah, he was such a great guy.

FLICK: Do you think we should ask her over?

RENEE: Maybe but I wouldn’t know what to say.

FLICK: Me neither.

MICKEY: Simon was a pretty great guy. We got along well most of the time.

COURTNEY:

Who do you think you are? You didn’t even know him! You’re as me... as everyone else... you never even tried to know him.

Did it take his death to realize?

It did for me.

When you were cutting him down, he was already dead inside, or just about. He must have been.

We all knew, but we just pretended. It was uncomfortable and we had ourselves in mind.

I used to think you were it Mickey. The hottest guy in school. I used to imagine you liked me.

Now... I don’t even want to know you!

(Leaving) You’re just a face to me!

School kids are arranged in staggered lines at each side of stage. Simon is silhouetted behind a scrim. Each character walks into the centre stage and has a duologue with Simon (but his lines are from behind the scrim...we don’t get a clear look at him...the other characters are talking to someone who isn’t there.) As each finishes they either return to their space on the side or take up a position on the side (in the case of the non-schoolkid characters who enter from backstage). As each character is returning to their spot on the side, the others make a small but definite
change in their position. At the very end, everyone turns to the middle and delivers the group line.

ELLEN
Darling, Honey, I’ve got to go to work now. Make sure.... What’s the matter?

SIMON
Are you off to work again, Mom?

ELLEN
- You know I have to work again.

SIMON
- You promised that we’d go out and do something together.

ELLEN
Sorry darling. Every day is just going into another. This is the last night of the play. And then I’ll have more time. So.... I’ll go with you tomorrow, OK?

FLICK
Simon, I have been looking for you everywhere! Mr Williams said that you and I are paired up for the science project. It’s on natural disasters. I’ve decided that we’re doing a volcano. I’ve looked at the sheet, and you’re good with building stuff so you can build the volcano and I will type up the report and paint it. Is that all right?

SIMON
Yeah. Should we get together beforehand?

FLICK
We don’t really need to. If you can build the volcano, I’ll do the rest— I don’t care how it looks; I just need to hand something in so I can pass. I think you need to hand in a written report, but you’ll have to check. Mr Williams has got the sheets. See you then.

RENEE
What are you doing down there?

SIMON
Hi Renee! Just looking at my bugs.

RENEE
Looking at bugs! Why? Are you making friends with them, are you?

SIMON
Yeah, sometimes I just wish I could fly away with them and be.... You know.... Free.

RENEE
Fly away with the cockroaches! Ha! I can just picture that— Simon, King of the Cockroaches.

(PAUSE. She steps on and squishes a cockroach).
SIMON
You just squashed him.

RENEE
Sorry for ridding the world of one more cockroach! Ha! You're weird, Simon.

SIMON
You just....

RENEE
Sorry.

RACHAEL
Hello there son. What are you doing?

SIMON
Sitting here.

RACHAEL
Doing what though?

SIMON
Watching cars go by.

RACHAEL
And what are you doing not at school, mate?

SIMON
Wanting to see what it's like on the other side of the fence.

RACHAEL
What do you think I should do with you, mate?

SIMON
I don't know.

RACHAEL
I tell you what, if I don't tell your parents and let you stay here for a while? Do you promise me you'll go back home?

SIMON
Yeah.

RACHAEL
Promise?

SIMON
I promise:
MICKEY
Oi, Simon! What do you think you’re up to?

SIMON
Nothing.

MICKEY
Why are you in those soccer colours? You’re not thinking about trying out for the soccer team, are you?

SIMON
Yeah.

MICKEY
Don’t even entertain the thought. We won the championship in those colours last season. You’re not worthy of wearing them, even for tryouts. You’re not welcome at the tryouts. Do you hear me? DO YOU?

SIMON
Why not?

MICKEY
You are SIMPLE SIMON. Simple, sad, pathetic, useless Simon. You disgrace those colours by having your stupid ugly head in them. Get them off or else I’ll kick your arse.

CASS
Hey, Simon. Do you know where Melanie is?

SIMON
No.

CASS
What’s wrong?

SIMON
Nothing.

CASS
Has Mickey been picking on you again?

SIMON
Yes.

CASS
Why do you let him pick on you?

SIMON
He’s good at it.
CASS  
Don't worry about Mickey. He's just a stupid guy who thinks he's so fantastic; sucks up to the teachers and then he's a pain behind their backs.

SIMON  
Yeah.

CASS  
Yeah, well. Look, if you see Melanie, can you just tell her I'm looking for her?

RYAN  
Hey Simon! If you see your sister can you ask her to call me after eight tonight?

SIMON  
Tell her to call at eight.

RYAN  
Don't forget.

SIMON  
I won't.

RYAN  
Thanks. See ya.

MELANIE  
Oh. Can I sit down?

SIMON  
What are you eating?

MELANIE  
Jam sandwich. Mum made it. So, what have you been doing?

SIMON  
Just homework. Assignments. Making a volcano.

MELANIE  
Oh, for the science assignment.

SIMON  
Yeah. Have you finished yours?

MELANIE  
Yeah. I've half finished. Oh. There goes the bell again. Are you coming to class?

SIMON  
Yep.
MELANIE
OK, see you.

ELLEN
I have looked everywhere for you. What are you doing sitting there? Now, where are the keys to the car? I’m late for the show!

SIMON
Here’s they are.

ELLEN
You stupid idiot. Aw, what are you trying to do?

PATRICK
Hey, Simon. can you do me a favour?

SIMON
What?

PATRICK
Can you ask Mum for twenty bucks for me?

SIMON
What for?

PATRICK
Because she won’t give it to me. Hey, what were you doing today?

SIMON
Nothing.

PATRICK
Ha! You were jigging, eh?

SIMON
I wasn’t jigging.

PATRICK
I’m telling Mum.

SIMON
Why?

PATRICK
“Cause.—(pause) I tell you what. If you can get that twenty bucks from Mum, I won’t tell her.

SIMON
What will happen if I can’t get twenty bucks from Mum?
PATRICK
Then, I’m gonna tell her. *Anyway, I’ve gotta go. Don’t forget my SEAT, hey.*

REEVESBY
Hey there! Perhaps you can tell me why the bus timetables are all torn down?

SIMON
I don’t know.

REEVESBY
It might explain why you’re out of school, young man. Would you like to tell me the story?

SIMON
Just sitting here, watching the bugs.

REEVESBY
Bugs?

SIMON
Yeah.

REEVESBY
Listen. I like that thing about the bugs. Maybe you can put it in the editorial section for a bit of a laugh. Here’s my number, if you get the inspiration.

KIM
You look depressed Simon. I haven’t seen you in class for two weeks. Is everything okay at home?

SIMON
Yes

KIM
Tomorrow after class I’d like to see you. Let’s have lunch together.

SIMON
Yeah. No, sorry, I can’t.

KIM
Why?

SIMON
Because I won’t be here.

KIM
Okay, some other time.

ALL
See you Simon.
Scene 16: I'm Calling
Song with movement piece. Add when it's ready.

END ACT I
ACT II

Scene 1: Remembrances of Simon

ELLEN: Thanks for letting me talk like this. I’ve really needed someone to talk to.

REEVESBY: It’s ok. Simon’s story needs to be told. You were saying what he was like as a boy?

ELLEN: He was very sick when he was young so he never fit in well at school. He was shorter than everyone else. Sports were always a problem. But he always seemed to have a good attitude. I remember one race he was so proud of himself. For once he didn’t come in last! Second to last, but not last. (They both laugh). His little legs ran and ran and ran…. We celebrated. We had such a good time on a 30 cent ice cream cone.

REEVESBY: (laugh) How did he handle not fitting in?

ELLEN: I thought he was ok. Obviously he wasn’t.

REEVESBY: Were there any recent changes? Behaviour, emotions? Did he get involved in drugs, truancy, anything like that?

ELLEN: Patrick caught him skipping school the day he…you know… His teachers say he hadn’t been there for two weeks. They thought he was sick. I didn’t know. I guess there was a lot about my son I didn’t know. That last day He hugged me – He didn’t let me go. One of those big bear hugs – and lifted me off the ground. Like I was his teddy bear. He had a beautiful smile on his face. He seemed so happy. Peaceful. Like he knew what he wanted.

REEVESBY: They say that’s the biggest sign – the sudden euphoria when they make the decision.

ELLEN: I see the signs, now… Oh, God, I wish I’d have seen them before. I wish I’d have seen them before.

(Blackout)
Scene 2: The Gym

Scene opens with the school kids playing a game of netball. Passing throwing and calling out. Melanie finally gets the goal.

Towards the end of the game Reevesby appears and Kim signals to her that they won't be long just take a seat. Reevesby sits close to the sideline of the game and watches.

KIM: Games over, go and get changed, and meet back here as soon as possible, to talk to our guest (signalling to Reevesby).

Girls walk to one side of the stage boys to the other. Kim goes to stand with Reevesby. Girls line up facing the audience pretending to change.

RENEE: That was great Melanie. Hey, if we need you for Saturday’s game we’ll call you.

FLICK: Hey Renee do you have deodorant.

Nobody responds.

MACKENZIE: You could have passed to me you know.

FLICK: Renee got any deodorant?

RENEE: No forgot it.

MACKENZIE: Hey is anyone going to mark or mats party on Saturday?

RENEE: Yep, sure.

MACKENZIE: Cause I’m definitely going.

FLICK: Which is it Mark or Mat?

MACKENZIE: Does it matter it’s a party.

RENEE: I can see us all turning up at the wrong house.

MACKENZIE: No chance, I can smell a party a mile off.

FLICK: HAS ANYONE SEEN MY SHOE?

RENEE: Probably over there, How was Melanie's reaction, its not as if I’m going to ask her if she wants to play on Saturday.

FLICK: She wasn’t that bad.

RENEE: OK. She can shoot, but the rest of her game she just stood there like... (Renee shakes her body in imitation of Melanie) Just doesn’t happen.
MACKENZIE: Why don’t you put her on the reserve bench?

RENEE: Ya she can sit on the reserve bench the whole time.

FLICK: You’re only cut she got past you.

RENEE: Oh anyway I’m going, anyone coming?

FLICK: wait up

All the students walk back into the centre of stage just hanging around. Cass pulls Melanie aside. Kim is standing back to audience facing Revesby.

CASS: Hey what’s wrong?

MELANIE: Cass I’ve lost something and ............ well, my mum only just got it for me yesterday and I don’t know where it is, I’ve looked everywhere.

CASS: Did you look in your bag?

MELANIE: Yes.

CASS: Well what about in the toilets, maybe you dropped it or something.

MELANIE: I need it.

CASS: It’s probably in one of your bags or something, come on we’ll be late for this meeting.

All the students muck around with a wash of general murmuring covering the stage.

RENEE: Hey, look what I found.

FLICK: Look how small it is.

General teasing from all other students.

RENEE: Here MELANIE, your trophy.

RYAN: you go girl.

MICKEY: It’s lovely MELANIE its just......divine...... (Dances around wearing it).

All other students start laughing loudly.

MELANIE: Stop it! Give it back!

Kim comes racing over.

KIM: what’s all the commotion about? What is that on your body?
MICKEY: It’s Melanie’s.

KIM: take it off. It’s gone too far. Haven’t you done enough already?

MICKEY: sorry miss.

*General sorry from all students.*

KIM: I expect good behaviour for our guest. (signalling for Reevesby to come over)

REVESBY: Good morning, boys and girls. My name is Martina Reevesby and I’m from the “Daily Exaggerator”. Now just so you don’t all talk at once, you might like to raise your hand before you have something to say. Well, now the reason I came here today is to talk to you about an enormously controversial issue that has touched all your lives recently. I understand that you are all still pretty shaken about Simon’s suicide, but my aim is to understand what was happening to him in his life that lead him to do this to himself. As his classmates, it would not only be helpful, but you should feel obliged to fill in the gaps for the people who are left behind. I would like to run this by getting you to first describe the relationship you had with him—

*Students all look at each other not knowing what to say or who will go first.*

CASS: I didn’t know him really well. I mean, he was a friend though. Mum heard that he was on medication or something, but it was probably a bunch of gossip. (Shy) I don’t know what I’m supposed to say.

REVESBY: that’s ok. Anybody else want to say anything?

RYAN: Well, like, I never really knew him either, but in a way I kind of sympathize with him because I can relate to what happen to him.

KIM: I’d like to add here; the only thing sadder than losing Simon would have been to never have had him in our lives. I know time is a healer and I know that in time the pain will fade, but if any of you here find this to much or too hard, let me know and you can be excused.

REVESBY: (to Ryan) Sorry when you said you could relate what did you mean?

RYAN: Oh ... um not the you know, but more him as a person.

FLICK: Well, I don’t know the circumstances that brought Simon to such...despair. (pause) I’ve contemplated suicide and felt pain so overwhelming I could only see one way out, tunnel vision I guess. I didn’t want to tell anyone my problems cause I thought no-one would understand. I felt alone and no-one understood. I’d lost control and blocked myself from everyone. I didn’t want to be depressed. I wanted it to stop so badly I would kill myself. Simon did it. I guess I was lucky, someone reached out.

KIM: Are you okay with sharing this right now? I don’t want to interrupt but I have to make sure you’re okay.
FLICK: I'm fine... I still remember the pain. I don't feel it anymore. I'm telling you because in a way I can relate. You see, back then I asked, 'Why doesn't anyone care? Why don't you like me. What's wrong with me?' And maybe that's where Simon was.

FLICK: Yeah, yeah. I've promised myself I'll never think like that ever again.

KIM: I remember my first impression of Simon. I remember saying to myself what a friendly gentle boy he is. Simon was very giving. I found him very helpful whenever he was around.

RYAN: I got that too. It was good... not what happened to him, but as a person.

REEVESBY: Would you mind elaborating on that for me? "As a person"?

RYAN: The way I see it, we all put up walls to stop people hurting us as a person. We are very much the same, I think. We both were aiming for the same thing. But I guess it was me who put up the better fight. But now I'm there I realise it's not where I wanted to be... and I hate myself for it.

REEVESBY: What do you mean? You're not where you wanted to be?

RYAN: I was too caught up in trends and images and relationships with the right people. To come to person after person and have no one to relate to you in real terms. The sort of stuff REAL friends are made of... REAL ones... So it's keeping up with the Jones's type things. Everybody tries to become another wishy-washy, image-chasing loser. Because it's not an image thing really. All you need is a pair of baggy pants and someone to pick on. And I sacrificed a lot for it.

REEVESBY: Would you say... or do you think that youth today aim more for an image than an education in schools today?

RYAN: I don't know. I suppose we all get caught up in ourselves without knowing who we are.

MELANIE: Not everybody is the same. Some of us actually want to learn. Even with all the hassle of not fitting in.

REEVESBY: What do you mean by not fitting in? Is that something you have a problem with?

KIM: (butting in to save Melanie's embarrassment) I don't think that's a major issue in schools today although it does occasionally become a problem.

MELANIE: I don't agree. I mean, some days are better than others but it's rare for a day to go past when you go to bed feeling good.

REEVESBY: Why is it rare for there to be a good day? I don't understand.

MELANIE: It just gets hard when you face the same torments every day. And I think that's how I relate to Simon I guess. We both copped flack for not fitting in.

CASS: Me too.
REEVESBY: Are you two friends?

CASS: Yeah, we've been friends for ages.

FLICK: I can kind of relate to all that, although I don't get picked on as much. I've had my fair share of not fitting in. I've felt pain, loss, rejection and shame. You know, maybe that's why Simon did it. To stop the pain.

MICKEY: We all feel pain.

MACKENZIE: You cause pain, Mickey. You don't feel it.

MICKEY: I have a heart.

MACKENZIE: Where? Your big toe? Or the same place as your brain; your bum!

Mickey stands up. All the kids laugh.


Mickey sits.

RENEE: Careful Mickey, your brain and your heart may get crushed.

All kids burst out laughing.

MICKEY: Yeah well, at least I've got em.

KIM: I said that's enough! Have respect for our guest.

REEVESBY: That's OK.

KIM: Everybody finished? Can we continue?

All the kids sit quietly.

REEVESBY (To Mickey): What was your relationship with him?

MICKEY: I don't know; he was just Simple Simon. I suppose some people are easy targets. People have to learn to stick up for themselves.

RENEE: That's not fair.

MICKEY: What?

KIM: It's true, people don't have the ability to control their lives but we do have the ability to choose the way we react to our circumstances.

REEVESBY: Would everybody here agree?
All students: Mixed yes and no's.

REEVESBY: Quite a mixed response.

MICKEY: Well, people have to learn to take control.

REEVESBY: How did you treat Simon?

MICKEY: I pushed him around. The odd jab in the kidneys as I walked past him in the corridor. By making everyone else laugh at him, I made myself look better. I mean, compare him to me. I've got money; I'm an excellent soccer player, star striker, nice clothes, big group of mates and a sharp tongue. Why wouldn't I pick on him? I didn't mean anything by it...I was just having a laugh, you know.

RENEE: That's so mean.

MACKENZIE: No. That's Mickey.

MICKEY: Shut up Big Head!

KIM: Okay, guys. Let's not turn this on each other.

MICKEY: You're all saying I killed Simon, not by shooting him or stabbing him, but by not caring about his feelings. He wanted me to stop—That's what you're all telling me, isn't it? That he was sick of hearing the jokes and laughs I just carried on. I didn't think he'd do this. I didn't know how bad I made him feel. I just didn't know. I'm sorry.

REEVESBY: This isn't about laying blame. It's just about trying to understand.

KIM: The point is, we cannot direct blame--This was his choice. We are not accountable for his actions, only he is. He made his own choices.

REEVESBY: Okay, let's get away from that focus. (Pointing to Mackenzie) Who were you to Simon?

MACKENZIE: We were friends. Simon was a great guy. A bit of a loner, but a great guy.

REEVESBY: You were pretty close to him then?

MACKENZIE: I think he thought he was my best friend.

REEVESBY: Was he?

MACKENZIE: No...I didn't believe in them...I talk to everybody.

REEVESBY: How has what happened affected you?

MACKENZIE: I don't know. I didn't even cry at the funeral....Well....Not much. I cried the few obligatory tears and then I was the pillar of support.
REEVESBY: What made you think that he thought he was your best friend?

MACKENZIE: He gave me his Walkman, his prized possession. I didn’t take the time… He told me he was thinking about suicide. I thought he was just joking. He called me before he… You know. He used to call me; I didn’t really like talking to him. That last phone call… I was heading out with some friends. I almost didn’t take the call but Mum has this thing about lying to people on the phone. So I took the call… It was kinda weird. He was almost… Happy. He said goodbye…. Then hung up.

REEVESBY: So he never really sounded happy?

MACKENZIE: Not that I can remember.

REEVESBY: That’s very interesting. Now I want to come back to you (pointing to Cass). In the pair of you (pointing to Melanie and Cass) (Aimed at Melanie) what was your relationship with him?

MELANIE: I was nice to him. We weren’t all that close but at least I talked to him like a human being; not like some others. They made him feel so worthless. They teased him and pulled him down. I just can’t believe he did it. Why Simon? It’s not fair. I mean, it’s not as though the whole world was against him. I wasn’t. What was he thinking? Didn’t he know that he wouldn’t ever come back? Maybe he thought he was in a dream and one day he’d wake up.

REEVESBY: (to Cass) How do you feel now?

CASS: I don’t know. I mean, it’s like, you can’t defend him because it’s supporting what he did. But if you don’t say anything you may as well say, “here you go, kill yourself”. The other day there was a song on the radio. The one they played at the funeral. And I really wanted Mum to turn it off. She thought it was because I just hate the station. (To Kim) When can you say his name and when can you laugh at stuff he did?

KIM: Time is a good healer.

FLICK: I keep reliving a conversation in my head that I should have had with him. I could have listened and established a glimmer of hope for him. Nobody should die feeling that worthless.

REEVESBY: (Pointing to Renee) I haven’t heard your side of the story yet. What was your relationship to Simon?

FLICK: They were an item.

REEVESBY: -Oh, really?

RENEE: We were not. Maybe he liked me a bit, but…

REEVESBY: But you didn’t like him…. What, as a boyfriend or just as a friend?

RENEE: I didn’t like him, not like that. I wanted him to stop following me around so I told him. Look, I didn’t lead him on, alright. He didn’t have a hope at all.
(Bell rings)

KIM: (to Reevesby) Thank you very much for coming. I think we would all agree that this time has been very productive and we hope you feel the same.

REEVESBY: Yes, it has and I thank you all very much for your honesty in sharing. (Directed to Kim) I'd like to have a few words with you if I may.

KIM: Of course.

(Students leave).

REEVESBY: What was your reaction to Simon's death?

KIM: I was shocked and consumed with disbelief when I heard the news. I found him funny, very generous, yet in time I realised there was much more of him to see. I grew to like him more for the person he was inside, not the outside image. I knew Simon was hurting. I pressed him with the issue of talking it out. The problem with Simon is that he hardly displayed his true feelings to anyone. He was just too nice, too polite, to inconvenience people with his problems. He was absent from school for two weeks. He was simply a giving person. Always giving. And getting nothing but heartbreak in return. He didn't have the ability to deal with rejection. He was simply blinded by the pain. I cannot fathom that he lost sight of all the love around him and never knew it was there. Never really saw it at all. Then again, I suppose it was never really shown to him, was it? I can't help thinking that if I'd just pushed that little bit harder, perhaps, maybe it could have made the difference.

(Blackout).
Scene 3: Cass and Melanie

Melanie is sitting on the ground reading a magazine. Cass enters and sits down to paint her toenails.

-MELANIE: (reading) Which famous personality is your man most like?

-Cass enters-

Hey Cass! Have you seen this test? “How clue’d up is your guy?” I did it on Mickey. He only got two points.

CASS: (laughing) Hey we should do it on Ryan! Have you got a pen? (She gets up and sits back down) I can’t believe what Renee did today. I don’t know where she gets off.

MELANIE: (gets up) Yeah, and Mickey will take every opportunity to put someone down.

CASS: Are you alright after what happened?

MELANIE: (doing her hair) They just think they’re so funny!

CASS: They might think we’re nerds, but ten years from now you’ll have a really good job and they’ll be going nowhere. They won’t even have a job!

MELANIE: (sits with Cass who starts to do Melanie’s hair) I’m just so sick of being picked on.

CASS: Look, you can’t exactly ignore it, it’s just there. It happens but you can’t let it get to you.

MELANIE: Easy for you to say... How?

CASS: You’ve got to know that you’re ten times better than they think you are.

MELANIE: I guess it doesn’t matter what they think, does it? I mean, they’re not my friends.

CASS: As long as you know that what they think doesn’t matter. Are you happy with who you are?

MELANIE: Yeah, I’m trying to be.

CASS: Well, that’s what counts.
Scene 4: Floating

(Flick, Ryan and Mickey are floating around in the space – swirling and twirling – as each speaks, they stop and only gently move... each in a different square of the set each time. At the end they are joined by their hands. Simon is also present in the scene... floating around... but never quite connecting with the others. As they come together to hold hands, Simon floats off stage).

RYAN
In this life I believe we’re all floating round each other. We have to take a look at who and what we are and who we choose to be close to and whether we’re close to them for our own reasons or for the benefit of others.

FLICK
In this life I believe we all have an abundance of love to give and receive. You can stop the flow of love from you (Flick stops floating) but you can never stop the flow of love to you. (Mickey touches Flick and she keeps floating)

MICKEY
In this life I believe we’re all connected (Flick grabs Ryan and they float together) and my actions have a direct effect on others. I never looked at what effect my actions had on others. (Mickey breaks connection between Ryan and Flick) I was too busy trying to be big man Mickey.

RYAN
Hey, that’s really funny you’re trying to be big man Mickey and I’m trying to be smart man Ryan. Now that I’ve become what my friends and parents want me to be, I stand back and realise I’m not the person I want to be.

FLICK
We all have to take responsibility for each other and do our utmost to make sure it doesn’t happen to anyone we know again. I’ve had someone reach out to me and now it’s my turn to reach out to others. Simon’s gone but I can reach out to you Mickey – Are you all right? (Flick reaches out and touches Mickey)

MICKEY
Not really. I was given a head start and instead of helping others, look what I did. When I go home at night I can’t stop thinking about how nasty I was to Simon. When I try and sleep I see his face in my dreams. I just keep apologising. I hate myself for what I’ve done. Why did I do it? Why can’t I show my real feelings? Why do I pretend to be such a bastard. That’s not me, not really. I want people to see the real me. I want people to like me for who I am.

FLICK
People look up to you, Mickey. You don’t have to put on a show for them. If you let them see the real you, they’d like you more – I know I do.

RYAN
And then you wake up and realise (light floods the audience for a split second) – real friends are standing right in front of you. You just need to discover them and reach out.

Simon exits.

Script Ideas

Updated 14 September, 2000
MICKEY
Reach Out

FLICK
Reach Out

RYAN
Reach Out

Each gets closer until they are touching hands.

ALL
We are connected.
Scene 5: Courtney

(Courtney is sitting at the graveside.)

I don’t know what he meant to me. He was my brother... What does that mean? I never knew him. I used to sometimes wonder if anyone knew him. I didn’t try to find out though. Does that mean I didn’t care? I DID CARE.

It was probably my fault because I didn’t care enough about him. It was about me. About my life. He’s ripping me apart and he’s not even here! I can’t even yell at him...

Who was he to kill himself? Why you Simon? Are you free Si? Free from all this crap? Does it feel better now?

(pause)

I don’t even know what’s real anymore. I don’t even know where to start. I can’t understand you! You were my damn brother and I don’t even miss you... we never talked. But I’m hurting bad, and none of this seems real.

If I could understand you then maybe I’d be able to figure out who I’m meant to be. I know I’m not meant to have figured it out yet, but I can’t stand all this mess, this confusion, it HURTS. Are we all like you? Am I the same, is it in the family? Will I end up, just the same?

Do I even care?

(pause)

I don’t know.

You’ve made me numb. You took my feelings away! I used to know at least that I was confused. Now I’m just numb. Maybe I do know the truth. We’re all STUFFED. We’re all just a waste of space!
Scene 6: Family Support

(Courtney is still sitting at the graveside. Ellen and Patrick enter and walk over to her.)

ELLEN
Oh - we found you! How long have you been here, honey?

COURTNEY
Oh, a while. (standing up).

PATRICK
We've been looking everywhere for you! Why didn't you tell us you were coming here?

COURTNEY
I just needed some space!

PATRICK
I just can't handle it anymore. None of us get on at all.

ELLEN
We need to start this family over again no matter how hard it is. We need to try. I love you both!

PATRICK
How come it took Simon's death for you to tell us you love us?

ELLEN
(looks shocked). I've told you...many times...not always in words....but I've always loved you.

(Patrick turns away)

COURTNEY
We're not ever going to be the same again without Simon.

ELLEN
Yes, that's right. There's gonna be a big hole in our family without him, but this is how we are now. And we need each other, to go on from here. (to Courtney) I need you. (they embrace). (to Patrick). Patrick, I need you.

(Patrick puts his hand on Ellen's shoulder).
Scene 7: Rachael’s Final Monologue

RACHAEL: She didn’t do a bad job on it, that reporter. Seemed to look at the story from different angles. (Picking up a paper and reads:)

Don’t think it happens to other people living in other places. It is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If someone is giving you an indication that they are suicidal, don’t think they’re just trying to get attention: they are crying out for help.

We don’t have to understand the problems, we just have to care. Even stranger reaching out is enough to bring them Back From Nowhere.

From my years in the force, I’ve learnt a lot about suicide and how to help someone in that situation. The reporter hit the nail on the head - we just have to care: we just have to connect emotionally. I think of young Simon; my first suicide case. I should have connected with him and instead I just left him on the road that day and..... I don’t need to keep reliving that. I’ve done my best to deal with it and now I’ve just got to try to help others. Someone asked me at the funeral why he had done it. There’s never just one reason you know...it can be a build up of losses and maybe just one thing happens on top of that to trigger them off: like maybe their cat dies or someone tells them they’re worthless...don’t think that these are small issues: if someone is hurting badly, anything additional could...well, they’re looking then to stop the pain. I’ve seen some terrible things in the force yeah, but I’ve smelt, felt and touched things that will always be with me. Simon’s face...will always be with me.
Scene 8: Bedtime Dreams

KIM:
Suicide costs a life but those left behind die a 1,000 deaths questioning WHY?

Everyone is lying on the floor or propped up against something. They are huddled in doonas. Each person tosses and turns and calls out “Simon” over and over. They overlap and the sound builds until everyone sits bolt upright screaming “SIMON!” There is a pause and everyone snaps to lying down again – back “asleep”.

Scene 14: Simon’s Farewell

The play ends with SIMON back on the balcony (or the box). He says something along the lines of:

SIMON: I just needed someone to listen…someone to show they cared. I didn’t mean to die; I just wanted the pain to end. Do you understand? I just wanted the pain to end. If I had known…if someone had told me… I mean, if only…well, I wouldn’t have done it. I just wouldn’t have done it. I just wanted the pain to end. I didn’t want to die...

Simon lays his rose on the pile and blows out the candle. Black out.

END ACT II
APPENDIX C

OTHER SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Press Clippings
Show Poster
Show Flyer
Programme
Breaking down the barriers

THEATRE
Catherine Keenan

Suicide is the leading cause of death among Australian youth, but when Bridget Aitchison wanted to take her play about the effects of suicide to Sydney's high schools, almost all of them refused.

"As soon as schools hear 'suicide,'" said Aitchison, "they close down."

Consequently, of the 300 schools that Aitchison contacted about Back from Nowhere, only three agreed to take it on. Yet where the play has been performed, Aitchison says response has been very strong.

"At one school we performed at, the bell for the last period rang and nobody wanted to go home. They all wanted to stay and talk to us."

Opposition was particularly strong at another school, where Aitchison got the play in only by saying it dealt with the issue of bullying. When teachers learned it dealt with suicide, she and her cast were denied use of the school theatre and given only half an hour to prepare. But this school had one of the most "amazing" reactions to the play, and Aitchison was asked to come back and do more work, because the school had lost a student to suicide 18 months earlier.

\textit{Back from Nowhere} is partly theatre as therapy. It is a collaborative piece, featuring two professional actors and a class of acting students from the Wesley Institute in Sydney, where Aitchison is head of drama.

The play is based on true stories researched by cast members, many of whom know people who have committed suicide (Aitchison knows eight people who have taken their lives). These were supplemented by stories sent in by anonymous members of the public who read Aitchison's small advertisements in local newspapers. The cast then did workshops with LifeForce, the Wesley Mission suicide prevention program.

"From all of that material, the cast chose what character they thought it was important to play to reach out to every type of person in society," Aitchison says.

"We decided what the important issues were and what we wanted to say. And then we wrote monologues and we improvised, and out of those improvisations the play developed."

Aitchison admits that, in the early stages, depression plagued members of the cast, who are aged from 18 through to their early 60s. It was necessary to call in counsellors, but Aitchison says the finished play has many light, comic touches.

Research indicates that 80 per cent of people who commit suicide give clear warning signs, and alerting people to these signs is one of Aitchison's main aims for the play. She also wants to help people of all ages who are affected by suicide to cope.

"There was one person who saw the show on a Saturday night and on Sunday morning got a call that his grandson had killed himself."

And he contacted us and said, 'If I hadn't seen the show Saturday night, I never would have known how to cope with that news, but now I was able to not only cope but help the family.'"

\textit{Back from Nowhere} opened last night at the Studio, Sydney Opera House, and runs until Saturday. Tickets are $35/$25 concession.

FACT FILE

- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australia's 15- to 24-year-olds. In 1998, 364 males and 82 females aged between 15 and 24 committed suicide in Australia.
- A 1995 World Health Organisation survey found Australia had the ninth highest youth suicide rate, although LifeForce at Wesley Mission says we are now in the top five.
AUSTRALIA has the seventh highest suicide rate in the world with seven people every day killing themselves.

Hundreds more attempt it and thousands are affected by it.

Kirsty Erb, of Baulkham Hills, who has a role in a new play aimed at preventing suicide, was just a few weeks into rehearsals when she found herself in a real life crisis.

Unbeknown to Kirsty, a second year drama student at the Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts, a good friend, was struggling with life.

Engrossed in her play, Back From Nowhere, which deals with the effects of suicide, Kirsty was learning through the play how to read the danger signs and how to help.

"I almost asked my friend to help me rehearse but I didn’t," Kirsty said. "Then a few weeks later he rang crying and saying he had lost his keys.

"I asked him if he felt like committing suicide and he said he did."

Kirsty immediately jumped in her car, praying all the way.

"He is okay now but I wouldn’t have taken him so seriously if it wasn’t for the play," she said. "I would have probably said don’t worry but I listened instead.

"Back from Nowhere is not just a play. It shows we can’t just sit there and ignore suicide.

“We have to say to people: ‘hey, we care and there is a network if support for you’.”

Using skills and techniques taught when the Back From Nowhere cast attended a LifeForce Suicide Prevention Seminar, Kirsty was able to go to her friend’s aid and save his life.

Back from Nowhere is a devised theatre piece based on true stories about the devastation caused by suicide for people connected to the victim.

Timely and topical, the play seeks to help people understand this traumatic event and the havoc it wreaks on the lives of everyone surrounding the victim.

Director Bridget Aitchison said the play incorporated key elements from Lifeforce’s strategy.

"By raising public awareness, showing people what the warning signs are and how to get help, and hopefully helping those who have lost ones to suicide to heal, we hope Back From Nowhere will be part of a solution to a growing problem in Australia,” Ms Aitchison said.

Performers in the play include a mixture of Wesley drama students and professional actors.

After touring high schools, churches and city councils, the play will be performed at the Sydney Opera House from November 8 to November 11.

Bookings: 9250 7777 or Ticketek.
GET THE MESSAGE ... Local actor Cathy Bradbury gets a taste of the limelight in a play that tackles the hard issues.

Suicide not the final act

BY NICK SOON

WESLEY Institute has taken a dramatic step to illustrate the destructive nature of suicide.

Its latest play, Back From Nowhere, focuses on the fragments left behind following a suicide of a young person. Running from November 8-11 at the Sydney Opera House, the production coincides with Life Force Suicide Prevention Week. The week aims to focus public attention on suicide and highlights the fact that Australia has the seventh highest suicide rate in the world.

Starring in her first lead role, is 19-year-old Seven Hills resident Cathy Bradbury. She plays Melanie, the close friend of a suicide victim. Currently, Cathy is studying a three-year drama course at Wesley Institute for Ministry & The Arts in Drummoyne.

"I want to be in plays, TV and movies," she said. "The role I am playing in Back from Nowhere could be a step in the right direction."

Director Bridget Aitchison said Back from Nowhere aimed to be part of the solution to a growing problem in Australia through "education, empowerment and healing."

"Life for each of us is a journey," she said. "We all have choices to make and pressures to deal with. Sometimes those choices lead to suicide and the journey is cut short."

Blacktown City Sun
Tuesday, November 7, 2000.
Lurch reaches out to prevent suicide

During last month during Prevention Week, a report, "A Dying Shame", released by Life Force, a prevention program run by Wesley Mission, detected an increase in suicide among middle-aged people.

Uewellyn-Smith, who helped a "men and suicide" workshop in partnership with Life Force, says to combat the problem we need to make services more accessible to those who have a history of being reluctant to seek medical help for this condition, so we need to make services out of the clinic more accessible to the community," he said.

Before it opened at the Opera House it played at St Philip's, Caringbah, where assistant minister Gary McCelland said it was well received.

"The production was very powerful, addressing issues that are rarely spoken about in our society. It brought to light issues that are considered taboo."

Youth suicide continues to be a problem, although statistics suggest that suicide rates among young people have lessened.

But other research highlights that up to 30 per cent of suicides are unreported as coroners are reluctant to pronounce suicide as the cause of death because of the stigma it holds.

Mr McCelland says the Church has a vastly important role to play in sending out a message of hope to the community.

"As a church we must bring the message of hope to those who see no way out, this is the simple message about Jesus. If young people truly understand what life is all about, then there is new meaning and purpose", he said.

— Southern Cross
Drama targets suicide

YOUTH suicide and the effects on people surrounding the victim are at the centre of the powerful production, Back From Nowhere. The play aims to make a positive impact by turning the tide on tragic statistics which reveal seven people commit suicide every day in Australia. Devised by a cast which includes professional actors and students from the Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts, Back From Nowhere will tour Sydney schools before a one-week season at the Sydney Opera House. It will play at The Studio, Sydney Opera House, from November 8 to November 11 at 7.30pm. A 2pm matinee on November 11 will be interpreted for the deaf. Tickets are $35 adults and $25 concession. All profits will be donated to the Lifeforce suicide prevention program. Book with the Sydney Opera House box office on 9250 7777 or Ticketek. Anyone over 60 can obtain free tickets by calling Deborah Wells on 9181 4424.
APPENDIX D

BACK FROM NOWHERE

VIDEO RECORDING

Part I: Tour Production
Penshurst Girls’ High School
2 November 2000

Part II: SOH Production
Saturday, 11th November 2000
(Evening)