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Abstraction, theatre and the musical frame

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Abstraction, Theatre and the Musical Frame

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Creative Arts

University of Wollongong

Nigel John Kellaway

School of The Arts, English and Media

March 2015

Abstract

Brief Synopsis: a beautiful naked woman ‘of a certain age’ brutally stabs a young man to death is a practice-led research project that consists of a production staged at Performance Space, Carriageworks, Sydney (November 27th – 29th, 2013) and an exegesis exploring how physical notions of space and the abstract qualities more generally attributed to music (tempi, dynamics, durations) can provide the structural, narrative and aesthetic building blocks of a new theatre work. The project considers how existing structures (vocal expressivity, linear narrative, etc.) limit the understanding and practice of theatre and impact the creation of new work. In asking if a work such as ***Brief Synopsis*** could be described as operatic, it reframes that question in terms of what might be described as a composer’s theatre.

The exegesis interrogates the process of creating ***Brief Synopsis***, contemplating precedence in theatre practice history with reference to my own work over past decades, in its elaboration of the methodology intrinsic to my making of a work. It argues a case for alternative strategies (extant and possible) to nineteenth-century models in the creation of a theatre that might be described as both “postdramatic” and “post-operatic”, guided by recent theoretical engagements with contemporary theatre and the concept of ‘musicalization’ (Roesner 2008, Lehmann 2006, Till 2006). ***Brief Synopsis*** aims to contribute to research that documents the creative process and in doing so, theories of performance that conceptualise approaches to the theatre medium as an abstract “landscape” in which the body, text, sound, space and character coexist within a visual/spatial construct, blurring the separation between scenario and image, story and style, content and form.

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Brief Synopsis was mounted thanks to the eager support of Performance Space, Sydney. My deepest appreciation extends to its co-directors, Bec Dean and Jeff Kahn, and their tireless producer, Tanja Farman, for providing a grand platform on which to present the work.

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And finally, I thank my partner, Takaaki Chinen, for his bemused patience as I have undergone this lengthy procedure.

Certification

I, Nigel John Kellaway, declare that this exegesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the School of The Arts, English and Media, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the 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.

Nigel John Kellaway, March 2015

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Brief Synopsis: DVD DOCUMENT

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (from left) Katia Molino, David Buckley. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

1:1 A history of concerns

For forty years my work has aimed to unsettle a range of historical presumptions concerning the art forms of music, theatre and dance. ***Brief Synopsis: a beautiful naked woman “of a certain age” brutally stabs a young man to death*** not only exemplifies this approach but also extends a preoccupation with the relationship between space and the corporeal presence of performer and spectator in the theatre medium. It sets out to disturb familiar responses to repertoire, the protocols and rituals determining the role of musicians and actors in the context of a performance that incorporates the

fundamental elements defining nineteenth-century opera. In contrast to the 'grotesquely inflated socio-economic position' (Till 2004, p.19) that nineteenth-century opera still commands in our culture, **Brief Synopsis** explores on a more modest economic scale how physical notions of space and the abstract qualities more generally attributed to music (tempi, dynamics, durations) can provide the structural, narrative and aesthetic building blocks for a new theatre work. It argues that such a work can be described as "operatic" if definitions of opera are broadened to encompass the practices intrinsic to a composer's theatre. As a composer of music I bring compositional concerns and skills to assembling theatrical, choreographic and visual elements in the theatre medium. In light of the project's presentation as part of the Performance Space's 30th anniversary festival, *YOU'RE HISTORY*, **Brief Synopsis** attests to a broader dialogue concerning notions of aesthetic lineage and artistic development in an environment that encouraged a rich hybrid practice.

Brief Synopsis emerged from a number of embryonic ideas (occurring to me in 2011) about a performance to be situated in a large flexible space incorporating, in some manner, Richard Strauss's 1948 song cycle *Vier Letzte Lieder* (*Four Last Songs*). My first title for this project was *A Landscape with Telescopes*, but it did not prove a fertile imaginative springboard. In contrast, the notion of "synopsis" and explicit action led to assembling a "library" of extant textual and musical material that produced the skeletal structure for this new work. In 2013, with a handful of composed musical sketches, a generalised spatial vision, the possibility of production and a project title, I began creating **Brief Synopsis**. The title of the work suggested (even promised) a clear narrative drive, but the intention was to unsettle that expectation through carefully crafted and staged discrete scenes. Was this work really about naked women and stabbings? Was this simply splatter porn? In the process of making this work, the collaborating team of artists might have elaborated on this "brief synopsis" to proffer a more coherent narrative for the theatre. That is, they might have provided some insight into the characters, a back-story, a succession of interactions between this young man and older woman that might logically drive toward this grizzly climax. But we eschewed these devices to

create a different kind of provocation: one more concerned with the abstract relationships between bodies, space and music in the theatre space.

This exegesis endeavours to explain and interpret the processes and outcomes of a performed (“published”) work, **Brief Synopsis** presented by Performance Space at Carriageworks, Eveleigh (in Bay 17, November 27th – 29th, 2013).¹ It draws on David Roesner’s (2008) conception of the ‘musicalization’ of theatre and Hans-Thies Lehmann’s (2006) theorisation of new forms of theatre as postdramatic in order to elaborate on the way I approach music in the theatre medium, and theatre as a musical medium. Roesner speaks of music as an ‘abstract, mostly non-referential, “language”’, insisting that ‘musicalization in theatre will ... result in changes in the audience’s traditional expectations of theatre communication’ (2008, p.54). This infers that qualities such as tempo, dynamics and duration might define a performance *moment* and give sufficient reason for a specific action on stage. (These notions will be explored in depth in Chapter 4.) At the same time, **Brief Synopsis** does not propose abstract negation of the paradigms, aesthetics or presumptions of drama. As Lehmann explains, drama ‘lives on as a structure in postdramatic theatre as a feature of audience expectation and as a foundation for many of its means of representation, as a quasi automatically working norm of its dramaturgy’ (2006, p.27). **Brief Synopsis** purposefully toys with and unsettles a number of dramaturgical conventions, in ways that will be explored in later chapters, in plundering a “library” of pre-existing textual material and performance traditions. In this respect the production exemplifies Lehmann’s general notion that art ‘cannot develop without reference to earlier forms. It is only a question of the level, consciousness, explicitness and special manner of reference’ (2006, p.27).

¹The collaborating artists were actor/performers Katia Molino, Nigel Kellaway and David Buckley; musicians Steve Meyer (‘cello), Laura Moore (‘cello), Catherine Upex (‘cello), Ashley Kurrle (double bass) and Benjamin Au (piano); director/composer Nigel Kellaway; photography artist Heidrun Löhr (with animation by Hans Bildstein); lighting designer/operator and production manager Richard Montgomery; ambient sound artist Russell Emerson; stage manager and production coordinator Clytie Smith; with sound designer and operator Gary Dryza.

1:2 The “space” – three decades of creative context

Brief Synopsis was created and presented in a producing partnership between my own company, The opera Project Incorporated, and the management of Performance Space, Sydney. Performance Space is a producing organisation (and from 1984 to 2006, a self-managed performance venue) that has supported my practice over more than three decades, since I first performed with Kai Tai Chan’s One Extra Company in 1981.² The challenging (and often conflicting) dialogue that has characterised Performance Space’s active engagement in the interaction of theatre, dance, music, contemporary performance and visual arts has shaped my approach to the theatre medium. I have (co)created around forty-eight full-length theatre works at Performance Space as a performer, composer and/or director, as well as acting as an occasional salaried producer for the organisation and as a Board member (1997-2000).³ It was in recognition of this long relationship⁴ that the co-directors (Bec Dean and Jeff Kahn) commissioned **Brief Synopsis** for 2013, a producing relationship entailing eighteen months of meticulous negotiation. Over thirty years nine directors⁵ of Performance Space have composed numerous mission statements, all emphasising the nature of innovative practice that grows from an active dialogue and collaboration between artists committed to varied discrete arts practices (theatre, dance, digital and visual arts, music, and so forth). Keith Gallasch’s précis of the activities of this organisation over those three decades points specifically to this cross-fertilisation: ‘Performance Space has mutated in the hands of visionary artistic directors, each with their own agenda, but each sustaining commitment to the “obdurately ephemeral,” as an early manifesto put

² At this time the venue was known simply by its address, 199 Cleveland Street, Redfern, until it was formally structured as The Performance Space Limited in 1983. Since 1999 it has been legally known as Performance Space Limited. In 2007 it relinquished its Cleveland Street venue to move its operations to Carriageworks, Eveleigh, as a producing entity.

³ I was formally acknowledged as one of the five “Legends of Performance Space” at their 21st birthday celebrations in 2004.

⁴ A biography and list of my major works since 1981 is contained in the appendices.

⁵ The directors of Performance Space: Mike Mullins (1983-85), Nick Tsoutas (1984-85), Allan Vizents (1986-87), Noëlle Janaczweska (1987-89), Sarah Miller (1989-93), Angharad Wynne-Jones (1994-97), Zane Trow (1997-99), Fiona Winning (1999-2008), Daniel Brine (2008-11), Bec Dean and Jeff Kahn (2011-14).

it, to providing a home for innovative performance and visual arts and their hybrids' (2013, p.24).⁶

The multi/interdisciplinary experiments emerging from Performance Space questioned established art form practices and created a forum for dialogue between artists working across a range of discrete media, encouraging collaborations that generated sophisticated hybrid practices. One of the early directors of Performance Space, Sarah Miller, points to a perceived 'orthodoxy that posits "performance" against "theatre"' arising strongly prior to the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in 'an "antagonism" between those working in "legit" theatre, as opposed to "presumably illegitimate" theatre' (Hamilton 2011, pp.187-188). Furthermore, another former director of Performance Space, Angharad Wynne-Jones (1994-97), describes the organisation (particularly when it was a physical "venue") as 'a much-needed physical and conceptual space for performance and art that challenges and infiltrates conventional and heritage arts practices' (Hamilton 2011, p.182). Artists working out of Performance Space were creating work in an environment where accepted artform descriptors (performative, textual, visual, musical) were not specifically privileged and so, in the light of this debate, a number of practitioners were compelled to look for ways of explaining a hybrid approach to creativity. It was in this environment that my work matured, embracing a breadth of arts practices well articulated by those I considered my peers.

Over the past decade theatre scholars Karen Jürs-Munby (Lehmann 2006, p.4), Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006, p.19) and Margaret Hamilton (2011) have retrospectively described my work and others' associated with Performance Space as "postdramatic", on the basis that we questioned dramatic theatre and

⁶ Gallasch lists groups, including those that explored hybrid practices: All Out Ensemble, One Extra, The Sydney Front, Russell Dumas' Dance Exchange, Entr'Acte, Open City, Frumpus, Legs on the Wall, Gravity Feed, Post Arrivalists, De Quincey Co, The opera Project, version 1.0, Branch Nebula, The Fondue Set, My Darling Patricia, Matt Prest & Clare Britton and Team MESS. There was also a wealth of visiting artists, including among many others, Nico Lathouris, Margaret Cameron, Jenny Kemp and Canberra's Splinters Theatre of Spectacle. Performance Space has also been a key player in the national hybrid arts laboratories Time_Place_Space and Indigilab, which has become Indigispace.

rejected certain formal traditions and specifically the notion that theatre functioned to illustrate a written text. Hamilton refers to such work as a contemplation of the 'transfigured stage' (2011, p.16). In addition to the term "postdramatic", 'post-operatic music theatre' (Till, 2006) could be used to describe my work and the work of other artists working out of the Performance Space, including Calculated Risks Opera Productions (with whom I performed and directed in 1990). The British director and scholar Nicholas Till describes artists:

for whom ... the aesthetic, institutional and ideological baggage of opera render it essentially moribund; artists who know that the significant developments of twentieth-century music and theatre fundamentally negate the nineteenth-century dramaturgies and metaphysics that continue to underpin most operatic practice, but whose continued engagement with the relation between music and theatre inevitably treads warily around, sometimes through and beyond, opera. Hence: a post-operatic music theatre. (2006, p.34)

Those of us exploring these specific concerns, along with other very disparate artists, were supported and nurtured by Performance Space's ever-growing community. Maturity of practice grew from dialogue, the sharing of resources and an active engagement with work beyond our personal discrete disciplines – horizons and skill bases were greatly enriched.

In 2012 Bec Dean, co-director of Performance Space and co-producer of **Brief Synopsis**, offered me the largest space at Carriageworks, Bay 17, to present the work.⁷ Bay 17 is a flexible space measuring twenty-six by forty-three metres with a rigging height of eight metres and wide opening doors at one far end, accessing an extra twelve metre deep backstage service corridor. Such an

⁷ Performance Space was the principal financial enabler of the production: without any direct government funding. The opera Project secured \$34,200 in cash support toward mounting the work (\$15,200 in self-initiated crowd funding, \$7,000 production funding from the UOW and a \$12,000 fee for rehearsal and performances from Performance Space). Performance Space contributed all additional costs, meeting rehearsal and performance venue, technical crew and advertising expenses.

enormous venue was going to define the work's dramaturgy: a contemplation on the distance between the viewer and a highly constructed live performance, between the fictionalised performers on stage, and the psychology of those relationships contemplated on that stage and how they reflect our lived experience beyond the theatre. (These issues will be considered in my concluding Chapter 7.)

1:3 Creative rationale

The term "rationale" could appear problematic in relation to my work as a creative artist, given that I rarely ask "why?" in the process of making work. I make fast, scarcely analysed decisions as to whether I am pleased with a component/moment (for instance, I like its tempo, or it is sexy, or silly, or mysterious) and keep moving. Similar approaches to practice by internationally established artists have been documented, for example, Robert Wilson in his staging of Heiner Müller's plays (as will be noted in Chapter 5).

Brief Synopsis ruminates on three major considerations that define the work of The opera Project Inc. Firstly, the project explores the way space is defined and explored, secondly, it contemplates the vagaries of time in performance and, thirdly, it examines the authoritative body and voice of the performer in that space (as will be discussed in depth in Chapters 3, 4 and 5). These concerns are intrinsically bound in notions of expectation. The scenario, as described in the title ***Brief Synopsis: a beautiful naked woman "of a certain age" brutally stabs a young man to death***, was a strategy to set up audience expectation: a succinct description of what the spectator might expect to unfold on stage, and which I then decline to dramatically realise, in order to encourage the audience's intellectual and aesthetic engagement rather than narrative satisfaction.

The decisions informing the development of ***Brief Synopsis*** are meta-theatrical (a form which self-reflexively concentrates on the technical processes and experiential nature of theatre) in so far as they offer a platform from which to explore formal aesthetic structures. My scepticism regarding theatre that

represents circumstances in a realistic manner no doubt results from my formative education in the abstract languages of instrumental music and contemporary dance - forms devoid of (or, at least, that eschew) logical narrative devices. In my opinion, the purpose of theatre (indeed all art) is to humbly draw attention to, criticise, celebrate and challenge the human condition, or, as the Romanian director Silviu Purcărete opines, 'to preserve humanity, not change it ... When you want to change it you fall into ideology and demagogy' (Dundjerovic 2010, p.92).

In addition to this meta-theatrical approach, my theatre responds to the traditions of melodrama, which I interpret as meaning a dramatic text spoken over music. For more than twenty years I have explored the technical challenge of presenting the spoken word over elaborate instrumental sound. I treat it as an alternative "reading" of the Baroque operatic recitative in which the emotional drive of the text (and indeed the performer) is tightly framed by the formal structure of the music. These scenes, eventually, move beyond the recitative format to become elaborate spoken arias, as the penultimate scene in **Brief Synopsis** demonstrates (refer to Chapter 5). I have always seen this as a way of tapping into the energies of the "operatic" without necessarily succumbing to its delusions or fetishising the virtuosic.⁸ I discussed this issue at length with my dramaturg, John Baylis, while creating my solo performance *The Nuremberg Recital* (1989). Baylis speaks in terms of the "melodramatic":

... melodrama is a link with a saner society, one that allowed for a grammar and lexicon of emotional display, before the private world made a fetish of our emotional life ... We deny the double, the divided self. We are not split, we are shattered. We are not pure, but many. The pieces gather together in gestures of pure (abbreviated) display. (Jenkins and Linz 1997, p.128)

⁸ Till (2006, pp.43-44) refers to the work of composer Giorgio Battestelli, 'repeatedly return[ing] to melodrama, in its original meaning of "dramatic texts spoken over music", to enable him to tap the energies of the operatic without succumbing to its delusions'.

It is this notion of “abbreviated display” that drives me toward an economy of gestures in my work. Simplifying moments to a single gesture in no way precludes exaggeration. My task, in every work, is to determine the most efficient means to create a heightened theatrical experience, to dislocate the theatrical experience from the “everyday”, to highlight aesthetic concerns. This entails a pragmatic, fluid shifting of concerns across discrete arts practices (musical, dramatic and visual). In subsequent chapters I will demonstrate the particular forms I choose to employ to create specific contrasting moments on the stage.

Certainly, I revel in the technical bravura of the performer in a space, and how s/he manipulates time (without drawing overbearing attention to their virtuosity in this ability). **Brief Synopsis** stages a scenario where often very little seems to be happening. There are extended moments of utter stillness, in which the audience is left to survey the stage, perhaps as they would a huge painting in a gallery. This visual nuance is central to my evolving work as a theatre artist, and has been key to the work of a number of significant twentieth-century theatre artists (Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage, Romeo Castellucci, Pina Bausch, William Forsythe, to name but a few). Lehmann describes the effect of such an approach as ‘a displacement of theatrical perception’ that can be ‘provocative, incomprehensible or boring’ for the spectator (2006, p.157). The aim of proposing such an explicitly action-centred title for **Brief Synopsis** was to draw the audience’s attention toward notions of space and music, or, as Lehmann explains, turning them from an abandoning of ‘the flow of a narration toward a constructing and constructive co-producing of the total audio-visual complex of the theatre’ (2006, p.157).

As mentioned previously, the first (abandoned) title of this work was *A Landscape with Telescopes*. The “telescopes” referred metaphorically to a means by which an audience is drawn to minute events played out at great distance on stage. The audience was not to be privy to what motivates the performers, but would merely watch these figures erupt into mysterious action from afar. **Brief Synopsis** begins with scenes of waiting and anticipation (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), akin to contemplating a landscape where

events merely occur, unexplained and with little evident consequence, and in this respect suggests the influence of Gertrude Stein. However, as Elinor Fuchs points out, it is not entirely clear if Stein ‘was talking about the way of viewing, or the thing viewed’ in describing ‘the play as landscape’ (1999, p.94).

Undoubtedly, Stein favoured a static theatre: ‘A martyr does something but a really good saint does nothing ... Generally speaking, anybody is more interesting doing nothing than doing anything’ (Fuchs 1996, p.96). I’m drawn to Stein’s concerns in the way this sense of interminable waiting imbues the tempi of her texts (notably her libretto for Virgil Thomson’s opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, 1927). I believe the influence of Maurice Maeterlinck is evident here. In his *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893) and *The Blind* (1890) there is little action or, as Fuchs (1996, p.96) notes: ‘Just waiting, mounting anxiety, and the slow recognition of inevitable death.’ This sense of waiting for that inevitability is central to both the themes and structure of **Brief Synopsis**, which begins with an explicit title and then a clear textual premonition of death, and finishes with a deliberate exeunt saturated in Richard Strauss’s final contemplation on death, *Im Abendrot* (1948).

1:4 Creative methodology

How do these notions of space, time and the body assemble themselves in my work? What are the processes of creation and realisation? I employ borrowed material (textual and musical, in the case of **Brief Synopsis**) as stimuli for devising a highly subjective performance work. In such a process the director and collaborating artists become the “authors” of the performance and the mis-en-scène becomes quite independent of this inter-textual assemblage of source materials.

Brief Synopsis draws on material from, primarily, three major twentieth-century artists (Richard Strauss, Heiner Müller and Alain Robbe-Grillet) but casts it against musical quotations from several other composers. There was an inexhaustible musical repertoire (extant and original) that could be brought to this stage. This project, like others, required what could be described as a “hook”, indeed several. These “hooks” are generally based on material beyond

musical concerns and will often be filmic or textual. If a particular musical reference initially attracts me I will go hunting for “combative” material, often in extant dramatic texts, in order to create an extra-musical context that will disturb established receptions of that music. I choose only the bits and pieces that suit my purposes: a narrative contrivance, a monologue or short exchange between characters, all of which can be liberally rewritten. I pilfer – generally dissatisfied with a single source. I’m always looking for something else to throw a gesture against. This has, in several works, led to provocative juxtapositions: a process of collision, in which historically established readings of the repertoire are unsettled and established performance protocols associated with this material are disturbed. Keith Gallasch, in a *RealTime* review of *The Rameau Project*, succinctly explains these concerns in drawing influences from a variety of sources: ‘*The Rameau Project* confirms Kellaway’s esoteric vision - musically scholarly, literary, in love with the cut and paste of building idiosyncratic works out of others’ classics. It’s a modus operandi ... which faces the inevitability of likewise becoming itself “classical”’ (2009, p.46).

When challenged with an initially literary proposition I will look for a musical link – something that fits (dramaturgically rather than emotionally) and complicates the textual and visual conflict I am planning. There is no rule as to what might trigger a new work, but it will most likely be an extant artefact – a musical work, a painting, a play text, a film, a photograph, a book, a lighting concept, even an architectural statement. Elizabeth LeCompte’s approach to performance offers a number of parallels to this process, exploring ‘performance itself as the field of raw material’ (Fuchs 1996, p.102). LeCompte’s performances consist of excerpts from classical texts, as well as from popular culture and other mediums such as film and television or dance styles that together constitute ‘arrangements in space that require the multiple, moment-to-moment shifting focus of postmodern spectatorship’ (Fuchs 1996, p.102). As I approach the assembling of disparate materials in my own work, I see the process as a constructive enterprise building on a deep respect for the material a new work is built on.

Let me consider some of the “hooks” The opera Project has used in two quite different works, and how we “sewed” them to other concerns in the process of creating unique interpretations of texts and/or musical repertoire, considering how varying their approaches were and how they contrast with the processes and outcomes of ***Brief Synopsis***. I must stress that I have never considered my work a continuum. Every new work springs from a unique concern and I tend often to consciously disregard the aspirations of anything I have made in the past. I don’t consciously build from one work to the next. These two works demonstrate how I have, in the past, selected music in relation to text: an intentional dramaturgical relationship. ***Brief Synopsis*** (as evidenced in subsequent chapters) takes a far more haphazard approach to these connections, aiming to present more disconnected components in order to heighten the notion of collision. The logic is consequently now less explicit, demanding a more intellectually rigorous engagement by the audience.

The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves (1997)⁹ emerged from discussions with long-term collaborator Annette Tesoriero with regard to Hector Berlioz’s song cycle *Les Nuits d’été* (1834) and dancer Dean Walsh and dramatist Keith Gallasch. Walsh introduced the idea of immortality as a result of reading Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Gallasch took this and the highly romantic notion of love beyond the grave, sustained in Gautier’s poetry for the Berlioz songs, to compose an original scenario. Wayne Koestenbaum’s writing in *The Queen’s Throat, Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* provides a further lead to the highly homo-eroticised work that emerged:

The eighteenth century critic Count Francesco Algarotti had described the musical element of opera as ‘effeminate and disgusting: the music should be the handmaiden to poetry ... (but) when music grows all powerful, words turn about and recoil upon themselves, a movement

⁹ ***The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves*** The opera Project Inc. Performers: Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero, Dean Walsh. Director: Nigel Kellaway (with Keith Gallasch). Based on a scenario by Keith Gallasch, original sound by Peter Wells, lighting with Simon Wise, Performance Space, Sydney, 1997. Toured to Brisbane Powerhouse and Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart in 2001.

repugnant to the natural processes of our speech and passions ... Music encourages words to behave like sodomites, overturning the natural sources of pleasure and meaning'. (1993, p.185)

The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves officially launched the new company, declaring that a primary concern of The opera Project was the theatricalisation of corporeal bodies presented on stage. *Our* vampires concentrated on the flesh, the voice and its relationship with the song, the body of the dancer, singer, actor and pianist, the body of the audience, highlighting the seductive power and sweaty embodiment of the voice as a dramaturgical core of the work.

In spite of Peter Wells's enveloping intermittent sound score, the focus was very strongly on Berlioz's songs, around which the three performers wound an intricately imposed scenario of physical action and extra-musical intent. The intention was to impel our audience to listen and consider this epic Berlioz cycle afresh. Preceding the 8.00pm shows, on a number of nights, Annette Tesoriero and I presented a static recital performance of the songs at the piano, in the order Berlioz had intended them to be sung, so the audience could choose to then consider the impact that our theatrical choices made on the source material and whether there had been a heightening or diminishing of Berlioz's vision.

another night: medea (2003)¹⁰ began with a collision of Louis-Nicolas Clérambault's solo cantata *Médée* (1710) with slabs from Heiner Müller's theatre texts contained in *Medea Material* (1982). This was the first time I had

¹⁰ *another night: medea* The opera Project Inc. Director: Nigel Kellaway. Performers: Regina Heilmann, Nigel Kellaway, Peretta Anggerek (countertenor), Michael Bell (piano), Nigel Ubrihien (harpsichord), Margaret Howard (baroque violin), Catherine Tabrett (viola da gamba). Lighting designer: Simon Wise. Costume designer: Annemaree Dalziel, Piano improvisations sketched by Melissa Seeto. Performance Space, Sydney, 2003.

grappled with Müller in nearly ten years,¹¹ although he has been a “constant companion” of mine in many works over the past thirty years. In discussing Müller's work, Hamilton talks of ‘a dramaturgy that hinges on the capacity of the spectator to relinquish historically conditioned responses’ to particular media, and notes, with particular reference to my work, how he ‘offered specific Australian artists textual material that emphasized the problem of representation and, more precisely, the relationship between presentational forms and modes of perception’ (2011, p.153).

In *another night: medea* the inclusion of substantial scenes from Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) proffered a clear dramaturgical coherence, exploring, as it does, a similarly dysfunctional middle-aged heterosexual relationship. It even drives toward an act of infanticide, as George “murders” Martha's imaginary son. Ovid's (43 BC – AD 17) story of Medea is a revenge myth. Its relevance to our project lay in the myriad ways in which Western culture has chosen to interpret the story and apply it to contemporary events and consciousness. There is no “one” Medea. Louis-Nicolas Clérambault's early eighteenth-century cantata reads the story as a psychologically complex “revenge tragedy”. We approached Edward Albee's play as a subconscious treatment of Medea's and Jason's wrestling match, and so set about to discuss the “relatively” recent positioning of theatre as a psychoanalytical forum, and to consider how myths have been quite differently interpreted in the artistic canon of earlier centuries - all pertaining to where we locate art in our collective self-awareness.

My concerns, as always, were in how the performance of the music would impact theatrical articulacy, as well as how well all aspects of the material served as a vehicle for the collaborating artists and their peculiarities. This work revolved around two performers on stage (Regina Heilmann and Nigel Kellaway) and how they juggled a number of associated relationships – mythic,

¹¹ I have incorporated Müller's texts in *John Laws/Sade* (1997), *The Pornography of Performance* (1988), *The Nuremberg Recital* (1989), *This Most Wicked Body* (1994), *another night: medea* (2003), *Cantata* (2003), *Medea Material* (2011) and *Brief Synopsis* (2013).

fictional and very real. Kyriaki Frantzi locates these disparate games of power which can be explored when one collides a variety of related “texts” with the immediacy of interaction that occurs between the personalities and visceral bodies of the actors on stage: ‘*another night: medea* can be seen as an interweaving of art history (theatre, opera, music) with personal and actors’ histories’ (2007, p.312). There were, in fact, three couples involved in this work, dealing with the issue of power-sharing in quite different ways: The relationship between Medea and Jason has become an unequal one. Martha behaves horribly to George who has proved a failure, while Regina Heilmann and Nigel Kellaway have established an ongoing professional partnership in which power is more equally shared.

Reflecting on these two former works I am aware of an, often critical, ambivalence to my apparent relationship with the material I choose to “collide” on stage. The point is that I pursue these processes in full knowledge that some elements (and readings) of the original sources will be sacrificed or scarred. I will happily jettison others’ intentions, as I do not see it as my primary responsibility to faithfully interpret the work of other artists. What interested me in *another night: medea* was the manner in which Clérambault’s music propelled Müller’s and Albee’s dialogue and framed every scene as a discrete artefact. Keith Gallasch reflects on my propensity to interweave extant material in creating something he describes as “operatic”, in its literal meaning, here in a much later *RealTime* review of *The Rameau Project*:

Over a number of productions, Kellaway and Heilmann have developed a mutual playing idiom ... intoned, almost dancerly and most memorable in their take on George and Martha from *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in The opera Project’s *another night: medea*, 2003 (which drew in part on Clérambault’s cantata *Médée*, 1710). Passion in this manner of playing is palpable, but tautly framed, indeed operatic. (2009, p.46)

As these two previous productions suggest, my relationship with the music I employ is different in each new work, and my authorial decisions are made according to how other components collide and contribute in an emerging

original artefact. My creative “processes” have never been consistent – on each new work a new strategy will emerge that reflects the requirements of these “colliding components”. But a considered method appears in this pursuit of referential “collision”. Oddly though, over the past twenty years, an apparent deterioration of clear reading has evolved, casting the audience further adrift as the works progress. I have certainly striven to unsettle a range of historical presumptions concerning the art forms of music, theatre and dance. I have disturbed familiar responses to repertoire, the protocols and rituals determining the role of musicians and actors in the context of “a performance”. But, as Lehmann urges, ‘provocation alone, however, does make a form; even provocative, negating art has to create something new under its own steam. Through this alone, and not through the negation of classical norms, can it obtain its own identity’ (2006, p.28).

And so, I set out to create meaningful and engaging theatre from powerful references to diverse extant repertoire. In this process I am trying to make some personal sense of a vast heritage (a cultural inheritance). In publicly deconstructing this material, in searching for fresh views, I am constantly opening myself to criticism. The *Sydney Morning Herald* critic Harriet Cunningham conclude that *another night: medea* deconstructs ‘Western ideas with no real attempt to rebuild anything from the rubble’ (2003). In response, Hamilton notes that ‘Cunningham reasoned that in “these post-modern days” theatre “needs to make a point”, and in this respect ... did not embrace the fragmentation and the (grotesque) desemanticisation of the (classical) body specific to *another night: medea*’ (2011, pp.154-155). Hamilton went on to discuss Robert Wilson’s uncompleted epic *CIVIL warS* (circa 1984), incorporating Müller text with classical citations, Shakespeare and Goethe, and music by Schubert, David Byrne and Hans-Peter Kuhn. With that in mind, Hamilton suggests that:

Cunningham’s criticism of *another night: medea* is likely to extend to Wilson in so far as he separates his source material from a demarcated “origin” and the body of character, and, in doing so, resists a central aim or the *telos* of Aristotelian thought. What Cunningham fails to

acknowledge, however, is a form of theatre, as opposed to spectacle, that is not designed to illuminate a grid of narrational comprehension or canonical format. Instead, these productions can be thought of as visual and soundscapes that supersede (semantic) identity – linguistic, literary and corporeal. (2011, p.159)

another night: medea employed post-operative concerns, acknowledging a substantial canon of work, creating an original and comprehensible whole from its various parts, without falling prey to historically established restrictions.

Brief Synopsis collides excerpts from two unlikely texts (Alain Robbe-Grillet's screenplay for Alain Resnais's film *L'année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961, and Heiner Müller's play text *Quartet*, 1982) and buries them in an instrumental reimagining of an eclectic choice of music. Structures, established criteria of musical and theatrical performance codes and "manners" have been undermined, leaving a partial void. The performers' authority has been "denuded" in so many ways: they are distant bodies and voices, sounds, gesturing with no clear intent, enjoying no real climaxes, no committed "arrivals" or profound "exits", no articulated revelations. (Perhaps death, as contemplated in **Brief Synopsis**, is a little like this – a few squabbles and then all is still.) I take a fairly relaxed approach to what Hamilton identifies in the texts of Müller as the 'the relationship between representational forms and modes of perception' (2011, p.153), casting my net of appropriation widely, and sometimes uncritically. That said, I am tasked to create an articulate whole from my sources, juggling issues of content and structure, in "composing" a work of colliding components (or provocations), as will be discussed in the next (and subsequent) chapters.

CHAPTER 2 Content and Structure



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (from left) Benjamin Au, Nigel Kellaway, Laura Moore, Steve Meyer, Catherine Upex, Katia Molino. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

2:1 Provocations

Brief Synopsis is built on a number of technical “provocations”, contributing to a “library of materials” (textual, physical, scenic and spatial), and brings to mind how established structures might limit the understanding and practice of theatre and impact the creation of new work. This chapter will discuss a number of alternative strategies (extant and possible) to certain established models in the creation of a type of theatre that has been described as “postdramatic” or even “post-operatic”, briefly reflecting on notions of what might define *opera*, as suggested by recent theoretical engagements with contemporary *theatre*. Till

points out there is a particular practice that acknowledges ‘music is visual and embodied, yet seeks to employ the spatiality, visuality and embodiment of music to challenge audiences ultimately to listen anew’ (2004, p.22). I would suggest that it also challenges us to “watch anew”.

In addition to Strauss’s *Vier Letzte Lieder*, a central inspiration for this new work (and textual contributor), Alain Resnais’s 1961 movie *L’année dernière à Marienbad*, illuminates devices by which established logic is disrupted, particularly in the artifice of voice-over and the musical structuring of scenes. The writer of its screenplay, Alain Robbe-Grillet, insisted that the “form” of his text, and the resulting film, was inseparable from its narrative “content”. Taking this idea a step further I describe ***Brief Synopsis*** as a performance work in which the aesthetic form appears to take precedence over the content. Lehmann points to this issue of content and form, the entanglement of drama and abstraction, noting that ‘abstraction is inherent to drama ... Which subject is suitable for letting the coherence of the interpreted Being shine out, without excessive embellishments of factual information clouding the view onto the abstract structures of fate, the “tragic collision”, the dialectic in dramatic conflict and reconciliation?’ (2008, p.39). ***Brief Synopsis*** employs the conceit of narrative (albeit obscure) and “dramatic conflict”, but there is no grand expressive conflict at play between its actors, and so no clear “reconciliation”. The audience’s attention is drawn primarily to discrete notions of action, sound and space. The verbal interactions between the performers, though dense in content, are flimsy in their construction as dramatic dialogue.

2:2 The opera Project – and my issues with “Opera”

The co-producing entity of ***Brief Synopsis*** with Performance Space was The opera Project Incorporated, a company I co-founded with mezzo-soprano Tesoriero in 1996. With it we aimed to create an ongoing process to examine contemporary theatrical structures within a collaborative forum involving several artists working in disparate performance genres (dance, music, theatre), who

had collaborated in various combinations over several years.¹² The printed program of our first major production (*The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves*, 1997) began with a definition: opera / 'opra / opara – It. from L.: service, work, a work (*The Pocket Macquarie Dictionary*, 1982, p.628). We chose the word “opera” for this literal Italian meaning, a work,¹³ while hinting at its culturally implied meaning. It is a “project” in so much as it entails, first and foremost, an interrogation of form. Our concerns were to develop a rigorous theatrical practice where music was but one contributing component. These concerns were not those that could be explored within forms dominated by a literary text, a particular physical vocabulary or a predominantly musical language. Spelling “Opera” with a capital “O” refers to a practice and economy of scale prescribed by organisations dedicated primarily to maintaining a heritage of largely extant works, particularly those of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Handel, Mozart, Verdi, Rossini and Wagner. Our use of “opera”, with a lower-case “o”, embraces all the potential of a theatre “work”, acknowledging (or at least referring to) but in no way suffocated by other implied histories.

¹² Major works by The opera Project Inc.:

The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves (premiered Performance Space, 1997, touring to Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, and the Powerhouse, Brisbane, in 2001)

The Terror of Tosca (premiered Performance Space, 1998)

Tristan (premiered Performance Space, 1999)

This Most Wicked Body (a restructuring of an 1994 work for the 1998 Adelaide Festival)

El Inocente (premiered Performance Space, 2001)

Entertaining Paradise: where all things are permitted (premiered Performance Space, 2002)

Another Night: Medea (premiered Performance Space, 2003)

The Audience and Other Psychopaths (premiered Performance Space, 2004)

Sleepers Wake! Wachet Auf! (premiered Performance Space at Carriageworks, 2007)

The Rameau Project (premiered Performance Space at Carriageworks, 2009)

Brief Synopsis: a beautiful naked woman “of a certain age” brutally stabs a young man to death (premiered Performance Space at Carriageworks, 2013)

¹³ John Jenkins and Rainer Linz in the book *Arias* (1997, p.7) also refer to opera as “a work”, suggesting ‘that very simple meaning often seems the most useful when discussing pieces that are new, innovative and difficult to pigeon-hole’.

Indeed, only two of our productions (*The Terror of Tosca*, 1998, and *Tristan*, 1999) have literally explored the Operatic canon.¹⁴

Rather, this exegesis demonstrates how liberally I have embraced notions of the “operatic”. I tend to eschew much of the artefact we call “Opera” and arrive at that definition, “a work”, which better suits my practice of creating new work, rather than being obliged to obsess over the historical implications or the recreating of extant works. I am here considering processes and decisions I undertake as a creative artist on a particular project, while reflecting on pertinent historical and more recent initiatives that share my concerns in the “operatic” but, more generally, the “theatrical”. From its inception The opera Project has always considered Opera a stupendous (if at times preposterous) construct based on nineteenth- (and earlier) century dramaturgies that so often continue to underpin the making of Opera, a century or more later. As Till points out in reference to his own company, Post-Operative Productions:

Opera is insistently, even narcissistically self-reflective. Just consider how many operas are actually about singers or musicians. ... We would argue that although the self-reflexivity of opera is a symptom of an almost neurotic anxiety about its validity as an art-form, self-reflexivity does not necessarily involve self-criticism ... In placing itself under the tutelage of Greek tragedy at its birth opera sought to acquire legitimacy, but only succeeded in creating a paternal authority against whose standards it could only ever fall short. (2004, p.17)

Opera often confronts its audience with a tradition where dialogue is sung assuming the conceit that it is actually being spoken, while inflected by emotional codes determined by historical aesthetic assumptions. As Nona de Sanctis (1983, p.1) explains, this notion of *verismo* (performed verisimilitude) is culturally inscribed artifice at its most heightened, purporting the ideal of the

¹⁴ *The Terror of Tosca* referred specifically to *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini, inventing upon the existing Sardou libretto and Puccini’s music. *Tristan* referred directly to *Tristan und Isolde* by Richard Wagner, though largely eschewed both the scenario and Wagner’s music for his opera.

truth – *il vero* – about life without romanticism or idealisation, stemming from the “Realist” movement in late nineteenth-century literature and figurative arts – partly a result of the Industrial Revolution, desiring to present a truthful, objective and impartial view of contemporary society. But this is paradoxical, as de Sanctis points out in asking ‘how did the librettists of *verismo opera* reconcile the drawbacks imposed by fundamental lyric conventions such as a dialogue in the form of arias and recitatives, the use of verse that twists syntax to fit the musical line, and the retarding effects of a large orchestra and chorus on dramatic action?’ (1983, p.4)

It is for these reasons that The opera Project chooses to frame the music in its productions in “inverted commas”, distancing it from any illustrative or servicing relationship to the action, affording it its own abstract autonomy. If I’m seeking verisimilitude on the stage I will ask my performers to simply walk and talk; to perform task-based actions, such as sleeping or eating on stage (two activities that featured strongly in *This Most Wicked Body*, 1994). This is not to infer disrespect or lack of appreciation for much that is contained in the Operatic canon (regardless of the concerns voiced in this document). There is an extant repertoire there to be nurtured and re-interpreted, but that is not the ambition of The opera Project. Indeed, its concerns, over the years, have shifted away from authoritative, singular musical sources to what Roesner describes more generally as a ‘musicalization of contemporary theatre’, wherein new dramaturgies and structures are introduced to ‘challenge the expectations and meaning-making processes of the audience’ (2008, p.44). In some regards this might be described as exploring the dramaturgy of music in the space, questioning assumptions regarding the authority and purpose of the performers (including the musicians) and providing them ‘an alternative (not mutually exclusive) performative task to work with that shifts the attention from working on character, situation and narrative towards aspects of timing, sound and the polyphony of the theatrical media’ (Roesner 2008, p.44).

Brief Synopsis proposes an improbable concert program: a wish list of some wonderful music by several dead composers spanning three centuries:

- Georg Frideric Handel (1707) “Un pensiero nemico di pace” aria from *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*
- Georg Philipp Telemann (1716) “Mein Heiland, Herr und Fürst” aria from *Brockes Passion* TWV 5:1
- François Couperin (1717) keyboard solo, *Les Baricades Mystérieuses*
- Johann Sebastian Bach (1723) Sonata in A Major for Violin and Harpsichord BWV 1015, *Andante un poco*
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1781) Serenade for Winds in Bb K316, *Adagio*
- Ludwig van Beethoven (1825) String Quartet Opus 132, Movement 1 *Assai sostenuto* – *Allegro* and Movement 5 *Allegro Appassionato* – *Presto*
- Reynaldo Hahn (1913) song, *À Chloë*
- Claude Debussy (1914) Six Épigrapes Antiques: *Pour un tombeau sans nom*
- Enrique Granados (1916) Tonadillas al estilo antiguo: song, *El Mira de la Maja*
- Richard Strauss (1948) *Vier Letzte Lieder* (*Four Last Songs*).

No producer would dream of presenting such a program. In a concert hall it would be dreadful, with no apparent cohesion of ideas, styles, genres or historical oversight. Such a concert would require two separate orchestras (symphonic and baroque), three very different sopranos (in tessitura and vocal style), a baroque violinist and harpsichordist, a fine pianist and a formidable string quartet (perhaps frustrated that they only get to play the outer movements of one of Beethoven’s crowning masterpieces). This program is particularly awful in chronological order of composition, so, what could possibly pull this program together? In **Brief Synopsis** I began by considering (and so re-writing) it as a humble recital rather than massive concert, rationalising the musical forces required (aesthetically and budget-wise), re-imagining the disparate musical sources for chamber instrumentation – a small band. The choice in this case is quite perverse: three ‘celli, double bass and piano. It “re-colours” this sound through a deliberate reminder of the musicians’ “presence” on the stage – mapping their entrances and exits, their movement across the stage, amplifying the glances that pass between them. Then the repertoire is thrown against a perversely eclectic spoken text – connecting the music with extra-musical material, considering the all-important notions of pacing and spacing on stage. And finally, quite inexplicably, it is cast against other recorded music.

The performers' authority is immediately undermined. The amplified sound system swamps them in a more "authoritative" sound. Live acoustic music is revealed in all its fragility in such an epic space.

I am not, strictly speaking, an "interpretive" artist. If my concerns, as a director, were to realise complete theatre texts, or, as an interpretive musician, to perform substantial composed scores, my task would be to enquire deeply into the intentions and visions of the writers or composers I was interpreting. I am, however, more a creative deviser of new work. At the same time I am an unapologetic collagist. I take small elements of other creators' work, collide them in unexpected ways and rewrite them. The resulting material begins as an ill-fitting jigsaw puzzle, from which I assemble my own vision resonating with my fleeting, deeply subjective, experience of the various components I have built it from. As Walter Benjamin (1968) observes, '[t]he uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition.' This is a profoundly personal creative process, but imbued with countless impersonal references, building from existing artefacts and traditions that impress and challenge me in so far as they provide solid building blocks. ***Brief Synopsis***, for example, is a performance work redolent of the aesthetics of abstract painting, whereby the audience is encouraged to look at, rather than through the artefact. It conflates notions of the 1960s' Nouvelle Vague of French cinema with more contemporary postdramatic intrigue, warping sensibilities of time, space, structure and logic – exposing human designs of crisis and futility.

In ***Brief Synopsis*** the first live, formal, sound emitted by the musicians is one brutally sharp arpeggiated dissonance on the piano from which the 'cellists emerge with a soft, quavering, unison top G that extends over a number of very still minutes, before dissipating into long silence. The musicians are foregrounded in this simplest of gestures. Ten minutes have passed, with prolonged set-ups and faltering entrances, before this first real "performative" moment occurs. It hovers for a few minutes in the stillness. My inspiration for this musical gesture came from the purported monotony of the earliest experiments in Baroque opera exploring musical monody at the very close of the sixteenth century.

Why reference this phenomenon? Opera (like all theatre) is a creative response to philosophical, cultural and scientific concerns arising at moments in history, though its actual premise was built on spurious research. In his book *Music in Western Civilization*, the musicologist Paul Henry Lang, (1941, pp.334-343) details how, around 1600, a loose academy of Italian aesthetes, known as the Florentine Camerata, imagined a theatre with the ideal of sublimating music to an Aristotelian supremacy of the word. The Camerata was essentially a literary and artistic society, including amateur noblemen (Giovanni Bardi, Jacopo Corsi), poets (Ottavio Rinuccini, Giambattista Marino, Gabriello Chiabrera), singers (Jacopo Peri, Giulio Caccini) and musical theoreticians (Vincenzo Galilei, Girolamo Mei). All these men were imbued with an admiration for the classical world, and arrived at a strong belief that the ancient Greeks and Romans sang their entire tragedies, which we now doubt. Caccini, a singer with some compositional skill, stated in the prefacing page to his *Nuove Musiche* (1602-07), 'I conceived the idea of composing a harmonic speech, a sort of music in which a noble restraint was placed on singing (in the strict sense) in favour of the words'.

The first extant opera was *Euridice* (1600), with a libretto by Rinuccini and music by both Caccini and Peri. Peri writes in its preface that he had observed closely the conversation of people and attempted to render their speech in his music. Each vocal part maintained basically the same pitch until the meaning of the text warranted a change, at which moment the chord on which that pitch sat also changed. The result was a fairly monotonous chant, interrupted by short instrumental ritornelli of just a few bars each, played by a small off-stage ensemble. This was a rigid, word-dominated recitative – a kind of chanted drama. It would seem, sadly, to have been neither a reproduction, nor a regeneration of classical tragedy. There was an apparent distrust in the expressive potential of the spoken voice. Indeed, I cannot help but think of Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi and his work in the 1970s and 1980s with the actress Shiraishi Kayako on a number of the Greek tragedies. Shiraishi's speaking voice had phenomenal gymnastic and expressive power ranging over

more than two and a half octaves. She did not need to sing, as the spoken effect was electrifying and coherently affective.

It must be remembered that none of the Camerata members were highly trained or accomplished composers. I'm prepared to surmise that their experiments may have been short-lived if it was not for the interest Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) took in them. His first opera, *Orfeo*, was premiered in 1604. (In reference to Till's earlier comment on the self-reflexivity of subject matter, like the earlier Caccini/Peri opera, this also contemplated the mythic musician Orpheus.) Monteverdi was a professional composer, a genius of polyphony, though frustrated by the narrow frames of the madrigal, of which he was, nevertheless, a master. He was not a man of letters and did not set a text to music in order to justify any intellectual premise. He created an opera that was both classical and modern, aiming not at the realisation of the ideals of some distant past, but exploring the expression of the life and passions that were alive within himself. The musicologist Paul H. Lang went so far as to anoint Monteverdi 'the Michelangelo of opera: (engaging in) a titanic struggle with matter and form ... taking the current culture of music into new territory' (1941, p.341). Monteverdi gleefully embraced the new monodic vocal style, enriching it through his own stupendous mastery of polyphony. In his hands, and those of subsequent contemporaries, the more expressive monologues morphed gradually into detailed aria contrivances. The Camerata's initially tight cloak of dramaturgical conservatism gradually parted, enabling dangerous new experiments in music. This new music drama has developed, over centuries, a tenuous relationship with the histories of "dramatic" theatre, with all its imaginative re-enacting of inherited stories, real experiences or imagined conditions, where the "coloured" word is the primary signifier. **Brief Synopsis** is testimony to my recent eschewing of the sung/"coloured" word of Opera. The raw words in this work are spoken bluntly by actors, with little apparent emotional attachment to them. These words are gestural and crudely informative.

2:3 Content within structure

Brief Synopsis explores the meeting of physical gesture, spoken text and music, the manipulation of space, the “positioning” of its audience; questioning assumed hierarchies pertaining to text, scenography, physical expression and sound, and redolent of the painting of landscapes, where colour, surface, line and material become autonomous players in the field of “abstract” art.

“Content”, in my work, pertains to physical, textual, sonic components and formal structures, rather than specific readings or “meanings”. I sympathise with director Silviu Purcărete when he says of his own work: ‘I am a very instinctive director. I do not have a method of working. My way of thinking is certainly visual; it is also about space and sound. It is not theoretical. The theoretical things come after the analysis’ (Dundjerovic 2010, p.95). In many respects this approach has characterised my work as a solo artist and director in many contexts, and also my short seven-year experience with a performance ensemble, The Sydney Front (a company I co-founded in 1986), in which we developed and identified a structural formula that (liberally) sustained all our theatre works. Although we never entertained dramatic narrative or notions of character development, all seven produced works followed a dependable scenic structure:

1. Dramaturgical Exposition – outlining our use of the space and introducing the rules of negotiation between the performers and their audience (which could be, at any moment, undermined).
2. Material – comprising the bulk of the work, assembled in an order that satisfied equally our musical, visual and dramaturgical sensibilities.
3. Penultimate Scene – this was generally quite chaotic, with an urgent sense that there was to be an inevitable outcome/event.
4. Climax Scene – this generally entailed some kind of sacrificial moment – the victimisation of either a performer (most often me), or sometimes (subliminally) the audience.
5. Denouement – essentially an exit strategy for the performers and audience, giving them space to reflect on their experience.

I have played with this formula for many years. It embraces all the possibilities of contemporary dance structures, the “operatic” and postdramatic, as it insists on no “dramatic” content. It survives on quite disconnected, abstract materials - and suits the ninety-minute theatre model beautifully. I have consciously employed this formula often, but it requires constant refashioning. In the case of **Brief Synopsis** this involved the conflating of penultimate, climax and denouement scenes into an elongated blur, as will be described in later chapters. It declares an allegiance to postdramatic practices: eschewing the centrality of a dominating dramatic text, allowing alternative “texts” (musical, spatial, physical) equal authority in the signing of meaning, in order to create an aesthetically coherent theatre work in which content and structure are indivisible – one not preceding the other.

CHAPTER 3 A Space: Site of Collision

Peter Brook was wrong. There is no such thing as an empty space. Spaces are always socially and historically located as places. Within places the configuration of space (the relationship between audience and performer, between onstage/offstage space, between the performers themselves) is always social, rhetorical and affective, and should be open to reconfiguration.
(Till 2004, p.22)



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (from left) Katia Molino, Nigel Kellaway. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

In my work I do not so much “abandon” established theatrical structuring systems, as complicate them. As the title of this chapter proposes, the space where ***Brief Synopsis*** plays out is a “site of collision”, and as anyone who drives a car will know, a collision most often ends in damage, wreckage even. Certainly, in this work, there is considerable damage to established assumptions determining the role of a performer on stage, the very purpose of music (in both the theatre, and on the concert platform), the notions of

“synopsis” and how that is “fleshed”, a relationship between the live and videoed body in which each seems to be undermining the authenticity of the other, an intense dialogue between actors reduced to cursory communication.

3:1 A landscape: collisions and appropriations

My concerns are in a dramaturgy of music and bodies in space. I am a grave robber. I have always maintained that there has been too much bad text written, and have questioned my right to contribute more. So I pilfer - but only from the canonical best (and only the short bits that suit my particular vision on a specific project). It's about a familiarity with the rich variety of borrowed materials and, then, an articulate re-imagining of it, positioning it in a newly envisaged space. Of course, my work is not unique in employing these methods (referring, for example, to that of The Wooster Group in their play with canonical texts), but I would argue that my processes lend equal veracity to the textual, musical and scenic references I am employing.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 1 – The set-up (refer to DVD 00.00 – 05.40)

The audience enters a huge unadorned enclosed space (Bay 17 at Carriageworks, Eveleigh). This is the quintessentially “Kellaway Space”: bare walls and a minimum of objects. But it is by no means what Peter Brook described as an “empty space” – it is imbued with history (theatrical, performative, social) and every audience carries with them a keen baggage of expectation. Perhaps some of the audience are drawn by their familiarity with former work of the collaborating artists, some are simply intrigued by the reputation of the company, or are interested in the venue per se.

I would have preferred one hundred and twenty individual seats randomly scattered across the space, offering a chance perspective/view for the audience. But theatre safety regulations (and budgetary constraints) determined a tiered bank of one hundred and sixty seats. We placed this configuration diagonally, as far downstage as possible, allowing a thirty-metre stage thrust. And so I was obliged to comply with a “front-on” viewing perspective – a

challenge I relished for its opportunity to explore the most conservative of performer / audience physical conventions.

The audience enters through a downstage corner, allowing them a clear view of the enormity of the space as they walk a twenty-metre void to their seats. An empty space, bar a closed grand piano over which hangs a six-metre wide projection screen framed like a blank painting. Entering with them is an elegantly dressed Katia Molino (though probably unnoticed as she takes her seat in the front row, if audience are not familiar with her nor recognise her from the show's advertising). Beyond this huge space, through the open fire doors, is a projection (some fifty metres away) of trains passing. This is the reality of what exists directly beyond the walls of the building – the Redfern railway corridor. And then there is movement: people entering, setting up chairs, music stands and café tables around the piano. Are they the musicians, or merely stage crew? The artifice is in the choreography of this action and the inhabiting of this huge empty space with simple objects that will eventually reveal their purpose.

Elinor Fuchs contemplates a performance in which 'the human figure, instead of providing perspectival unity to a stage whose setting acts as a backdrop and visual support, is treated as an element in what might be described as a theatrical landscape' (1996, p.92). The audience is thrown into a contemplation of this landscape, which is indeed an extraordinary space. The "room" is the primary focus. Its vastness is impressive and a little daunting. The figures, moving on its peripheries, are ill defined. Fuchs might describe them as "raw material", evidently potential players in an event yet to be revealed. It will be an onslaught of references – some immediately identifiable, and others merely resonant of deeply embedded cultural memories. In **Brief Synopsis** this empty stage constitutes calculated confusion, countering all the information the audience have brought into the space (those expectations driven by the explicit title of the work). Is nothing happening now? Who were those people? Merely distant players in an abstract scenography?

But then a car with blinding headlights arrives on stage through the back doors, announcing a beginning, an event to inhabit this theatrical landscape. 'Cello cases are unloaded from its roof rack and disappear back-stage.

A soft and measured amplified voice is heard in the stillness – disembodied, anonymous:

Deciding on how an episode should be viewed.

Because, in reality our mind goes faster ... or sometimes slower ...

Certainly more varied, richer, less assuring.

Skiping certain passages.

Preserving a record of unimportant details.

Repeating and doubling back over time.

Perhaps it was a hostile thought that created TIME: inconstant, voracious – endowed with both wings and a scythe.

But then a second, happier thought was born to parry such harsh dominion:

In which TIME was no longer TIME.

A mental TIME, with all its own peculiarities, its gaps, obsessions, obscure regions ...

This is a conflation of words by Cardinal Benedetto Pamphilj that Georg Frideric Handel used for the aria “Un pensiero nemico di pace” in his Roman oratorio *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (1707), with words from the introduction Alain Robbe-Grillet wrote for the 1962 publication of his screenplay for Alain Resnais’s film *L’année dernière à Marienbad* (1961). In paraphrasing these two writers I am introducing a number of themes central to the work that will evolve: notions of the visual, time and memory. This is what might be (unfashionably) described as a “collage” of extant material - or, in more contemporary (and fashionable) jargon, a “mash-up”.

This multiplicity of references and moment-to-moment shifting of foci in space and reading, which Fuchs (1996, p.92) insists requires a ‘postmodern spectatorship’, is the essential *raison d’être* of **Brief Synopsis**. It constructs a theatrical realm that does not adhere temporally and spatially to ‘an unseen outside’ or narrative progression (Fuchs 1996, p.93). Instead, the “raw material” is manifold, colliding borrowed theatre texts, filmic images, extant musical quotations and choreographic references – requiring this particular mode of

viewing. But this is not to infer it is material situated in an “empty space”. Rather, this is a profoundly theatrical space, conceptually familiar in that the spectator is arguably cognisant of what Fuchs describes as ‘diffused spectatorship’ (1996, p.92), and in this respect a space an audience brings very particular expectations (and sometimes prejudices) to as part of the experience of viewing a work in the theatre medium.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 2 – The band enters
(refer to DVD 05.40 – 11.12)

This still reverie on the profundity of the space is abruptly disturbed by a very loud recording of the aforementioned Handel aria, as the musicians enter the space with their instruments and settle, upstage, around the piano. This is a trademark “Kellaway gesture” – triumphantly grandiose. It introduces the musicians as central players in a drama that promises to ensue (given the title of the work). It places them centre-stage, even as the recorded music seems to “upstage” them as distant mute figures. Handel’s aria is written in a strict “da capo” form (that is, with two contrasting sections – the first fast and dramatic, the second in a contrasting reflective mood – and then completed with a furiously ornamented repeat of the first section). In our staging we reflect that structure precisely: when the soft second section arrives the musicians retrace their steps and exit with their instruments, so that on the reiteration of the first section, they can re-enter the space, in precisely the same order, and settle again in their seats. Two almost identical entrances are, of course, theatrically absurd: a musical “da capo” structure translated as physical action. But they make it evident from the outset that musical structures will pervade the action of the work.

I am a theatre director who practices the piano for several hours every day. My concerns are about composers’ intentions and how I interpret/realise them, but in this process I am often distracted, asking “how could all this inspire a theatrical action?” Virtuosity in any performance field is about process – the notions of labour, obsession and possession, to which members of the audience variously relate. One area of my expertise as a pianist is in

interpreting the Baroque (particularly French and German) repertoire. There is a peculiarity in what defines rhythm in this music. It is important to focus on the approach to the downbeat. This might be through the arpeggiating of the chord, a kind of ornamentation required by the harpsichord for which some of it was written. The French indulged in the notion of “inegale”, by which no two notes are precisely equal in duration. It evokes an almost improvisational “jazz” approach to the music. Beethoven, on the other hand, demands a very different awareness. The downbeat powerfully announces itself, and from that moment everything evolves. There is a much stronger sense of rhythmic constancy.

So, how do these quite different approaches identify or inflect a theatrical moment? The syntax (musical and theatrical) is comparable, indeed inseparable. And compare Bach’s ability to write a seemingly endless melodic line, a single-minded trajectory, with the wrestling of contrasting themes in Beethoven’s classical sonata form. Music is (in many ways) defined by its duration and elongation of time. This duration can be divided into a progression of beats. Auditory volume is consciously determined. Given my awareness of these qualities and strategies (and my pianistic concerns) it is not surprising that the ungainly physical presence of the piano has been a recurring signature of my work over the past couple of decades. It communicates in a particular and unique language. It is an awkward design object, a fairly unmoveable feature which I often place centre-stage, becoming, in relation to the architecture of the space, a constant focal point. And so, in my work, it is a provocateur, often driving the action. The pianist on stage is often something “other”, prompting the other more flexible action, as though a puppeteer.

In 2005 the France-based Australian dancer Rosalind Crisp invited me to Paris to develop an extended duet with her. Her proposal was, quite simply, “what if?” We both thought I should play the piano, rather than dance, and considered a variety of extant solo piano repertoire (as keyboard improvisation is neither my forte nor my personal interest, even though Rosalind’s performance practice is largely improvisational). But another idea came to me. When practising accompaniments for singers, I contemplate pure pianistic sound before meeting with the singer to contemplate “the song”. One of my favourite works has

always been Schumann's monumental song cycle for solo voice and piano, *Dichterliebe* (*Poet's Love*, 1840). These are sixteen brief settings of text by the German romantic poet Heinrich Heine, contemplating love, loss and longing. The piano part could perhaps (provocatively) be interpreted as the centre-piece of the composition – the singer seeming to float their "interrupted" thoughts over these divine and almost complete pianistic inventions. So I thought "why not float the dancer's body" indeterminately over this piano material – cracking open Schumann's structure? It seemed an interesting response to Crisp's essential performative question: "what if?"

The resulting work called **32 Short Scenes on the *Dichterliebe***¹⁵ previewed in Paris at the Centre Nationale de la Danse before a Sydney season at Performance Space in November 2005. The piano part in the *Dichterliebe* is extraordinary in that it contains absolutely no ornamentation. Of course, it begins with one of history's most famous appoggiaturas (faltering, anticipatory notes), post-Mozart and pre-Wagner. And the vocal part is full of them, throughout. Indeed, to me, Crisp's dance trajectory, at that time, could almost have been a comment on / antidote to the art of both Baroque and Romantic appoggiaturas. But there are no trills, turns or ornamental fancies in this piano part. It is pure and solid structure, not a single note superfluous to its argument. But then, so unexpectedly in the closing bars, after the singer (dancer) has "left the stage" in mid-phrase, unable to say any more, the piano is left to reflect on an earlier theme and, as if in revelation, momentarily explores two brief, beautiful and pleading melodic embellishments around two fleeting notes. Then, almost embarrassed, we tear away in strident chords to eventually close slowly, quietly and confidently – resolving remembered sounds that at the beginning were so tentative.

I pondered whether Crisp's dance was devoid of, or entirely made of, ornamentation. We had discussed and entertained both options. What

¹⁵ **32 Short Scenes on the *Dichterliebe*** Co-created with dancer Rosalind Crisp. A full evening work for dancer and pianist with music by Robert Schumann. Created in residence at the Centre Nationale de la Danse, Paris, and premiered at Performance Space, Sydney, 2005. Lighting design: Simon Wise.

constitutes structure? Ideas? Fancies or base concepts? Our provocation was in the meeting of this pianist and this dancer. Crisp seemed to be eschewing the primary motivation of any specific action – interrupting it, and then staggering forward in response to the fall-out. She challenged herself to never repeat a gesture (within the habitual constraints of her inscribed body). Whereas, however quixotic this particular division into sixteen contrasting energies is, Schumann allows himself much space to revisit and reflect on motifs. Herein lay a tension – and a dramaturgical momentum for this "dance and music" work. To absent a central vocal/textual focus of Schumann's music seemed the correct response to Crisp's "dance by accidents", inviting the listener/watcher to ponder on what might have been; what was missing; removing the subject matter and considering what remained; pure abstract gesture; available to our own "projections" evolving over fifty minutes.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 3 – The actors enter
(refer to DVD 11.12 – 24.40)

An interminably long unison 'celli note (referred to in Chapter 2), utterly devoid of ornamentation, eventually fades to silence, revealing total stillness on the stage. Katia Molino stands and drops her gown. Her presence is set apart from everyone else in the room. She is the only one standing. She is the only one naked. She is indeed a woman "of a certain age" and certainly very beautiful (just as the title of the work promises). She takes one slow step forward, naked except for her stiletto shoes. Are we in dangerous territory here? The lurid fashion photography of Helmut Newton comes to mind. A period of absolute stillness is required for the audience to compute conflicting aesthetics, and to imagine what detour we might take next. Is the band there to accompany her next moment – is it controlling her motion? Is she faltering, doubtful? Or is this just a theatrical/choreographic device - a kind of "freeze-frame"? Action, ideas and breath are suspended for a time insofar as 'it is thus left to the constructing imagination of the viewer whether s/he considers the different figures on the stages as existing within a shared context at all, or only synchronically presented' (Lehmann 2006, p.79).

The pianist attacks with another discordant sforzando, out of which emerge just two soft conflicting arpeggiated chords extended over the space of nearly two minutes. These are the C minor and A flat minor chords that announce *Frühling*, the first of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* (1948). Molino moves forward, in silence, evidently now in control, and then pauses again. The music is through-composed, but halting and with repeats. The rhythm is quite opaque (written with a variable 10/8 time signature). Gradually notes foreign to the two chords softly infiltrate. Molino slowly moves upstage, her back to the audience. The muted 'cellos enter the clouded sound with elongated phrases spanning large note intervals. Molino walks on. The choreography of her walk is studied, each step considered, small hand movements and changes of focus meticulously indicated. She pauses for thought, her gaze wandering. In her nudity she is absolutely empowered. She controls the stage, the gaze of the audience and the attention of the up-stage musicians. She might appear pensive but she is clearly not troubled. At times she moves a little faster and the band plays a more spirited phrase. Does this imply her urgency, or is it merely a dynamic variation?

This is a long scene and one wonders, at this moment, whether the audience is more engrossed in their own presence within this room and the sound encompassing them than in the woman they are watching. This woman hasn't really "identified" herself. She has enormous presence, indeed the primary presence, but there is no explicit purpose in her actions. The band is playing, so their purpose is clear. She is like the Noh actor who has not yet named herself. She exists there, yet not quite alive, in a narrative theatrical sense. We might fear the worst for her (although the title of the theatre production tells us that she is the killer). Is this because we think she is helpless in this larger picture – voiceless, naked within a huge space and drowned by the commanding musicians?

During this long scene David Buckley, who has been masquerading as a 'cellist, leaves the band area and passes Molino as he exits downstage with his 'cello. He takes out his mobile phone, photographs her and sends a text message. To

whom?¹⁶ Some time into Molino's walk a projection flickers briefly on a side wall of the space. It is a series of animated photographs of Molino running naked down a dark country dirt road fiercely lit in the headlights of a car. This image is at odds with the cool control of Molino's live presence on stage. This is a woman vulnerable. But it is a fleeting five-second image at odds with the durational experience on stage. However, this image will repeat with metronomic regularity on the OP wall of the space every five minutes throughout the entire work. How it coincides with the live action on stage will be determined by chance. But it is a constant peripheral reminder that this woman's wellbeing may well be at risk. The animated photography of Heidrun Löhr is integral to the dramaturgy of *Brief Synopsis*. The dialogue it engages in with the actors, space and musicians will be further explored later in this chapter, in view of the foregrounding versus backgrounding of material and meaning and how they are perceived according to the audience's interests.

We have been confronted for a considerable time with the enigma of this woman. This is a huge space for the audience to contemplate, with just eight people to watch, and not a lot of activity. Eyes can carelessly wander. Our task is to carefully manipulate audience gaze in order to create a digestible theatrical shape, a kind of sparse and slowly moving spatial tableau by which we direct the focus. The technical device for achieving this is in detailing the movement on stage, however minute: breaking the stillness or monotony with a change of a walk's direction or a flutter of a hand.

Molino simply exits far upstage, accompanied by a surprising short flurry of Rococo pianism. And, suddenly, a deafening burst of machinegun fire. This is the aggressive musical "downbeat" referred to earlier. This gunfire has no narrative implication beyond heralding a sense of danger. It is an auditory

¹⁶ I'm fond of telephones in the theatre. They were important narrative devices in *John Laws/Sade* (1987), *The Pornography of Performance* (1998), *Little George* (2001) and *The Rameau Project* (2009). They are so transparently fake, but trigger a day-to-day immediacy, underlining a hierarchy of information. They focus an audience's attention on a "dialogue" that is purportedly real. Even pretend technology has a seductive pull on the imagination. If you want to highlight a moment, do it on a mobile phone – a medium everyone is anxious about.

dynamic statement and announces Kellaway's abrupt entrance, beating on the windows of the upstage car. He turns to the audience – "ill-defined", simply walking. He exudes almost no personality. In the context of the space he is presented as a central player (although not mentioned in the title of the work) because of the solitary staging and musical import of his entrance. If Molino has, so far, been presented as an enigma, at least she has been announced in the title of the work. We have seen her naked, and can only guess how she plans to fulfil her prescribed mission. But this middle-aged man, way upstage, has no "back story". He is evidently not the "young man" of the title. He walks slowly downstage. Whoever he might be, he appears supremely confident in these surrounds. Is he the same man we heard earlier describing his discomfort in this space? His gait and gestures are meticulously choreographed. He smiles. He frowns. His gaze describes broad arcs. The music is tightly structured, oscillating between further string ruminations on the final bars of Strauss's *Frühling* and measured bars of Rococo-like ornamentation. Kellaway ploughs across the stage, apparently unaware of the musical arguments being explored, more concerned with the presence he commands on the stage. The music becomes incessantly and romantically expansive as he approaches the audience. This is a body confidently traversing a space, enveloped in sound – three essential components of my notion of "opera".

Both Molino's and Kellaway's entrance/exits have been backlit by the car idling upstage. As Kellaway makes to exit downstage Molino walks (dressed) to the car far upstage. He falters. We hear, amplified, recorded voices we now clearly identify as those of Molino and Kellaway. The actors haphazardly lip-sync and reiterate the words and their inaccuracies are softly amplified:

Molino: *The first time I saw you, was in the garden.
You were standing a little apart from the others,
facing a little to one side, and hadn't seen me coming.
Only the sound of my footsteps on the gravel attracted your attention,
and you turned your head.*

Kellaway: *I don't think I'm the person you mean. You must be mistaken.*

...

*But you weren't listening any more.
 Your eyes had grown serious and empty.
 You half-turned away ... and, once again, we were separated.*

(adapted from Alain Robbe-Grillet 1962, pp.51-54)

Kellaway quietly exits downstage as Molino gets into the car and backs it, the headlights catching a young man (Buckley) running at the car at great speed. Katia blasts the car horn. He leaps aside as it speeds out of sight. This is the 'cellist we saw at the beginning of the show. He appears uncertain.

And then more music begins, the first thoroughly through-composed music we have heard (apart from the opening recorded Handel aria): re-imagining (though almost an arrangement, albeit bizarre) of the *Andante un poco* movement from Johann Sebastian Bach's Sonata in A Major for Violin and Harpsichord BWV 1015 (1723). I have played the keyboard part of the original work in recital. The violin has a relentless melody duplicated precisely in the right hand of the keyboard at a bar's distance – a work born from Bach's prodigal mind. I have mulched the material. Two succinct "soprano" melodic lines have been shared between five "tenor / bass" instruments, slicing the expansive melodic phrases into very short figures swapping back and forth between the players over disparate octaves. The momentum is maintained throughout, but the vigour of the entwining melodies has become confused. This reflects precisely the predicament of **Brief Synopsis's** young man making his entrance.

On the main screen and projected onto the theatre walls is an animated photographic video of Molino and Kellaway walking across a vast rural vista. Kellaway follows Molino at a distance. They are unsuitably dressed, in formal wear, for such a bucolic setting. Walking away from the camera, they eventually disappear into the far distant horizon. But the young man is apparently stranded in this vast "real" space. He is rendered helpless as the music and video evolve around him. No words. No performative indication. He dashes in and out of the space. But he (unlike Molino and Kellaway) is not really exiting the space. He eventually moves purposefully toward the seat Molino has vacated in the audience seating-bank, removing his suit jacket to reveal a blood-soaked white

shirt. We are about thirty minutes in and, according to the title of the work, he has been stabbed, the piece is finished and little in the way of tangible “dramatic narrative” has occurred. However, the “players” have been enigmatically introduced, an eclectic choice of musical gestures has been presented, ample time has been allowed for the audience to quietly contemplate the space they inhabit, and an extended caption of animated photography has been introduced. This is a collision of vicariously related components, with a degree of aesthetic coherence and sufficient “space” to allow the mind to wander, so satisfying my criteria of opera as a “work”: a variously coherent theatrical assembly of materials across an array of media and concerns.

In this entrance of the young man we have experienced projected film “as” a landscape “within” the landscape of the space. There is a conflicting of material and message at play here. The German composer and theatre maker/polymath Heiner Goebbels, in an interview with James Woodall (2010), clearly states his antipathy to how video is often approached in live performance: ‘I hate the idea of the multimedia cliché – four musicians in front, with a big screen at the back doing something with video.’ My shared problem with this approach is that it too often provides a mere scenic backdrop to the live action, without any rigorous interaction. Indeed, video can be a dangerous intrusion in the theatre, often inflicted rather than integrated. It can too often assume an unwarranted authority because it is so huge and pre-ordained. In **Brief Synopsis** photographer Heidrun Löhr and I were seeking a more pluralistic dialogue and argument between the “pre-recorded” and live action. Our approach was to treat the projections as discrete artefacts. We chose animated photography as our medium for the reason that it disturbs the naturalistic flow of image that video so often prefers. In this process it is the photographer/editor who becomes the “choreographer” of the material, determining the mood, tempo and even the events constituting the action.

There are certainly moments where the photographic material drifts into the essentially scenic (albeit in an evocative or abstracted rather than literally pictorial manner), but for most of the time we are opting for a provocative

contradiction to the live action, a portrayal of alternative scenarios, or providing another layer of information to be considered in the reading of conflicting but otherwise simple actions: watching, following, walking to or from the camera/audience. For example, as Kellaway makes his first entrance, very short projections flicker on the screen behind him of Buckley dancing topless in a high-rise apartment window, as though perhaps watching him. Kellaway turns quickly to catch a glimpse of them, but always too late. Meanwhile Buckley walks slowly up the darkened far OP side of the stage and photographs Kellaway on his mobile phone. Moments later, as Buckley makes his long featured entrance centre-stage (toward the audience), the projections depict Kellaway following Molino across a vast rural setting, away from the camera. This suggests a scenario of pursuit that, although depicting the two actors who are presently off-stage, insinuates on Buckley's entrance. Similar visuals return later in Molino's Scene 7 "molestation" of Buckley, but in this footage we have Molino following Kellaway across the same landscape, toward the camera. The meaning of these juxtapositions is not explicitly stated. As in the case of everything within ***Brief Synopsis***, resonances are merely implied, but the audience is clearly implicated in this constant "watching others from afar".

Often the projected images frame the length of a scene, determining its rhythm and tempo (or sometimes providing a rhythm and tempo to work against on the stage). And, always, it depicts a landscape beyond the physical space of the theatre – both rural and urban. Regardless of the vastness of the physical venue containing the action, in ***Brief Synopsis*** I was keen to imaginatively extend that space. This is also the use of image as a musical device: determining duration and offering a contrapuntal rhythm to the action on stage. A clear example of this occurs toward the end of the work, where the projected image structures the scene quite completely:

Scene 14 – Escalators (refer to DVD 1.01.55 – 1.05.30)

The piano begins a deep descending ostinato figure. The 'cellos join with a slow and expansive melody in canon. This is material based on Claude Debussy's *Pour un tombeau sans nom* from Six Épigaphes Antiques (1914). It is clouded

in mysterious over-tones and sonorous canonic inventions. I will admit, here, to a rather simple musical joke built around the pentatonic (whole tone) descending scale in reference to escalators, on which every step is the same height. The projections change to a menacing mirrored bank of department store escalators. Molino and Kellaway follow each other: their ascending and descending are the defining motif of the film. The video determines the duration of this scene, as nothing much else is happening on the stage, and the music is written with a flexibility to fade with the closing frames.

As I have stated, my work aims to unsettle a range of historical presumptions concerning the art forms of music, theatre and dance. In ***Brief Synopsis***, is this process disturbing? I imagine not, as it so gently introduces its arguments. It is clear in the opening thirty minutes that there will probably be no coherent narrative. Any expressive “drama” between these eight players will likely evolve as disconnected abstracted events to be cognitively assembled as the audience chooses. I should point out that this eschewing of dramatic narrative is not an essential feature of my creative processes (*The Terror of Tosca*, *El Inocente*, *The Audience and Other Psychopaths*, and *Another Night: Medea* were all built on insistent narrative structures). One of the first decisions I make in embarking on a new work is whether a narrative logic is appropriate to my concerns. In ***Brief Synopsis*** it was of no concern, even though I consciously teased the audience with a title that promised one. Why? Perversity, and the opportunity to unsettle an expectation. Similarly I strive to unsettle uncomplicated listening experiences to the music I present on stage, as the next chapter will outline.

CHAPTER 4 A Musicalisation of Theatre



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (from left) Steve Meyer, Benjamin Au, Laura Moore, David Buckley, Catherine Upex, Ashley Kurlle. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

As a theatre artist I am variously “inscribed” by my education and professional experience. In building any new work I refer to what I describe as my “body of memories”: classical ballet, contemporary dance, Suzuki Tadashi’s acting technique, Butoh, Western and Chinese opera, pianism, Australian contemporary performance practice, the grand European texts and compositional/musical structures. So I harbour several conflicting aesthetics, resulting in a very particular creative sensibility. My first “language” other than English was music – its grammar, syntax and expressive potential. This particular linguistic fluency has impacted every theatrical work I’ve made. This chapter provides an account of the ways the “abstract” nature, or non-referential language, of music informs this new theatre work and changes the ‘traditional expectations of theatrical communication’ (Roesner 2008, p.54).

In my formative years as a committed theatre artist (in the early 1980s) I shifted away from primarily musical concerns as I learned new skills and developed different foci and applications of technique. It is only over the past twenty years that my attention has drifted back to my essential “musical self”. I find myself defining the theatre processes I now know very intimately in musical terms. Roesner and Rebstock use the term “Composed Theatre” to describe a field of artistic practice situated ‘*between* the more classical conceptions – and institutions – of music, theatre and dance’ (2001, p.19). Eleni Varopoulou describes this as a view of “theatre as music”:

For the actor, as much as for the director, music has become an independent structure of theatre. This is not a matter of the evident role of music and of music theatre, but rather of a more profound idea of theatre as music. Maybe it is typical that a woman of the theatre like Meredith Monk, who is known for her spatially arranged poems of images and sounds, once remarked: “I came to theatre from dance but it has been theatre that brought me to music”. (1998, p.2)

My trajectory has been more circular than Monk’s: from a profound literacy in “classical” music to mainstream commercial musical theatre, then to classical and contemporary dance, leading to a wider embracing “contemporary performance”, and then back to music and notions of “opera” in what Lehmann (2006, p.91) would describe as a “musicalisation of theatre”. From 1978 to 1985 I embarked on a professional dance career. From 1984 to 1986 I explored new territories of theatre and dance in Japan and as a choreographer in Australia. Over these years I maintained productive collaborations with composers and musicians.

From 1987 to 1993 my energies were concentrated on the work of The Sydney Front, a contemporary performance ensemble.¹⁷ The genesis of The Sydney Front was more-or-less as a dance/theatre company, albeit with a core of performers that came from a variety of physically based disciplines (dance, corporeal mime, Grotowski, Suzuki). The work at that time was highly influenced by choreographer Pina Bausch who consciously eliminated the division between dance and theatre through the language of movement that attempted to refer back to traces of body memory (Meyer 2011, p.96). It could be said that, to an extent, The Sydney Front often approached music a bit like a ballet score – the “meat” of many scenes on which theatrical material was inscribed.

The company's first two works (*Waltz* and *John Laws/Sade*, both 1987) had commissioned scores by, respectively, Sarah de Jong and Andrée Greenwell. The composers observed occasional rehearsals, responding to theatrical material as it emerged and retreating to devise their personal responses, from which we eventually constructed our finished physical material. In combining these two works to create *The Pornography of Performance* (1988) the musical structure became rather messy. In retrospect I don't think we respected the sources sufficiently, and consequently they became merely efficient, sacrificing their initial formal integrity.

The music components for *Don Juan* (1991-92, composer Rafaele Marcellino), *First and Last Warning* (1992, composer Peter Wells) and *Passion* (1993, composer Andrée Greenwell) were the results of more substantial commissions. They were almost through-composed scores. But, still, these performance works were predicated on how we envisaged an evolving relationship between the live bodies of performers and their audience, rather than a conscious consideration of how a musical score could shape the work.

¹⁷ The Sydney Front Inc. 1987-93. Core members: Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Clare Grant, Nigel Kellaway, Christopher Ryan. Theatre works: *Waltz* (1987), *John Laws/Sade* (1987), *The Pornography of Performance* (1988), *Photocopies of God* (1989), *Don Juan* (1991-92), *First and Last Warning* (1992), *Passion* (1993). All works premiered at Performance Space, Sydney.

It's interesting to note my use of the term "commission" in referring to The Sydney Front's engagement with composers. They were responding to a brief, and we would be clear about what we expected. In subsequent years, in my work with The opera Project, that relationship with music has changed. With the exceptions of Peter Wells's intermittent sound score for *The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves* (1997) and Richard Vella's score for *El Inocente* (2001), for which they worked in relative isolation, the music for The opera Project has evolved in an intensely collaborative environment rather than commissioning directive. The composer or musical director (often myself) has been actively involved in, or even responsible for, the writing of all aspects of the work and the rehearsal of its realisation. Text, scenography, choreography and music are inseparable in conception and preparation. This is a creative process determined by a model of theatre as music.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 12 – Versace (refer to DVD 56.32 – 59.38)

Molino enters with a suitcase overflowing with glorious frocks. The stage is immersed in projections of a Versace shop window, in front of which Molino and Kellaway appear, embroiled in some kind of silent abstracted argument. On stage, she invites Buckley's assistance as she chooses something suitable to wear. This is a scene built on a musical structure (Enrique Granados' *El Mira de la Maja* from *Tonadillas al estilo antiguo*, 1916). He warns her, though she seems oblivious:

Buckley: *I will leave tonight ... taking you with me ...
I've been waiting for you ... you've been waiting for me.
You've dressed to leave ... and begin to wait for him.
Out of some superstition, you have asked me to leave you here until midnight
... I don't know if you hope for him to come or not. I even think, for a moment,
that you have told him everything and arranged a time when you will meet him
... Or else you are only thinking that maybe I won't come myself.
I will come ... at the time we set.*

(adapted from Alain Robbe-Grillet 1962, pp.155-161)

Eventually the musicians wander downstage OP to watch the “Versace” film. Molino joins Kellaway to watch and privately joke about the film, downstage Prompt. The process of structuring this crowded scene around the music, text, action and a film sequence with which I was very confident, was painstaking. I was challenged to construct a shifting tableau that exploded from the stillness of the previous aria-based scene, and then quietly dissipated. My solution was to construct this scene around music precepts, even though all the physical, textual, filmic elements were quite complicated. This all appeared deceptively simple for the audience, as I chose to move the action very slowly over the scene.

In the closing scenes of *Brief Synopsis* narrative devices are strongly eschewed to concentrate on a more abstracted dialogue between action, film, music and borrowed text, framed within a defined and highlighted physical space. Through *Brief Synopsis* there are carefully space short extracts from Heiner Müller’s play *Quartet* (1982), a phenomenal essay on how desire can be politically and obscenely corrupted. After an elongated opening to the piece, the Müller hits with a sudden brutality but I disguise that with multiple affectations: a gentle, recorded Baroque aria with the sweetest of voices and ethereal recorders – Georg Philipp Telemann’s “Mein Heiland, Herr und Fürst” from his *Brockes Passion* TWV 5:1 (1716) wafts across the space. This has a sacred text (“My saviour”), its quiet piety rubbing abrasively against the text Kellaway and Molino throw at it. It occurs three times throughout the work with ever-changing live dialogue, and in its final manifestation:

Brief Synopsis: Scene 13 – Telemann 3 (refer to DVD 49.38 – 1.01.55)

Telemann’s aria plays again as the entire cast returns to walk the strikingly lit “catwalks”/corridors of light. This music has become something of a leitmotif in the work. It has a formal reason to exist, in that it frames other material by virtue of its recurring insistence. As Lang explains:

Music has no, strictly speaking, pictorial means of illustration and explanation. It uses other means – forms, rhythms, etc. – to facilitate its

comprehension. In order to transform the mental into the corporeal world, music must ally itself with another art or arts. (1941, p.330)

When asked what the defining qualities of theatre are, I will always answer – “the fast and slow, loud and soft bits”. And, indeed, repetition will also come into play, as a musical and theatrical construct. Lehmann has remarked:

Rhythm, melody, visual structure, rhetoric and prosody have always used repetition: there is no musical rhythm, no composition of an image, no effective rhetoric without purposefully employed repetition ... On closer inspection, however, even in theatre, there is no such thing as true repetition. The very position in time of the repeated is different from the original. We always see something different in what we have seen before. (2006, pp.156-157)

According to Meyer, Heiner Goebbels uses repetition ‘not only as a focal point of content but as a basic structuring principle ... in order to generate sensual meaning in a different manner’ (2011, p.97). Each time this Telemann aria is visited in ***Brief Synopsis*** we entertain the same staging concept, the same arch delivering of a selected Heiner Muller invective. But the material is altered. We have new words rhythmically manipulated to work in counterpoint with the same music.

Kellaway: *They’re very attractive.*

Molino: *Yes. A bit like you.*

Though their advantage is their youth. In bed as well, if you really want to know.

Do you want to know?

Kellaway: *Not really ...*

Of course, in another thirty years there would be no difference between us, if you could turn us all into stone with that one loving glance of the Medusa.

Buckley: *(laughing) A fertile notion, eh?*

Kellaway: *Yes ...*

Molino: *The museum of our loves!*

Kellaway: *We would have a full house, wouldn't we,
with the statues of our putrefied desires?*

Molino: *Those dead dreams classified according to the alphabet*

Kellaway: *or lined up in chronological order,*

Molino: *free from the accidents of the flesh ...*

Kellaway: *... not exposed anymore to the horrors of change.*

Buckley: *Our memory needs those crutches.*

Kellaway: *Yes! One doesn't even remember the various bends of cocks,
let alone faces.*

Molino: *A haze ...*

Kellaway: *It's all just a fucking haze.*

Molino: *(to Buckley)*

Do you seriously want to poke around in these muddy leftovers? I pity you.

(adapted from Heiner Müller 1982, p.108)

I am most particular in the way I approach text, movement, sound and light in my work, ensuring that they do not duplicate each other. Roesner, describing a similar approach in the work of Heiner Goebbels, writes of a 'polyphony' and 'counterpoint' working against a particular interpretation; of a 'playful multiplicity of conjunctions and confrontations ... a text, a movement, a sound or a light as distinguishable discrete elements of such a score that need not, and should not, simply duplicate each other' (2008, pp.44-45). I do not believe this means that music, dramatic text and character are mutually exclusive. Rather, a particular musicality imprints itself with considerable weight on the aesthetics, meaning and perception of my work, providing, equally, its dramaturgical, emotional and rhythmic drive. I am a director who now chooses to structure my theatre creations around my musical concerns and practice. I am entertaining the notion of theatre as music, exploring the discrete abstract qualities of dynamics, tempi, light and staging, rather than a determined dramatic interrogation of character and action (which of course will necessarily emerge, merely as the result of peopling the stage). And while centring my methodology on a

“musicalisation” of theatre, I am also questioning easy presumptions regarding the reading and liturgy of that music.

CHAPTER 5 Quiet Please, There Are Performers On Stage

(with apologies to Peter Allen and Carole Bayer Sager,
in likely reference to Judy Garland, 1979)

Sentences develop in a void, as if they mean nothing.
Once begun, they suddenly remain in suspension, as though frozen by the frost.
Always the same conversations, the same absent voices.
And everywhere there are signs: “Quiet Please”.
(adapted from Alain Robbe-Grillet, 1962)



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (from left) Nigel Kellaway, Katia Molino,
David Buckley. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

An expert manipulation of a beautiful space, finely performed music and technically astute actors create a rewarding resonance in the theatre. But more is required than mere virtuosity. What are the “bones” of the theatre work that so many artists are striving so hard to realise? My concerns are spatial, musical, choreographic, and in this chapter I will reflect on the textual content of

Brief Synopsis, as it is in such material that an audience seeks “meaning” in a work that entertains spoken dialogue. In this work I entertain the voice embodied by the actor, the disembodied recorded voice and notions of gestured but unheard voices from way upstage. It is in this interplay that meaning is sought.

5:1 Narrative, dialogue – and a void of interaction

The title of this creative project constitutes a strategy. I am handing the audience all the essential information, “up front” with a ‘brief synopsis’ of the action: ‘a beautiful naked woman of a certain age brutally stabs a young man to death’. The ensuing ninety minutes function as disturbing elaborations revolving around essentially aesthetic considerations given that the synopsis is very straightforward. The artefact, however, involves ‘dislocating the viewer and preventing them from holding onto any fixed, defined, rational and tangible construct of meaning and significance’ (Brophy 2011). I am incorporating plots that go nowhere, or in endless circles, in order to direct the audience’s attention to the discrete details of the work: the manner in which the space is negotiated, the abstract movement of bodies across that space, the placement of music and text. Time spans collide, cancelling and overlapping each other. Characters are artificially constructed figures that aim to transport the viewer through the “narrative”: a narrative riddled with gaps, ruptures, fissures and other holes – affirming that the narrative itself is perversely aware that it has no reference to any imaginable social reality.

I am simultaneously drawn to and repelled by narrative logic in the theatre. And so, in **Brief Synopsis**, I take a short, sudden, fatal incident, deny its enactment, and embroider around it a lengthy reverie on how such an action might resonate, as seen in a fleeting moment. **Brief Synopsis** is a brief eighty-five minute glimpse of the obscure circumstances and uncertainties of mortality. It contemplates the nature of monologue – the man who begs to stand apart and watch his life played out by others, through fictional rather than autobiographical reflections. He uses anyone at hand (Müller, Robbe-Grillet, Richard Strauss, Hermann Hesse) in a collision that dislocates his sources. But his choices, and

the manner in which he assembles them, suggest a quite singular identification with his materials. And so, although I will always eschew explicitly conveyed psychological motivation in my work, I am drawn to Marguerite Yourcenar's contemplations on the writing of her novel *Memoirs of Hadrian*:

Take a life that is known and completed, recorded and fixed by history (as much as lives ever can be fixed), so that its entire course may be seen at a single glance; more important still, choose the moment when the man who lived that existence weighs and examines it, and is, for the briefest span, capable of judging it ... He stands before his own life in much the same position as we stand when we look at it. (1986, p.270)

In ***Brief Synopsis*** Yourcenar's idea manifests in the notion of the performers as distanced *carrier-vessels* of information.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 4 – Telemann 1 (refer to DVD 24.00 – 27.32)

I imagined and designed eight distinct corridors of light running the depth of the space (like fashion catwalks) with the entire cast (actors and musicians) strutting the length of the space. The spoken material in ***Brief Synopsis*** is principally a collage of two quite disparate texts. Herein lies a central "conceit" of the work. It's an unlikely collision of two masterpieces: specifically, Alain Resnais's film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and Heiner Müller's play text *Quartet* (1982). One is hardly present: Alain Robbe-Grillet's screenplay for Resnais's film is about bodies in an abstracted space. Here it is glimpsed utterly out of its intended context. It is a tantalising suggestion that the three actors on stage have been brought together to perform a mysterious dance, which perhaps none of them truly understand. Or, if they do, they are certainly holding their cards very close to their chests. The Müller text fragments, on the other hand, are bitter, overt, highly sexualised. They require very careful "framing". What intrigues me is the apparent asexuality of the Resnais and the brutal and sophisticated (though never physicalised or resolved) obscenity of the Müller. They are arranged together in ***Brief Synopsis*** as something very unusual, cool, distanced. Everything is "reported", events are often spoken of in the past

tense, emotions are contained within strict musical structures and coloured/reflected by the projected photo visuals. The vastness of the Carriageworks venue enables this “viewing” most effectively. I am not asking my audience to identify with these bodies patrolling the space, but to observe them objectively and consider the physical details of their interactions. These are aesthetic considerations that emotional involvement would obscure.

The recorded voices in the opening scenes insist on a notion of the “third person”. “I” is readily interchangeable with “he” or “she”. Indeed, the three voices carried by the actors throughout the work are generally interchangeable. Actually, it all might be considered a single voice – embodied in three. The only “definites” are the two characters stated in the title of the work – a naked woman and a young man. So, who is the Kellaway character? He has no defined role. He hovers over everything. Perhaps he is the author of the events. Everyone is a puppet in this distant reverie on death and doubt.

Kellaway: *Time is expensive.*

Time – the void of creation. Demanding everything.

There is far too much of it.

For the rabble, the church has stuffed it full of God.

But for you and I? ... Our vocation is to kill time.

To make the clocks of the world stand still: Eternity as the eternal erection.

Molino: *Do you have difficulty in making your better self stand erect?*

Kellaway: *With you?*

Ah yes, life marches faster when dying becomes a stage play, eh?

*The beauty of the world cuts less deeply into the heart,
as we watch its destruction.*

*Watching the parade of young buttocks that confront us, day in,
day out, with our mortality – we can't have them all, can we?*

Do you sometimes think of death? What is your mirror telling you?

(Heiner Müller 1982, p.109)

Kellaway and Molino spit their text across the stage, but there is little eye connection and no physical contact between them. This is a revelling in words – Müller as a provocative intruder on this otherwise cool world of distracted players in an elegant and imposing space. And the entire cast (musicians and

actors) has been brought together very suddenly, unexplained, for a concisely constructed moment. This moment of sudden vertigo is perhaps not as hysterical as the devices I indulged in way back in the 1980s with *The Sydney Front*. I am now more measured, deliberate, less reckless. But these games are no less unsettling, obtusely framed, particularly in regards to the uncertain relationships being played out between the performers.

Here we are talking about how creators and their audiences draw connections between diverse materials within a work. Fuchs has compared Gertrude Stein's and Elizabeth LeCompte's contrasting approaches to this issue, pointing to Stein's cultivation of 'the relation of "any detail to any detail", in an homogenous field', while proposing that "'disconnect, only disconnect" could be LeCompte's credo' (1996, p.87). I have played with both approaches over my career, and it is interesting to compare the work I have made in performing partnerships with two long-time collaborators, Regina Heilmann and Katia Molino. My productions with Heilmann (1990-2009) were often constructed around the notion of two lovers or, perhaps more precisely, a study of dysfunctional heterosexual relationships.¹⁸ All these works entailed the collision of textual and musical sources. Perhaps most striking was *Another Night: Medea* (2003) in which we laboured to detail the possible thematic and narrative connections between Edward Albee's substantial play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) and Heiner Müller's three monologues comprising *Medea Material* (1983). On the other hand, my collaborations with Molino (1991-2013) have been more about the disconnection between materials (narratives and personalities). *The Audience and Other Psychopaths* (2001-04) collided a suicidal drag queen (myself) obsessing over Alfred Hitchcock's 1951 movie *Strangers on a Train* with Molino pursuing a totally unrelated scenario as a B-grade Italian film director haunted by the disembodied voice of her psychopathic lesbian ex-lover (soprano Karen Cummings's recorded voice in a score by composer Stephen

¹⁸ These works with Regina Heilmann built on "partnerships" drawn from literature: Tosca and Scarpia (*The Terror of Tosca*, 1998), Tristan and Isolde (*Tristan*, 1999), Fassbinder's Myra Hindley and Ian Brady (*Entertaining Paradise*, 2002), Albee's George and Martha and Müller's Jason and Medea (*Another Night: Medea*, 2003), and in shifting across genders as Genet's maids and Jelinek's protagonists in *The Piano Teacher* (*The Rameau Project*, 2009).

Adams). It was only the disconnected relationships Molino and I played out with an unwitting young man from the audience each night that drew a sense of cohesion between the two barely related scenarios colliding in space and time.

Brief Synopsis has comparably tenuous formal devices to link the disconnected characters, narratives and materials. The live music, for example, is all historical repertoire (albeit re-composed for the particular ensemble), and is quite complete in itself. Little consideration was given to marrying pieces to particular scenes (with the exception of the first and last of the Strauss songs), and any apparent relationships that may arise are by and large coincidental. The three central protagonists occasionally brush against each other, but a vast distance remains between them. The enormity of the Carriageworks space certainly encouraged me to explore and develop ideas of disconnection – between the performers, between textual materials, between a perverse array of concert music.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 5 – Habanera (refer to DVD 27.32 – 31.06)

True to this notion of distance, Molino and Kellaway then sit at two separate café tables. Buckley offers them a glass of wine each, which they both refuse. This is, in fact, the first suggested interaction of bodies and minds, but again it discusses issues of disconnection:

Molino: *We meet again.*

You never seem to be waiting for me, but we keep meeting each other, as if ...

Kellaway: *I have never heard anyone raise their voice in this place ...*

Molino: *... as if talking about anything, anything that comes into our heads ... or else we aren't talking at all.*

(to DB) And then, one night, I came to your room ... You were alone.

Buckley: *Sorry?*

Kellaway: *(to DB) Sentences develop in a void, as if meaning nothing.*

Once begun, they suddenly remain in suspension, as though frozen by the frost ...

then starting again, at the same point ... or elsewhere ... it doesn't matter.

Molino: *Always the same conversations, the same absent voices.*

Kellaway: *No business discussed, no projects undertaken, nothing to arouse the passions.*

Molino: *And everywhere there are signs:*

Kellaway: *“Silence.”*

Molino: *“Quiet Please.”*

(adapted from Alain Robbe-Grillet 1962, p.90)

Once again, they are not communicating in any real way. It is as if they are randomly sharing a monologue. There is no engaged “dialogue”. Lehmann has referred to this phenomenon in many contemporary (as he describes, “postdramatic”) works:

... the dialogue, even where it still exists, is often deprived precisely of that which the art of the theatre author was traditionally meant to produce with its help: namely the electric suspense toward the response and progression. (2006, p.126)

But, when you look through the text of the **Brief Synopsis**, all the lines spoken could be interchangeable. The only “given” is the title of the work referring to a naked woman and a young murdered man. Shifting the words between the players would make little difference. (We experimented with this in rehearsal, and the general intention of all the scenes remained oddly intact.) Indeed, the entire text could be staged as a seated monologue with music and film. All that exists between these actors in this “first dialogue” is the same information that has been “enacted” in their distanced entrances and exits and the sexual antipathy suggested in the previous brief Telemann/ Müller performance, between Kellaway and Molino.

The band suddenly strikes up a frantic pace and in doing so introduces a new physical energy: fast action after thirty minutes of very measured tempi. This is Beethoven with a Spanish flavour in which vulgarity, clumsiness and the “high art” of Beethoven collide. Kellaway, Molino and Buckley are like puppets driven

by the music, furiously skipping or sometimes staggering in wide arcs around the space. This begins as childish fun that gradually reveals a nasty game of two siding against a third player. It reflects the joy I experienced decades ago in numerous works of Pina Bausch, witnessing unbearably tense scenes collapse with the entire cast joyfully circling the stage, smiling, benignly gesturing, engulfed in most pleasant music. There is barely a show I've made over the past few decades that hasn't included a short skipping scene. I like skipping. It's naïve, beguilingly simple, countering any notion of operatic seriousness and is deceptively easy to perform in a large space. Any promised narrative has, once again, been interrupted. Is this just about the music, and are the actors just filling in time? How, or why, are they driven? Of course, such "simple" choreography allows for games to be played. And this is evidently a game that two mature manipulators play with a younger novice. This hiatus, this brief intake of breath (or relaxation of tension) is a clearly calculated moment promising further games of power and allegiance. But the rules have not yet been explained.

Buckley: *(to Kellaway and Molino)* *I believed your passion for me had died. Why this sudden fire? Such youthful force?*

Kellaway: *Too late.*

Molino: *I need coffee! (exits)*

And there is momentary "quiet", save for the soft fall of Molino's retreating footsteps. She has cut a scene brutally short, providing a musical pause and physical hiatus, preparing for a quizzical, repetitive 'cello phrase that slowly leads to a gentle (almost jazz-like) piano solo, setting the ambience of the following scene.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 6 – Coffee (refer to DVD 32.06 –35.14)

This scene is the first overt suggestion that Molino and Kellaway may be pursuing Buckley. But to what purpose? It begins with Molino and Buckley sitting together at a café table. Buckley initiates a short dialogue, suggesting that he is aware of a game being played. He has evidently been watching both

Molino and Kellaway. But when they accuse him of this he quickly denies it. Kellaway keeps his distance, stalking the periphery of the space, as Molino pours a saucer of milk for Buckley and places it on the stage floor. Her attitude is provocative, and a little menacing. He drops on his hands and knees to “lap it up” in evident subservience, heightening the power games that have already begun to establish themselves between the central characters.

What has brought these three characters together? They are constantly denying complicity in whatever has happened (Buckley appears blissfully unconcerned about his blood-soaked shirt or what is about to happen.) This is, apparently, a calculated seduction, but it is confusing as to who is seducing whom, which segues gently into the next scene, shifting the mood from benign subjugation to one of menacing humiliation.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 7 – Mozart Molestation (refer to DVD 35.14 – 40.14)

*Kellaway: Remember? ... It was evening, probably the last one.
A faint shadow advancing through the darkness.
You recognised me. You stopped ...
We stood like that, a few steps from each other, without saying a word.
You, standing in front of me, waiting perhaps –
as if you couldn't take another step, nor turn back either.
And you looked at me; your eyes wide open, too wide, your lips parted a little,
as if you were going to speak, or groan, or scream ... You are afraid.*

The scene begins with the sound of distant bombs and sirens, redolent of the post-apocalyptic world favoured by Heiner Müller in so many of his theatre texts. Fuchs points to the fact that Müller's work ‘conjure[s] a destroyed physical landscape on which political and cultural ruins are prominent features’ (1996, p.96). The aims of **Brief Synopsis** are not so lofty. This particular soundscape is intended merely to create a sense of foreboding, from which can emerge perhaps one of the most instantly recognisable musical quotes in the work: the *Adagio* from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Serenade for Winds in Bb K316 (1792), here reduced to something like a wheezing, broken accordion in the lower reaches of the strings, over which emerges the achingly beautiful and extended high C in the first ‘cello part. When I presented this very beautiful

music to the musicians at their first music-only rehearsal, the 'cellist who best knows my work wryly suggested that something most unpleasant was likely to be happening on stage at this moment. I replied that it would probably be more "creepy" than "horrific". My concerns are in creating provocative atmospheres, confusing contexts for specific actions.

Molino takes Buckley aside. He is utterly passive as she begins to undress him. She removes his shirt and replaces it with one that is even more blood-soaked. She takes down his trousers, and neatens the arrangement of his genitals while tucking his shirt into his underpants, as a mother might a little boy. She gently spits on his hair to smooth an errant curl and tucks a blood-stained white handkerchief into his suit pocket. This moment has the malice of a Pina Bausch scene (though Bausch would probably have chosen to cast the woman as the victim). The man is helpless as the older woman fusses over him. But there is nothing maternal in her attentions. He is quietly humiliated, in an otherwise quite cheeky little scene. Conceiving this material was a simple task, but it required hours or meticulous rehearsal in order to frame it perfectly within the pre-composed music. The physical material depends on the profundity of the Mozartian structure to give it power. Although physically offstage, Kellaway's "presence" remains on the projection screen in another long series of animated photographs depicting him following Molino, at a considerable distance, across a vast rural landscape toward the camera. In itself the film suggests nothing sinister, but in relation to the Molino/Buckley scene enacted live against it, there is hint of pursuit, with Molino and Kellaway eventually disappearing, enigmatically, past the camera. As this scene closes Kellaway nonchalantly traverses the space toward the piano.

Molino: *(To Buckley, referring to Kellaway) He's the one you're afraid of. He's the one you think is watching you. See? He's looking for you ...*

Buckley: *... or else he just happens to be passing.*

(Alain Robbe-Grillet 1962, pp.107-108)

Brief Synopsis: Scene 8 – Cocktails (refer to DVD 40.14 – 44.35)

The 'cellists have left their seats to casually mingle downstage. The pianist enters with a tray of drinks. Buckley is drawn into the gathering. Kellaway, as he "passes", notices the vacated piano and nonchalantly takes its seat, smiling amiably at the idle double bass player. He casually begins to pick out the opening phrases of François Couperin's harpsichord classic, *Les Baricades Mystérieuses* (1717). The tempo is erratic at first, as though he is merely "mucking around", but slowly finds its pace as the bass player improvises (apparently!) a jazzy obligato part. It's "restaurant music" to accompany the casual atmosphere of the gathering. There is, once again, fluidity in the performers' roles on stage, while still enforcing our aim to frame the theatrical material within tight musical structures.

Buckley sidles up to Kellaway at the piano:

Buckley: *I have another game to suggest: a game I always win.*

Kellaway: *If you can't lose, it's not a game.*

Buckley: *I can lose ... but I always win. And, of course, it takes two people to play.*

(Alain Robbe-Grillet 1962, p.39)

The performers' roles are further confused by the projection on the screen over the piano of Molino sitting at another grand piano. Through a large French window behind her, we see Kellaway slowly approaching across a grand garden. He comes to the window and stares, menacingly, at her playing. But, onstage, Molino is the one observing from a distance. She approaches Buckley, as he chats with the 'cellists, and suddenly physically attacks him - though not with a knife. Given her slight stature and Buckley's height, it's a fairly harmless assault that is quickly over as Buckley inadvertently tears Molino's dress from her. She retreats to a far table to re-dress, and begins to write "a script" (which will later be passed to Kellaway to perform). She is still watching, scribbling feverishly, as the cocktail party disperses. Here is a multiplicity of images that, though simple and vaguely coherent in their juxtaposition, hint at intentions

beyond what is literally being portrayed on stage. I return to ponder Fuch's observation on Stein's relation of "any detail to any detail" and LeCompte's urge to 'disconnect, only disconnect' (1996, p.87), and acknowledge I am playing here on a tightrope between these two missions - in order to simply confuse. There are obscure messages constantly being passed throughout this work. Direct dialogue (except the most cursory) is eschewed, and when it does occur it is purposefully obtuse. In this respect it counters the 'world of discussion' intrinsic to modern drama and its increasing co-option by the mediums of television and cinema (Lehmann 2006, p.75). Despite the abundance of words in this work, there appears very little investment in debate. There is endless talk at cross-purposes, and so ***Brief Synopsis*** permits an endless requoting of material, in order to de-dramatisise the function of dialogue in that it does not aim to construct a 'tempo, dialectic or debate that results in resolution (or dénouement)' (Lehmann 2006, p.75).

But then Kellaway leaves the piano and approaches Molino to engage her in an exchange that briefly promises meaningful interpersonal communication:

Kellaway: *You asked me to allow you one more year, thinking perhaps that you would test me that way ... or wear me out ... or even forget me.
But time doesn't count. I've come to take you away.*

Molino: *That's impossible.*

Kellaway: *You know very well that it is possible, that you are ready, and that we're going to leave.*

Molino: *What makes you so sure? (turning back to her writing)*

Kellaway: *And then you turned away, undecided, not knowing where to go ... I've kept a photograph of you, taken a few days before you left.*

Buckley: *That proves nothing.*

Anyone could have taken that snapshot, any time, anywhere:

Kellaway: *Indeed, the setting is vague, remote, scarcely visible ...*

Molino: *I think this game is silly.*

*(to Buckley) There's a trick you have to know. There are rules.
It's the one who goes first who loses.*

And just when there appears to be some hint of complicity, understanding, logic in the relationships between three characters, Kellaway draws Buckley aside and we are thrust back onto the corridor-lit “catwalk” with the same recorded Telemann aria we heard in Scene 4: a predetermined formal spatial configuration and musical structure, interrupting/overwhelming that possibility.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 9 – Telemann 2 (refer to DVD 44.35 – 47.22)

Kellaway: (to Buckley) *There were minutes – should I say moments – no, a minute ... that is an eternity ... A minute when I was happy.*

Buckley: *That minute during which you could use me to feel something.*

Kellaway: *Don't take your hand away.
It's not that I'm feeling anything for you ... It's my skin that remembers.
When I close my eyes you are beautiful.*

Buckley: *Or hunchbacked ... if you want it. The privilege of the blind.*

Kellaway: *Yes, they drew the better lot in love, eh?
They are spared the comedy of circumstances:
They see what they want to see.
The ideal would be both blind and deaf mute. The love of stones.*

Molino: (to Buckley) *No. Don't retract your tender offer, sir.
I am buying. I'm buying in any case.
No need to fear emotions. Why should I hate you? I never loved you.
Let's rub our hides together.*

Kellaway: *Ah, the bondage of bodies!*

Molino: *The agony to live and not be God. To have a consciousness ...*

Kellaway: *... and yet no power over matter.*

Molino: *No, don't rush. Yes! That's good. Yes, yes! yes!! ... YES!!!!
Well, that was well acted, wasn't it?
What do I care for the lust of my body?
My brain is still functioning at its normal rate. I am totally cold.*

(Heiner Müller 1982, p.107)

Familiar music, but here we have another tiny insight into what might fester within Kellaway's and Molino's “characters”. They are bitter and malicious, their

erotic lives evidently exhausted. It is telling that this text is adapted from Müller's portrayal of the "dangerous liaisons" played out by the dying characters of Merteuil and Valmont in *Quartet*, given that our structured "catwalk" setting emphasises the fact that these characters prefer to hide behind postures and empty words – a clear symptom of passive-aggression. Such pathologies challenge processes of identification for the audience, clouding the actors in chosen rituals. They are presented as sketches (as will be noted in the following paragraphs).

Brief Synopsis: Scene 10 – Badminton (refer to DVD 47.22 – 52.40)

Kellaway and Buckley move toward a café table on the Prompt side of the space, concentrating attention on a confined area in this vast "landscape" of stage. Still, the sound of footsteps – the figures alienated within a musical/rhythmic structure. Everything is ostentatiously "composed" – textually, physically, musically – as though framed in "quotation marks". Molino remains at a distance. We hear her whispered recorded voice, loosely paraphrasing Lehmann's words (2006, p.108):

Molino: Ernest Hemmingway's The Snows of Kilimanjaro, a sick man is waiting for his death in the expanses of Africa without resisting it. His leg is gangrenous, the rescue plane is a long time coming, but the man does not want to be rescued anyway. With the woman who wants to keep him alive he leads a conversation punctuated with hatred, tiredness, despair and disgust.

In **Brief Synopsis** the performers generally talk about someone else, rarely about themselves. Consequently the information is always very sketchy. But this is purposeful, in that it turns the focus back on the vagaries of audience perception. As Lehmann suggests, 'When theatre presents itself as a sketch and not as a finished painting, the spectators are given the chance to feel their own presence, to reflect on it, and contribute to the unfinished character themselves' (2006, p.108). In **Brief Synopsis** the performers are given no fictionalised names. The musicians are playing the music in a space that is acknowledged as a theatre. The audience is seated in the playing area.

Everything is notionally “real”, except that the events are clearly constructs. This is theatre that demands contemplation, rather than emotional identification. It is hyper-theatrical. That does not imply that emotional experience is denied. It is just that such experience is not methodically intellectualised or manipulated. It is intentionally mysterious, reflective, surprising, and conducive to myriad readings and frustrations for the spectator.

Molino, now standing at the piano, confronts the pianist with an opaque and rapid-fire text, almost inaudible against speedy and energetic music. But she now seems to have some mysterious notion of identity in this baffling scenario – she is clearly a woman on a mission. But why her anger, her urgency? Why is she confronting the pianist in this manner? Is it because Kellaway and Buckley are no longer listening? Or is it because the pianist is also now implicated in whatever might be going on? This is a rush of complex information (auditory and visual) intentionally challenging the audience’s comprehension. This is language, music and physical action colliding as pure aesthetic gesture. This is speed. Kellaway and Buckley are playing an absurd game of badminton downstage – a game Buckley can never win. This is choreography built around improvisation within a tightly defined structure. Indeed it is “choreography” very loosely defined. Thirty years ago I was meticulously inscribing dance steps on my dancers in any given production. Now, in ***Brief Synopsis***, I create scenarios and very generalised shapes for the performers to invent upon, allowing them creative ownership of the material. But the attitudes and spatial arrangements are precisely defined so that in every performance the movement, energy and intention are similar. The structure determines the gaze traversing from Kellaway’s studied service of the balls to Buckley’s athletic, though hopeless, attempts at returning them - as hopeless as his attempts to enter Kellaway’s and Molino’s secret game of power. And then Katia, from afar, calls the scene to a halt. Buckley is exhausted, frustrated, angry. Kellaway’s response, a vicious diatribe, not masked by exquisite music or artifice, functions to mark a fresh dramatic concern: a quite new scene:

Kellaway: ... *there is no man whose member wouldn’t stiffen at the thought of his dear flesh departing. Fear breeds philosophers.*

What have you learned today? Eh? Other than how to manoeuvre your cock into a cunt resembling the one you once fell out of ... always with the same more or less pleasant result ... perhaps.

And always deluded that the applause of those alien mucous membranes was meant for you, and only you, that those screams of lust were addressed to you. While you are nothing ... nothing but a barren vehicle, indifferent and totally interchangeable, for the lust of those who are using you ... the power drunk fool of their creation.

Molino: (from afar) God, you bore me!

Kellaway: (to Molino) Lust alone takes the blindfold from love's eyes and grants them a view through the veil of the skin to the coarseness of the flesh. Why else that weapon called the face?

Molino: You are a whore!

(Heiner Müller 1982, p.110)

Molino leaves the two men seated, facing across a café table, this time in close proximity to the audience seating bank.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 11 – A Chloris (refer to DVD 52.40 – 56.52)

Music begins – a recording of an aria, “A Chloris” by Reynaldo Hahn (1913). The recording we chose is so closely, intimately recorded, and the voice is very pretty. This is music as independent theatrical structure, what Varopoulou is referring to when she writes of the notion of ‘theatre as music’ (1998, cited in Lehmann 2006, p.91). Reynaldo Hahn’s song is an exquisitely constructed piece of nostalgia, longing for a Baroque sensibility that, in itself, longs for an imagined classical ideal of love, loss and pain. Gustave Flaubert, in a letter to Madame Roger des Genettes in 1861, expressed something of the sadness exuded in this moment: ‘The melancholy of the antique world seems to me more profound than that of the moderns, all of whom more or less imply that beyond the dark void lies immortality. But for the ancients that ‘black hole’ is infinity itself; their dreams loom and vanish against a background of immutable ebony. No crying out, no convulsions – nothing but the fixity of a pensive gaze.’

Kellaway quietly sobs as Buckley watches him with attempted dispassion. The music is emotionally affecting Kellaway's tears. This has become a dialogue between Kellaway and the music, not Kellaway and "the boy". His "convulsions", his movement on his chair, are tightly choreographed according to the structure of the aria. This performed strategy is an intentional provocation. Lehmann identifies a comparable artifice in the work of Robert Wilson in his discussion of the way 'the phenomenon has priority over the narrative, the effect of the image precedence over the individual actor, the contemplation over interpretation' (2006, p.80). Lehmann concludes that Wilson's 'theatre creates a time of the gaze' that is 'without tragic sentiment or pity' (2006, p.80).

And so, Kellaway very quietly sobs as Buckley pensively gazes. Kellaway perhaps knows more than has been played out on this stage. Certainly more than the young man who sits opposite him. It is slightly embarrassing. Surely it is better to quietly pass away with no fuss. Buckley eventually proffers his bloodstained white handkerchief, perhaps distrusting the authenticity of his companion's apparent grief.

We hear Molino's voice from upstage:

Molino: *Have I changed so much then?
Or are you just pretending not to recognise me?*

Kellaway: *No, you haven't changed. You have the same remote eyes, the same smile, the same sudden laugh, the same way of extending your arm as if to brush something away ... a child ... a branch ...
And you are wearing the same perfume.*

(Alain Robbe-Grillet 1962, p.60)

Of course this scene of overt despair has been a construct, in some obtuse manner preparing Kellaway for another, grander, humiliation to be played out in the next "climax scene". I refer back to that "formula" I outlined in Chapter 2: the "climax scene" involving some kind of "sacrifice". In **Brief Synopsis**, this is an

overtly manufactured sacrifice, one for which Kellaway takes no apparent responsibility, but is clearly compliant (even rehearsed) in.

Brief Synopsis: Scene 15 – This most wicked body
(refer to DVD 1.05.30 – 1.11.12)

Roland Barthes discusses a ‘density of signs and sensations built up on a stage starting from the written argument’ (1972, p.26). This particular scene is certainly constructed on a substantial monologue/”written argument” from Heiner Müller’s climactic scene in *Quartet* (1982), but it eschews any narrative continuity with the framework that has constituted the development of **Brief Synopsis**, depending, rather, on a “density of signs and sensations” built on a musical momentum as much as textual meaning. And so it is part of a continuum that has placed my work, over the past thirty years, in the orbit of *postdramatic theatre*. Hamilton refers to Lehmann’s comprehensive theory describing:

... forms of composition ‘no longer dramatic’ insofar as text operates as one of a number of elements and is deprived of its ‘codified royalty’, to use the words of Italian director Romeo Castellucci – embodies the set of relations intrinsic to the new theatre ‘text’ (1997, p.193). By proposing an aesthetic logic of theatrical praxis ‘no longer dramatic’, but not ‘beyond’ drama, Lehmann’s approach acknowledges the dramatic literary heritage intrinsic to new forms of theatre and the consistent contiguity between theatre and text despite its no-hierarchical position in postdramatic theatre form. (2011, p.190)

Much of **Brief Synopsis** is constructed around re-imaginings of borrowed materials, musical and textual (and thematic). Heiner Goebbels explains how he mistrusts ‘the idea that it is possible to be completely original. We are all full of memories, full of history, full of taste which is not ours; which comes from the past’ (Till 2006, p.39). Goebbels knows that, prior to any ideological and stylistic implication, ‘composition means first and foremost: the shaping of musical time and the processes of perception’ (Till 2006, p.39). He dislikes the

Gesamtkunstwerk principles of opera or modernist music theatre: 'I try not to match words with people, words and pictures, music and words in an illustrative way. Distance on stage keeps our senses awake and curious, and actualizes our longing and desires for the matches' (Till 2006, p.41). Goebbels has long enjoyed incorporating fugitive words of elusive (usually dead) authors into his music theatre, as he notes (quoting a personal warning from Müller): 'you should never nail a text down to just one meaning' (Woodall 2009, p.3). It might be argued that to fully appreciate all the references contained in Müller's *Hamletmachine* and *Medea: Material* one needs at least a passing familiarity with the Shakespeare and Euripides and other sources. On the other hand, I made **Brief Synopsis** assuming that no-one would be au fait with either the Müller or Robbe-Grillet texts I was plundering. In my work it is more a matter of "what you see is what you get" – it does not, by necessity, refer back to its sources.

In Robbe-Grillet's / Alan Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* it is interesting to note that whatever is happening on the soundtrack sets up a series of tensions and ambiguities with whatever is happening in the image-track. Structurally, the start, development and ending of any of the organ passages give the film a feeling of musical movements and when you see an image and hear a voice-over, their relationship is rarely clearly defined. Whose voice is it? Was that character privy to every event we have witnessed? Is the voice-over designed to give us privileged information, or is it casual and indifferent? In this respect Resnais, like Goebbels, is less concerned with dramatic momentum than the delivery of an abstracted aesthetic experience.

In a similar way to Goebbels and Resnais, the artistic team collaborating on **Brief Synopsis** experimented, in the rehearsal studio, in reassigning the lines between the three actors in order to assure ourselves that the words, in themselves, had a strong poetic drive beyond an otherwise flimsy dramatic narrative. The moment-to-moment events shifted but the overall aesthetic of the work remained intact, driving toward the same resonance of loss that imbues the final scene of exit. Similarly, remove the character attribution, insert a few "he said" or "she said", and the text of **Brief Synopsis** could serve perfectly as

a monologue. It is a singular voice shared between bodies that, regardless of what they are saying, are discretely, physically, articulate. Our decisions regarding the assignment of text were by no means random. We were acutely aware of the deceit of inferred narrative structure, but in teasing the audience along the inevitable path toward the work's final moments we, like Akira Kurosawa in his 1950 movie *Rashomon*,¹⁹ were pointing to death as fact (in the actions presented on stage, that is) but truth as illusive, given that the performers at no time indicate that their experience (or appreciation) of events are shared. Indeed, they seem variously aware of what might actually be occurring on stage.

Preparing for our climax scene, Molino distributes music to the band. Buckley has set floor lights beside the piano, among which Kellaway takes his position at a music stand. Buckley dresses Kellaway in a necklace of pearls, a frightful blond wig, and lurid red lipstick, as though preparing him for sacrifice.

Molino: *There! (handing Kellaway the script she has previously written)*
So, I may watch your final performance ... with fear and pity.
(to Buckley) I should have mirrors set up ... so I can watch him die in the plural.

(adapted from Heiner Müller 1982, p.116)

Molino leads Buckley downstage to sit together, among the audience. A *climax scene* (albeit somewhat static and demure) ensues – a recital for spoken voice and instrumental ensemble, structured on Valmont's final monologue from Heiner Muller's *Quartet*, in which he assumes the voice of the woman, Merteuil, with whom he has argued throughout the work. This text is performed as an "entertainment", a "recital", Kellaway at a microphone and half-conducting the band. The music is freely based on the final movement of Beethoven's String Quartet Opus 132. This text is certainly lifted directly from Müller's, but it is devoid of his intended context. It floats as unbridled invective in the space. Its

¹⁹ The film *Rashomon* is famous for its plot device involving various characters providing alternative, self-serving and contradictory versions of the same incident, involving rape and murder. The film gave rise to the term "Rashomon Effect", referring to real-world situations in which multiple eye-witness testimonies of an event contain conflicting information.

reason for being is unexplained. It is pure performative gesture insofar as it does not progress a narrative in any way. This is an exercise in treating all the autonomous components of theatre as respected and discrete “objects” in the space, in recognition of Edward Gordon Craig’s notion that ‘no one element of theatre is more important than another’ (2009, p.73).

Lehmann describes this manipulation of the actor’s delivery of performance text as becoming ‘more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information’ (2006, p.85). Müller identified and appreciated this approach in Robert Wilson’s direction of his writing. For Müller:

[Wilson’s] main objective is to find room for all the elements in his mind or his fantasy. And that’s what interests me. My texts can breathe, they have room ... A good text has to be like a thing, like a solid rock or stone. You can throw this stone from the mountain and maybe there’s some dust flying off, but nothing else. It stays the same. Theatre people in Germany always try to find something inside the text, but Wilson just takes it, like a kid playing with marbles. (1984, p.67)

The text in question here is borrowed (referential) material on a number of levels: quoting a work I made nearly twenty years before (the two hundred and forty-hour marathon performance piece *This Most Wicked Body*, 1994)²⁰ for which I similarly “stole” this Müller text as my own final monologue. It is also an indicated reversal of roles for Molino and Kellaway (which we painstakingly set up with her slow writing of the text Kellaway now reads from the page) as Molino and Buckley enthusiastically applaud him from the audience seating. It contemplates a morbid illness. Is it elegant? Can such thoughts really be so

²⁰ *This Most Wicked Body* Director/Performer: Nigel Kellaway. Composer/Percussionist : David Montgomery. Restaurateur: Gay Bilson. Lighting design: Simon Wise. Video artist: Peter Oldham. Performance Space, 1994.

“arted”? We have similarly used it here as the “marble”, the plaything, that Müller so admires in Wilson’s work.

Kellaway: HOW TO GET RID OF THIS MOST WICKED BODY!

I shall cut open my veins as I would an unread book.

I shall do it with scissors, since I am a woman, and every trade has its own jokes.

You can use my blood to make yourself up – a new grimace.

I shall find a way to my heart through my flesh.

The way YOU never found, since you are a man, your breast empty, and only nothingness growing inside you.

Your body is the body of your death. A woman has many bodies.

You have to bleed yourself if you want to see blood.

Or one man has to bleed another.

Envy of the milk in our breasts – that is what turns you men into butchers.

If only you could give birth. I do regret this experience is denied you, this garden forbidden, by decree of nature hard to understand.

You would give the best part of yourself for it, if you knew what you were missing,

and we could make a deal with nature.

I did love you.

But I shall push a needle into my womb before I kill myself, to be sure that nothing you have planted is growing inside me.

You are a monster, and I want to become one!

Green and bloated with poison, I shall walk through your sleep.

Swinging from the rope, I shall dance for you.

My face shall be a blue mask, my tongue protruding.

With my head in the gas-oven I shall be aware that you are standing behind me, with no thought but how to get inside me.

And I? I will desire it, as the gas bursts my lungs.

It is good to be a woman, and not a conqueror.

When I close my eyes I can see you rotting.

I don't envy you the cesspool growing inside you.

Do you want to know more?

I am a dying encyclopedia ... each word a clot of blood.

I just wish I could watch you die, as I watch myself now.

By the way, I am still quite pleased with myself.

We can all still masturbate ... even with the maggots!

(adapted from Heiner Müller 1982, pp.117-118)

This scene has been set up (for all intents and purposes) as an informal, intimate, apparently impromptu performance. But Kellaway presents, in concert with a meticulously rehearsed band, a bravura recital piece. Lehmann discusses Klaus Michael Gruber's opinion of theatre as:

Scene and situation. The spectator is there to witness the pain the actors speak of. Gruber traces a link back to that essential reality of the stage that means that here *the moment of speaking* is everything. Not the timeline of action, not the drama but the moment the human voice is raised. A body exposes itself, suffers ... What counts ... is the precious moment when a body, under threat, starts to speak in the space of a scene ... The postdramatic theme here is a *theatre of the voice*, the voice being a reverberation of past events. (2006, p.76) [emphasis in original]

But Kellaway's rendition of the Müller text is absolute artifice, exhibiting none of the pain Gruber demands. It can only be the product of the distance a borrowed text bestows on a performer. Indeed, at its conclusion, Kellaway acknowledges that fact (in the guise of the conceit that Molino has authored the text):

Kellaway: *That was so beautifully written, Madame.*

I do hope my performance of it didn't bore you. That, indeed, would be unforgivable.

You know, I believe I might have grown accustomed to being a woman.

Molino: *I wish I had.*

(adapted from Heiner Müller 1982, p.118 and p.114)

And so ends **Brief Synopsis** - almost!

Brief Synopsis: Scene 16 – Im Abendrot

(refer to DVD 1.11.12 – 1.20.00)

This is the show's scheduled "denouement", a gentle and slow exit for the performers, and an opportunity for the audience to contemplate Richard

Strauss's mighty vision of death. A phenomenal orchestral Eb Major chord envelops the space, via the sound system, heralding a recording of the entire final song of Strauss's *Four Last Songs*: "Im Abendrot" (1948). It lasts a full nine minutes. It is Strauss's final great musical offering – a peaceful acceptance of his own mortality, a transcendence beyond the bitter struggle with death. The 'cellos and double bass move to music stands on the far Prompt side of the stage. They play along with the vocal line, but their parts are a mere opaque accompaniment to the disembodied voice – indeed, the audience can barely hear them, so their playing is a more visual than aural presence and this emphasises our notion of all the performers on stage as mere puppets responding to a force beyond them. Up to this moment Strauss's songs have been "shoe-horned" into instrumental contrivances to serve predominantly theatrical gestures. This final blast of Strauss's profound intentions bullies everything into submission. Kellaway, and then Molino and Buckley, have no apparent option other than to slowly and quietly exit through the great upstage doors opening behind them. The musicians follow them. Strauss talks of a death that must be gracefully embraced. The full title of ***Brief Synopsis*** gently insists on that. But who were those three figures in a landscape? What was going on between them that we were not privy to? Was Kellaway an "angel of death" unannounced in the title of the work? We'll never know. We are ultimately denied what Lehmann describes as 'the entertainment value of "suspense" where one situation prepares for and leads to a new and changed situation' (2006, p.69), specific to dramatic theatre, and now nothing remains but a deserted space and the title of a work.

Brief Synopsis has been purposefully "book-ended" by recordings of two magisterial contemporary sopranos – Cecilia Bartoli (in the opening Handel aria) and Renee Fleming (in this closing Strauss song). Such music, amplified through an expansive sound system, surely swamps the efforts of eight humble artists lost in an epic building. It begs the question of whether the audience might have been better staying at home with a couple of good CDs, but that would deny the context we have presented. We've complicated an easy listening experience, to challenge our audience to listen afresh to music they might be too familiar with.

Brief Synopsis positions its performers not so much in a “dramatic theatre”, but rather, in a “composer’s theatre”. As a boy I thought that composition was the arranging of dots on a five-line stave. But now I appreciate it as being more broadly about the arrangement of disparate elements (of any description) to create a satisfying whole, not limiting the notion of a “composer” to the musical medium. I view my theatre as a composition incorporating (equally) musical, physical/choreographic, spatial/design, and textual elements. As I have explained earlier, I choose to call this invention “opera”, peopled by “clowns” driven by mysterious forces – as will be further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6 Mysterious Forces

Le drame, c'est quelque chose qui arrive, le No, c'est quelqu'un qui arrive.
(The drama is something that happens, the Noh is someone who arrives.)

Paul Claudel (M.Watanabe 1987, p.26)



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (foreground) David Buckley, Nigel Kellaway. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

6:1 Ritual and ceremony

At the beginning of ***Brief Synopsis*** Molino appears downstage, slowly traversing the space (turned away from the audience) and then simply exits far upstage, accompanied by a surprising short flurry of Rococo pianism. Then, quite suddenly, Kellaway enters. This is a signature of my work. The protagonists are often distanced. They have an autonomous position on stage

and ample opportunity to take central focus. Their entrances and exits are ceremonial. A kind of “liturgy” develops as they later gather for certain precise theatrical rites of dialogue and physical confrontation. It is a process of choreography, in the sense that it is compositional, which Lehmann identifies as ‘ceremony as a moment of postdramatic theatre’ on the basis that ‘the whole spectrum of movements and processes ... have no referent but are presented with heightened precision’ (2006, p.96). He further points to ‘musical-rhythmic or visual-architectonic constructs of development; para-ritual forms, as well as the (often deeply black) ceremony of the body and of presence; the emphatically or monumentally accentuated ostentation of the presentation’ as intrinsic to forms of theatre that are no longer dramatic.

The “characters” in ***Brief Synopsis*** are like memories, oddly recognisable, yet not quite “of this world”. They are ostentatiously theatrical, but almost corpse-like in a Western dramatic tradition. They are begging to be vitalised in the audience’s imagination. Both Jean Genet and Müller spoke of theatre as “a dialogue with the dead”. ‘Müller considered theatre as an incantation of the dead. And the Japanese Noh Theatre revolves around the return of the dead with a minimum of mimesis’ (Lehmann 2006, p.70). Indeed, Maeterlink thought ‘that every being that has the appearance of life without being alive makes us think of extraordinary powers’ (Plassard 1992, p.38). This idea/experience is intrinsic to ***Brief Synopsis*** in that the bodies we present on stage are bereft of clearly explained motivation in their actions. They are fulfilling a carefully mapped choreography. They are driven by something “other”.

Apart from accentuated periods of extended and focused stillness, there is a constant walking in the space. But walking without evident purpose. This kind of activity is so “ordinary”, a choreographic as well as auditory device. In the 1980s, influenced as I was by Japanese Butoh theatre/dance, I slowed everything down. This was in order to highlight histrionic gestures, reading as a kind of “silent melodrama”. Nothing was happening other than the performer’s momentary experience, agonisingly elongated. ***Brief Synopsis*** not so much slowed the action of walking, as elongated it, in its attempt to create an appreciation of its simplicity.

This notion of “silent melodrama” corresponds to an extent to Lehmann’s elaboration of the performer in Wilson’s theatre as the subject of ‘mysterious forces’:

... the actors’ movement in slow motion always produces an absolutely peculiar experience in [Robert] Wilson’s aesthetic, an experience that undermines the idea of action. We are talking here of the impression that the human actors on stage do not act of their own volition and agency. When Buchner wrote that humans are like puppets moved on invisible wires by invisible forces and Artaud spoke of “automate personnel”, then these motifs correspond with the impression that in Wilson’s theatre there are mysterious forces at work who seem to be moving the figures magically without any visible motivation, objectives or connections.
(2006, p.78)

The “mysterious force” in ***Brief Synopsis*** is the product of epic space, the music and the enigmatic appearance of bodies in Bay 17.

Lehmann goes further in describing this experience as imbuing ‘a peculiar aura of fatefulness because the figures seem to be at the mercy of a mysterious magic’ (2006, p.58). As the title of the work, ***Brief Synopsis: a beautiful woman “of a certain age” brutally stabs a young man to death*** suggests, the figures in this drama are subject to a predetermined fate, in that they are players in a predetermined drama. We all know the inevitability proposed by the Passion of Christ. There are no surprises. The intrigue lies in the peculiar retellings of that story, the information gaps contained in all four gospels. It is about how we, as an audience, choose to fill those gaps. This is the “mysterious magic” that Lehmann is referring to. The resonances cannot be accurately prescribed, but can be roughly planned.

Maurice Maeterlinck found the essence of tragedy not in action, but in contemplation:

I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently ... giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting without comprehending the silence of doors and windows and the quivering of light ... does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or the husband who avenges his honour. (Fuchs 1996, pp.95-96)

These are profound words that quietly inspired ***Brief Synopsis*** to envisage a space of contemplation rather than overt action or conflict, an alternative ordering of conflict and resolution, prescribed by musical rhythms. The actors are controlled by all the mechanics of the theatre. They are puppets, displaying all the natural attributes of humans but functioning entirely within a construct. It is not about conflicts that exist between 'normal' people. This is theatre that distances the audience from their lives. Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, a contemporary of Gertrude Stein, contemplated a theatre constituted entirely of formal elements, utterly dismissive of the mimesis of reality: 'On leaving the theatre, one must have the impression of waking from a strange sort of sleep in which even the most ordinary things had the strange impenetrable character of a dream and which cannot be compared to anything else' (Crugten 1971, p.116). But as Lehmann also points out, 'an essential quality of the dream is the non-hierarchy of images, movements and words. "Dream thoughts" form a texture that resembles collage, montage and fragment rather than a logically structured course of events' (2006, p.84). Both Witkiewicz's non-mimetic theatre and Lehmann's conception of "dream thoughts" elaborate on the aesthetic logic key to ***Brief Synopsis***, a theatre work that is a "montage" of disparate textural elements organised as formal structural components, defined by abstract notions of music and bodies in space.

Lehmann might include ***Brief Synopsis*** among the works that contemplate what he attributes to "the reamins":

...a theatre after the catastrophe (like Beckett's and Heiner Müller's texts); it comes from death and stages "a landscape beyond death"

(Müller). In this it differs from drama, which does not show death as preceding, as the basis of experience, but instead depicts life moving towards it. Death in (Tadeuz) Kantor's work is not dramatically staged but ceremoniously repeated. (2006, p.71)

Brief Synopsis highlights a tension between situation and fiction, a situation where rituals/ceremonies are repeated over and over again. I am reminded of a work I made twenty years ago. In ***This Most Wicked Body*** (1994), the theatre space became my living space for an interrupted 240 hours – it did not pretend to be my living space, it actually was. My food was served onstage to me, and was evidently required nourishment. The upstage bed, I evidently slept in every night for 10 days. The location of my shower and toilet was clear to all. The audience was entering a “real space”, with no pretension of being something “other”. But the extended monologues I delivered repeatedly throughout the performance were far more suspicious. Several of them I had evidently lifted from texts by others, notably Müller. They were often contradictory, and yet the energy I committed to their delivery was clearly sincere, contributing to a notion of “wholeness”. Over the ten days the audience could clearly perceive my increasing exhaustion. They witnessed a kind of marathon virtuosity that cannot be faked. Form and content became intertwined, confused, contained in the spectacle of a flailing body: the “realness” of the body betrayed by the implausibility of everything he utters.

A more recent work by Heiner Goebbels contemplates a man similarly marooned on a lonely stage that slowly reveals itself as site of elaborate tricks. In ***Eraritjaritjaka*** (2003) a man appears on stage after a lengthy performance by a string quartet. He tosses around some excerpts from the writings of Elias Canetti (1904-94) and then leaves the theatre followed by a video cameraman. The audience see him, apparently, arrive at a city apartment and make an omelette. But eventually we realise that this is in fact all happening on the theatre's stage behind a backdrop façade of a house front, and (not so) simply filmed and projected onto the set. We are constantly being fooled, and then exposed as such. We are transfixed by a theatrical virtuosity – so many

components (music, text, film, live performance) married in a unique spectacle, contemplating the conundrum of “truth”.

6:2 Those mysterious musicians on stage

How do we behave as an audience when a musician walks onto the stage? I believe we are “hard-wired” to treat them with some respect. They are (hopefully) virtuosic vehicles of a perceived “knowledge”, particularly if they are about to perform/interpret the music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and such-like. We give them space, but only so long as they prove their credentials and satisfy (or authoritatively confront) our expectations of that repertoire. But how can five musicians possibly respond, on their initial entrance, to the crashing grandeur of a huge orchestra and the magisterial virtuosity of Cecilia Bartoli’s voice? They quietly tune their instruments and inaudibly natter amongst themselves, as we hear the pre-recorded voices of another man and woman (Kellaway and Molino) quibbling over some obscure memory of entrapment:

Molino: *The others? What others? Don’t be so worried about what they’re thinking.*

Kellaway: *I can’t stand these whisperings ... worse than silence. These days worse than death. This prison we’re living in, side by side. Like coffins laid side by side, underground in some frozen garden. A garden reassuringly arranged, with clipped hedges, and regular paths where we walk with measured steps, side by side, day by day, within arm’s reach, but never coming an inch closer to each other, without ever ...*

Molino: *Other? What other? Don’t be so worried about what he’s thinking.*

Kellaway: *This silence, these walls, these whispers. These days we’re living through, side by side, all alike, one after the other, walking along these corridors with measured steps, within arm’s reach, but never coming an inch closer. Never holding out these fingers made to clasp, these mouths made to ... These eyes made to see you ... that must turn away from you – toward these walls, covered with ornaments from another century ... painted perspectives.*

(paraphrased text by Alain Robbe-Grillet from *L’année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961)

It is pertinent, in this exegesis, to reflect on the ways I have presented the “musician” on stage over the past few decades. A singer or instrumentalist

brings unique performance skills to a theatrical stage. An audience has entrenched expectations of what the musician might have to offer this entertainment: a focused virtuosity or sensitive accompaniment. Their physicality is too often considered secondary to their sonic expressiveness. I habitually challenge these presumptions. Keith Gallasch captured, most astutely, this ongoing concern of mine regarding the positioning of the skilled performer on stage in his text for *Tristan* (The opera Project, 1999). His opening lines, written for performer Jai McHenry:

Off-stage voice of “the Doctor”:

Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please. The soprano is indisposed. She will, however, be singing this evening’s performance of “Tristan” from the wings. Her onstage role will be indicated by a dummy.

My apologies ... the onstage presence of the soprano in tonight’s performance of “Tristan” will be indicated by an actor.

Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please. In the tradition of performances of “Tristan und Isolde”, to which this evening’s performance pays homage, the conductor has had a giddy spell and been sent home. Tonight’s ... “recital” will be accompanied on piano.

Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please.

In tonight’s performance, the part of Tristan will not be sung. Thank you.

We had rudely shunted the soprano (Annette Tesoriero) into the “wings”, replacing her with an apparently unrehearsed actress (Regina Heilmann). Tristan (Nigel Kellaway) was rendered, in Keith Gallasch’s text, almost incoherent and certainly incapable of singing his role. And then we denied Tesoriero a single note from Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*, demanding she sing from other German romantic repertoire. These choices were astute comments on the psychology of narcissism and despair that underpin Wagner’s great opera. The writer and co-director, Keith Gallasch (1999), articulated these dramaturgical concerns in his program note:

Save for a piano transcription by Franz Liszt of the *Leibestod*, The opera Project’s *Tristan* is a juxtaposition of recitals of Wagner’s *Wesendonck Lieder* and Robert Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* (A Poet’s Love; 1840, to poems by Heine). While *Tristan und Isolde* yearns and agonises over

and transcends pain through death, the *Wesendonck Lieder* more joyfully shares some of the same sentiments, images and music (and Schopenhauerian underpinnings). The Schumann cycle, however, enacts in song a descent into self-torment, despair and death (metaphoric but grimly wrought) over unrequited love. Nature offers no solace (nor can it in Wagner) and the loved one becomes a monster. (Tristan's self-pity is relieved by Isolde's love for him, and his love for her is resolute: but he is impatient to die and tears off his bandage on her arrival, the journey is solitary still.) While Schumann mocks his protagonist here and there with quaint tunes and high operatic self-pity, an interplay of the plangent and the mock-heroic against a relentless piano part enacts male suffering with a powerful subjectivity. But in The opera Project's *Tristan* the *Dichterliebe* is performed by a woman, the soprano places her finger in the male wound.

And so a conceit was established from the outset. With no vindictive intent, the work of The opera Project has systematically challenged the singer's and musicians' assumed authority over "opera". Because our concerns are theatrical, the performer is primarily an imparter of information, regardless of the specific discipline they contribute to the work. Their authority is an uncertain commodity. Indeed, collaborating with The Sydney Front on *Passion* in 1993, all established performance authority was undermined by removing the "employed performers" almost entirely from the action, recasting them as mere functionaries / stagehands / facilitators, enabling the audience to take centre-stage in their nightly re-enactment of the Passion of Christ.

In several productions by The opera Project the singer has been similarly distanced from the narrative action: an outsider, sometimes a kind of narrator, a "deus ex machina" or simply an observer of the dirty actions of the actors, resisting any responsibility for the unfolding events. The singer's voice in these events is positioned as aloof, beyond the sordid grind of staged physical interactions. But, at the same time, it is this sung voice that so often propels this action. The actors respond to the "foreign" dynamic of the song. Usually the singer performs in French, Italian or German. I often choose to eschew music

from the opera canon, preferring songs with little narrative drive, as they become static commentaries on the action. They function as a landscape.

However, in *The Terror of Tosca* (1988)²¹ we toyed with the musical nature of a Puccini operatic masterwork and allowed the titular role her singing voice, very occasionally. In her program notes, collaborator Annette Tesoriero (1988) explains:

Puccini's *Tosca* does not strictly follow the school of verismo, which derives from the traditions of theatrical "realism". It belongs, rather, to the traditions of romantic melodrama. Our task has been to compress, and yet keep coherent Sardou's original plot (an intricate example of what is ironically known as a "well-made play"). Ours and Puccini's texts are melodrama – raw responses to threats and violence, abrupt declarations of jealousy and desire.

In our production, Puccini's three central protagonists (Tosca, Cavaradossi and Scarpia) were repeatedly shared between the six performers. Annette Tesoriero sang only two set arias from the opera as she performed alongside actors Regina Heilmann and Jai McHenry in the role of Tosca. At one stage the Peking Opera actor Xu Fengshan made an inexplicable swap between a menacing Mandarin-speaking Scarpia to a veiled Tosca in a falsetto duet rendition with Tesoriero of the aria *Vissi d'arte*. The actor Jai McHenry shifted constantly between the roles of Tosca and Scarpia. She never signalled these swaps with a clear performed identity, but merely a costume change – and in that gesture Tosca and Scarpia had become as one. And we heard the historic 1953 recordings of Tito Gobbi and Giuseppe di Stefano as Scarpia and Cavaradossi in their two most iconic arias – their voices disembodied.

²¹ *The Terror of Tosca* The opera Project Inc. Director: Nigel Kellaway. Performers: Annette Tesoriero, Nigel Kellaway, Xu Fengshan, Jai McHenry, Dean Walsh, Regina Heilmann. Music: Puccini and Kellaway. Costumes: Annemaree Dalziel. Lighting: Simon Wise. The Performance Space, Sydney, 1998.

This was a work, like *Brief Synopsis*, that entangled its performers in a precise and concise argument regarding power and possession, jealousy and desire. Stewart Hawkins (1998), reviewing for *The Daily Telegraph*, suggests that this substantial deconstruction of Puccini's opera tapped into areas that a more conventional rendering is unable to achieve:

Scarpia's sick desire to torture and debase Tosca while wanting to possess her utterly is strongly developed in the piece, which juxtaposes spoken text with operatic arias and physical movement. There are few psychological and physiological permutations left unexplored as Scarpia (Kellaway) eventually dons Tosca's dress, possibly in an attempt to identify with or even become the woman who is both his victim and his murderer ... The intellectual journey on which Kellaway takes his audience is not only intriguing, it is also compelling and, in a way, probably more honestly reflective of the characters the opera is based on than the original piece.

In *The Audience and other Psychopaths* (2004),²² the soprano (Karen Cummings) was utterly distanced. Although she was a central protagonist in the action, expressing her motivations explicitly in English, her voice was entirely pre-recorded and placed within the conceit that she was singing from an off-stage dressing room, refusing to come onto the stage. ("I'm never coming out", she insisted.) The body of the singer (a crucial player in the action) was absented, but we certainly experienced her psychotic rage. In *The Berlioz: our vampires ourselves* (1997), the pianist (Nigel Kellaway) was much more overtly an actor. And the piano was also a powerful protagonist – a weapon. Its first notes stirred the young man (Dean Walsh) and then conjured the entrance of the woman (Annette Tesoriero) onto the stage. It drove the work from scene to scene. The whole drama was essentially played around the physical presence

²² *The Audience and other Psychopaths* The opera Project Inc. Director: Nigel Kellaway. Performers: Katia Molino, Nigel Kellaway, Karen Cummings. Writers: Amanda Stewart and Nigel Kellaway. Composer: Stephen Adams. Video Artist: Peter Oldham. Lighting: Simon Wise. Co-production with Performance Space, Sydney as part of NEW MARDI GRAS, 2004.

and persistence of the piano. In *The Terror of Tosca* (1998), the character of Scarpia (Nigel Kellaway) used his piano as an accessory and refuge – he kept returning to it as it gradually took power over the action. His relationship with the multiple Toscas evoked the symbiotic relationship between a soprano and pianist on a recital podium.

Sleepers Wake! Wachet Auf! (2007)²³ featured absolutely no singing, but was clearly about music and memory, musical nostalgia even. Virginia Baxter, Jai McHenry, Amanda Stewart and Josephine Wilson co-wrote for me an extended monologue for which I composed several “re-imaginings” of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* to be performed centre-stage by a piano, violin and ‘cello trio. Baxter’s and Stewart’s contributions, particularly, were written contemplating the poetic spoken voice in a kind of operatic recitative with the instruments:

1955. Glenn Gould playing Johann Sebastian Bach's Goldberg Variations. He recorded this music at the age of 20 something, just a few months before I myself was born ... November 1955. Ah! Now that comes out of the blue! Let's be exact here! The 9th of November 1955. Hey! That's what birthdays are for ... a confirmation: I became ... I am ... still ... I think.

(Nigel Kellaway in *Sleepers Wake! Wachet Auf!*, 2007)

In 2005, I spent a chilly autumnal fortnight in Berlin between gigs in France and Nuremberg. In the first week I immersed myself in the architectural splendours of the late German Baroque and Rococo – Schinkel’s and Knobelsdorff’s palaces, gardens and museums for Frederic the Great. And, in the second week, on to the extraordinary rebuilding of “post-1989” Berlin – Frank Gehry, IM Pei, Renzo Piano, Norman Foster and others. Over breakfast and late every night I sat alone in a bar with a book of blank manuscript, an Urtext score of J.S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* open on the table, and every detail of Glenn Gould’s 1955 tempi and phrasings clearly etched into my memory colliding with

²³ *Sleepers Wake! Wachet Auf!* Performer/Director/Composer: Nigel Kellaway. Musicians: Margaret Howard, Catherine Tabrett, Michael Bell. Writers: Virginia Baxter, Jai McHenry, Amanda Stewart, Josephine Wilson. Lighting: Simon Wise. Performance Space at Carriageworks, Eveleigh, 2007.

the cacophony of the bar. And I quickly decided that I would write for that late eighteenth-century Germanic (almost "Frederician") invention – the piano, violin and 'cello trio. My variations on Bach's variations referred to an early twentieth-century French neo-classicism, explored by composers like Ravel and Stravinsky and then, later, by exploratory and jazz luminaries like John Cage and Dave Brubeck. My inventions were still redolently "Bach", but distracted by other histories – as though remembered in a state of "half sleep", "half awake".

In the program note, co-writer, Virginia Baxter (2007), though most familiar with me as an actor and theatre director, was astutely aware of the role music plays in my performance:

Experiencing opera Project works over a number of years, I've been intrigued by the shift in Nigel Kellaway's performance as he moves to the piano, or when he's attending to the music. There's a serenity that contrasts with more overt operatic gestures in the work. Sometimes it seems as if he's slipping into a very private world. I wanted to expose something of this aspect of Nigel's stage persona and so I cast him as a musical interpreter ... speaking into the ears of an audience of intimates ... the narcoleptic translator who loses himself in his own sonorous commentary ... The text we've created together is an elusive and intriguing thing which, like memory and music, threatens at every turn to slip from our grasp.

The actor (Nigel Kellaway) began by making his way to the piano, but he did not get to play, quickly usurped by the "real" musicians. As the work progressed he was constantly referring back to these musicians and their "Bach" as an oddly re-imagined memory. Then, in the final moments, once the musicians have left the stage, he finds himself back at the keyboard to play Bach's central Goldberg theme. Bryoni Trezise, reviewing in *RealTime*, elaborated on the central focus of music in this work, and the way in which it informs (indeed, controls) this "solo" dramatic performance:

At the centre of the space are three musicians ... What we hear are “variations upon variations” - music that is “quoted”, recollected, eclectic. It lullabies on recurring motifs that return, each time with a slightly different twist, engineered to sink us into the sense that we are looking at the same problem from perhaps a different angle. Kellaway’s reference to Dean Martin and eighteenth century music boxes sounds out a tinny, kitsch nostalgia above the depth of Bach. Another version using Kurt Weill has dramatic spunk in its pace. These incongruous musical themes elide dream with recollection. They make Nigel dance before us, stand before us and, interestingly, resist the memory of Kellaway’s own musical skill. Kellaway, the performer, does not play (until the very end). (2007, p.43)

The Rameau Project (2009, an essay on servitude and humiliation, colliding Jean Genet’s play *Les Bonnes*, 1954, with Elfriede Jelinek’s novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, 1983)²⁴ was a theatre work for two actors (Nigel Kellaway and Nikki Heywood, replacing Regina Heilmann) and a band of seven musicians. I approached the microphone at the beginning of the work. There was a moment of silent anticipation in the audience, but before I could say a word a recording of Bonnie Tyler’s classic rock anthem “Faster than the speed of light” tore through the space as the band entered quickly across the stage. The audience applauded them. A history of concert etiquette was evidently at play here. The two central actors (playing Jean Genet’s maids) feverishly set the seats and music stands for the musicians. The musicians were the masters. The actors were their servants, given just a moment’s space for a few words to the audience, only to be interrupted by the tuning of the band – a focused theatrical moment before proceeding to play uninterrupted for nine minutes, as the actors quietly exited the space.

24 *The Rameau Project*, The opera Project Inc. Director: Nigel Kellaway Actors: Nikki Heywood (replacing Regina Heilmann), Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero (mezzo-soprano). Dramaturg: Bryoni Trezise. Musicians: Heloise Pyne, Katrina Papallo, Catherine Upex, Steve Meyer, Ashley Kurlle, Michael Bell. Lighting design: Simon Wise. Performance Space at Carriageworks, 2009.

In *The Rameau Project* the music seemed at times to exist outside the world of the actors. The soprano (Annette Tesoriero), as in *Tristan*, sang from “the wings”, though occasionally entered the action as an actor, generally personifying Genet’s Madame. Her vocal expertise and musical literacy placed her in an elite position – a world from which the maids were excluded. An unpleasant snobbery was at play here, which I believe contributed to an uneasy audience response to the work. There was an uncertainty about how the actors were positioned against such a relentless and virtuosic musical score. These were separate desires being played out by the actors and the musicians that purposefully eluded each other, similar to those needs portrayed by Jelinek’s protagonists. Keith Gallasch, reviewing in *RealTime*, interpreted this tension in terms of “passion”:

Passion in this manner of playing is palpable, but tautly framed, indeed operatic. Kellaway’s maid departed like a strangled diva, deprived of her aria. (2009, p.46)

What drives the actors across the stage in ***Brief Synopsis*** (as in my earlier works, discussed above) are forces beyond their will, beyond any clear psychological motivation. They are responding to a musical force, an ever-changing landscape of light, the enormity of a space they cannot hope to fill, a dissonance of variously borrowed voices they cannot hope to own. I distance my performers. I deny an audience’s empathy with them. They are fleshed puppets ... clowns enveloped in space, sound and light. They are vehicles for reflection on issues beyond their control. I am intrinsically a comedian, but melancholy and mystery pervades my work. Indeed, to paraphrase (and perhaps misinterpret) Paul Claudel (1987, p.86)), ‘The drama is something that happens, the theatre is someone who almost arrives’.

It is denial of clear psychological/emotional “flesh”, narrative device or apparent “truth” that positions my performers in a landscape of impersonal abstracted aesthetic arguments, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 7 Conclusion - epilogue

Like a painter who has chosen a landscape, but who constantly shifts his easel now right, now left, I had at last found a point from which to view ...

(Marguerite Yourcenar, *Reflections on the Composition of Memoirs of Hadrian*, 1951, p.275)



Brief Synopsis, 2013. (foreground) Nigel Kellaway. (photo: Heidrun Löhr)

The above quote from Yourcenar suggests that as an artist I must reflect on how my work inhabits a space. This exegesis²⁵ has been written as a guide through a number of issues that arose in the creation of one particular live performance work. In this final chapter I will briefly discuss where I believe **Brief Synopsis** stands in relation to my body of work and the broader definitions of postdramatic and post-operatic practice, and attempt to assess particular choices I have made in creating theatre over forty years. In maintaining a broad definition of “opera” as a “work” I have endeavoured to foreground the practice of a composer’s theatre in which the abstract dynamic qualities of music (fast and slow, loud and soft) are primary shaping tools for my theatre work. It is an approach to creating a unique theatrical production or “whole”, dependent on the “collision” of disparate components (textual, musical, spatial, choreographic) reliant on both extant and original materials.

As a theatre artist I am first and foremost an actor, but one who has “diversified” (thanks to acquired skills and concerns across a breadth of artistic media) over a lengthy career. As an audience member my gaze will always return to the performer on stage – the vessel. My ten-day “solo” marathon performance, *This Most Wicked Body* (1994),²⁶ began with a very loose paraphrasing of Müller’s *Lessing’s Sleep Dream Scream* (1984, p.77), casting the body of Nigel Kellaway centre-stage over two hundred and forty hours:

My name is Nigel John Kellaway. I was born on the 9th of November 1954. I am an actor. I have stuffed sixty or seventy dolls with the sawdust that was my blood, have dreamed a dream of a theatre in this country, and have reflected in public on things that were of no interest to me ...

In many respects **Brief Synopsis** epitomises my preoccupation with the corporeal presence of the performer (be that an actor, singer, instrumentalist or dancer) and the spectator, whose physical and cognitive presence is integral to

²⁵ *exegesis*, from the Latin, meaning an explanation or interpretation of a written text, from the Greek *exegeisthai*, to ‘explain’, derived from *hegeisthai*, to ‘lead’ or ‘guide’.

²⁶ ***This Most Wicked Body*** Director/Performer: Nigel Kellaway. Composer/Percussionist: David Montgomery. Restaurateur: Gay Bilson. Lighting design: Simon Wise. Video artist: Peter Oldham. Stage Manager: Joel Markham. Performance Space, 1994.

the performance event. **Brief Synopsis** challenges this presence of the human body by situating it within a vast and visually complex space and soundscape, threatening to swamp any notion of corporeal authority. But it is so constructed that the spectator can create meaning from the crafted utterances and meticulously choreographed movement of these performers describing a coherent theatrical and musical structure over ninety minutes.

7:1 Abstraction

While my practice explores the abstract dynamics of music, that is not to infer that my process is governed by the purely abstract. Rather, I need something more in the mix, by way of “content” – a collision with something other that provokes a question of the viewer, a conflict in which the obvious reading of discrete components is confounded, requiring fresh interpretation. **Brief Synopsis** does not completely shy away from dramatic narrative devices. Instead, it entertains them but in doing so seeks to disturb any notion of linear momentum. In this manner it aligns itself with the tenets of postdramatic theatre. Lehmann explains that:

... the adjective ‘postdramatic’ denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time ‘after’ the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre. What it does not mean is an abstract negation and mere looking away from the tradition of drama. ‘After’ drama means that it lives on as a structure – however weakened and exhausted – of the ‘normal’ theatre: as an expectation of large parts of its audience, for a foundation for many of its means of representation, as a quasi automatically working norm of its dramaturgy ... Arts in general cannot develop without reference to earlier forms. It is only a question of the level, consciousness, explicitness and special manner of reference. (2006, p.27)

And so, every moment (in music, text, action or film) of **Brief Synopsis** announces itself as a new idea / a new scene/ a fresh concept. This requires enormous energy, not only in the conceptualising and composing of the

moment, but also in the performance and reception of it. In (only) this manner it might be comparable to Rezah Abdoh's *Tight, Right, White* (1993), as described by Fuchs: 'The text was fragmented and only very loosely sequential as pieces of a tale ... each bit of action or text hit with the force of a new beginning' (1996, p.99). This drive for "new beginnings" is integral to my work. I am a composer, organising disparate elements, not seeking a particular coherence of reading but, rather, a dynamic momentum that shocks (however discreetly) the audience into discarding the events presented in any one scene, in order to embrace the next, on its own terms.

7:2 A composer's theatre

Brief Synopsis is "operatic" in that it considers the dramaturgy of music in space. It is perhaps my most thorough endeavour in ensuring that every creative component remains autonomous, able to stand on its own. The texts, photography, music, action and lit space are singular works in themselves. It is the assembling of these disparate components that I describe as "operatic", creating "a work". My choice of raw materials is not random, but certainly intuitive. I initially see, read, hear something and think "I could do something with that" or "that would create an interesting contrast with something else I have in mind". The creative process doesn't necessarily begin with much intellectual rigour. Rather, that comes with the laborious detailing of the emerging, overarching structure. My process is in dealing with how unrelated gestures "*operate*" within an abstract whole.

My work is generally made for a stage shaped by light, rather than a built set. Light, like sound, has a fragile quality that can be torn from the space. And so, accordingly, I build my work around the abstract musical notions of "fast and slow", "loud and soft". In this way **Brief Synopsis** is like a vocal or instrumental recital. Any good recital program will pay attention to some notion of dramaturgical drive. It will strive for an over-arching intellectual coherence in its disparate repertoire – its dynamic journey. My theatre works, of course, have to juggle with many more components than a recital program. They are akin to what Lehmann describes as Heiner Goebbels' 'scenic concerts':

multiform theatre pieces he [Goebbels] realizes as a composer, director, arranger and “collagist of texts” ... the interaction of complex spatial arrangements, light, video and other visual material with musical and linguistic practices such as song, recital, instrumental performance and dance ... The actual theme ... is the bringing together of different theatre languages (acting, making music, installation, light, poetry, singing, dancing, etc.) that have otherwise become disintegrated. (Lehmann 2006, p.111)

Brief Synopsis has a dismaying number of genre components and historical approaches to theatre and music in its makeup, co-existing only if they are allowed their autonomy. Consequently, they never replicate or illustrate the intentions of another. This requires the incessant tension of conflicting messages on stage. Here, I must agree with Goebbels when he says: ‘I am interested in a theatre that does not incessantly multiply signs’ (1996, p.76). I do not work toward a stripping back of content to essentials, emphasising a “sign”, but a judiciously selected superfluity of overlapping materials: a barely disguised frivolity, a Baroque exuberance that denies motivation beyond aesthetic pleasure. There are no defined, articulated pedagogic concerns appropriate to my creative processes. Indeed, in 2005, researching the musical repertoire for *The Rameau Project* in Paris with William Christie,²⁷ he assured me: “Nigel, you can do whatever you wish ... so long as it works”. This was invaluable advice from an esteemed pedagogue, as it pertained to every aspect of my work. I believe Christie was discreetly insisting that what “works” is a highly subjective notion, worthy of mention and historical discussion, but ultimately defying aesthetic analysis in the rehearsal studio.

²⁷ William Christie (b.1944) is a Paris-based American pedagogue in Baroque music practice (Paris Conservatoire), harpsichordist, conductor of *Les Arts Florissant* and member of the French *Académie des Beaux Arts*.

7:3 Deceit

Lehmann points out that, '(f)rom postclassical times to the present, theatre has gone through a series of transformations that assert the right of the disparate, partial, absurd and ugly against the postulates of unity, wholeness, reconciliation and sense' (2006, p.44). **Brief Synopsis** reflects this on-going questioning of the murky relationships inherent in the arted representations of "truth" and "beauty", "dishonesty" and the "ugly". In doing so, it exemplifies what my former colleague Chris Ryan identifies as intrinsic in my work in his observation that '[Nigel] is a very slippery character' (Hodgson 2007, p.7).²⁸ Indeed I am. Deeply embedded in "the meaning" of my work is the very nature of lying - beautifully. A collaborator (and profound influence on my critical observance of, and confidence in, personal aesthetic criteria and processes) over seven years, the Peking opera performer Xu Fengshan²⁹ constantly referred to the intangible notion of "beauty". For him it was the absolute requisite of theatre. It was an abstract, subjective concept, and yet he identified it in every detail he considered worthy of further development. Or he would quickly dismiss an idea as 'Nigel, not very beautiful.' Indeed, I recognise beauty when I see it, yet have no desire to pin it down, define or analyse it. It's the mystery that sustains my practice, be it in a turn of phrase, a melodic gesture, a smile, a determined action or a shaft of light across a darkened space. In my work this notion of "beauty" is intertwined with the mechanisms of "deceit" in that I explore performative beauty while protecting corporeal anonymity, allowing fiction (blatant lies) to flourish. Despite the meticulous attention to performance detail in **Brief Synopsis**, the performers remain mere dots in a landscape, shuffling around a gigantic space, marking their ephemeral territory, performing tasks: walking, smiling, shouting, crying, as indicated in their scripts. There is no grand display of emotional investment. A cool distance from the

²⁸ Travis Hodgson's BA Hons casebook, detailing and reflecting on the final four weeks of rehearsal, prior to production, of *Sleepers Wake! Wachet Auf!* (2007), discusses the practical integration of memory, invention and deceit in my work and creative processes, at length.

²⁹ My collaborations with Xu Fengshan have involved six weeks of intensive workshops (1993-94) leading to the devising and performing of *Orientalia* (directed by Sally Sussman, 1995), *Fright!!* (1995), *The Terror of Tosca* (1998), *Tristan* (1999) and *The Query* (directed with John Baylis, 1999).

material is maintained, everything is reduced to gestures. Vocal expression is tightly controlled, indicating little internalised emotion. Words are dry information to be interpreted by the audience, rather than by the actors. And this audience are as safely anonymous (although as central to the negotiation) as the performers.

Though I did not set out to make a work about anything in particular, I eventually interpret **Brief Synopsis** (beyond a massive architectural space inhabited by bodies, texts, music and light) as contemplating death. I cannot be sure that my audience read it as such. Indeed, my work generally ends in a rhetorical question mark. Why? What happened? Deceit is the conceit common in much of my work. Accordingly, I recall preparing to leave the stage on the final night of *This Most Wicked Body* (1994), engaging the audience on the dubious nature of “truth” in both life and theatre – a pertinent conclusion to this discussion of dilemmas inherent in **Brief Synopsis**. This self-composed diatribe liberally quoted text by Neil Bartlett (1988, pp.168-9):

You know, I'm not talking to you like this merely to ingratiate myself. It's actually very painful for me to be forced to tell the truth. I'm actually in terror of being discovered. The elegance of my diction is merely a front – anything rather than speak the truth. I sweat, I speak with revealing hysteria about the “SECRET OF LIFE” – anything but admit the truth. It must be a terrible thing for a man to discover suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing BUT the truth.

*But, this is **ART!!** I am totally uninterested in authenticity. The “SECRET OF LIFE” is to appreciate the pleasure of being terribly, terribly deceived. Insincerity is merely the means by which we multiply our personalities. I mean, does anyone of you think you could possibly summarize the daily fluctuations in your physical appearance with a single name? Well, which is it to be? As the casually dressed citizen, or perhaps as the well dressed night-clubber? Or shall it be as the naked lover, as spontaneous as the half-remembered boy? Go on, select a photograph of yourself to send to me, to introduce yourself to a total stranger. Choose from that stuffed wardrobe of all those versions of yourself acquired since that moment that you reduced yourself to zero by announcing to yourself and to the world **I AM***

Oh God, I'm tired. I think it's probably best we leave it there. (exit)

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Appendix A

Nigel Kellaway Major Full-length Productions 1981-2014

1981 FREEWAY

One Extra Company

Performer

artists: Kai Tai Chan, Julie Shanahan,

Coralie Hinkley, Silvia Jansens, Philip Punch, Ann Treager, Gary Lester, Lynn Santos, John Hannon, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

1982 THE CHEATED

One Extra Company

Performer

artists: Kai Tai Chan, Louis Nowra,

Richard Vella, Silvia Jansens, Paul Blackwell, Katie Thorpe, Julie Shanahan, Gary Lester, Mickey Furuya, Lynn Santos, Tamar Goldstein, Kerry Casey, Helen Jones, Geoff Cobham, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

ONE MAN'S RICE

One Extra Company Performer Composer

artists: Kai Tai Chan, Andris Topp, Carl

Morrow, Gary Lester, Julie Shanahan, Aku Kadoga, Richard Talonga, Percy Jacksonia, Ronaldo, Kate Champion, Geoff Cobham, Mickey Furuya, Lynn Santos, Silvia Blanco, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

1983 JACARANDA BLUE

One Extra Company Performer Composer

artists: Kai Tai Chan, David Whitney,

Richard Talonga, Peter Matthews, Julie Shanahan, Jennie Brain, Brian Harrison, Regis Lansac, Nigel Kellaway, Gary Lester; Sydney Opera House. (Toured: Melbourne, Canberra.)

THROUGH THE RED DUST

One Extra Company

Performer

artists: Kai Tai Chan, Ralf Cotteril, Mickey

Furuya, Graham Pitts, Davood Tabrisi, Nigel Kellaway; Seymour Centre, Sydney.

1984 LOOKING FOR THE BEAT

One Extra Company

Performer

artists: Richard Vella, Richard Talonga,

Don Secomb, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

THE HOUSE OF AWA

(self produced)

Performer Director

artists: Julie Shanahan, Lynn Santos, Kate Champion, Mickey Furuya, Tsukasa Furuya, Don Secomb, Kevin Woodham, Regis Lansac, Philip Norman, Jim Mann, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

1986 GIVE ME A ROSE

to show how much you care (self produced) Performer Director

artists: Nigel Kellaway, John Baylis, Matthew Serventy; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Adelaide.)

ILLUSIONS

Adelaide Festival

Performers'

Director

artists: Mike Mullins, Peter Carey, Martin Armiger, Derek Nicholson, Robert Perrier, Stephen Champion, Bruce Keller, Elizabeth Burton, Ludmilla Doneman, Nikki Heywood, John Baylis, Glenda Lum, Eamon D'Arcy, Nigel Kellaway.

FANTASTIC TOYS

Australian Dance Theatre

Director/Choreographer

Artists including: Sarah de Jong, Kim Carpenter, Lenny Westerdyk, Lisa Heaven, Csaba Buday, Tia Proposz, Phil Callaghan, Guy Detot, Kim Hales, Nigel Kellaway, Brian Harrison; Adelaide Festival Centre.

A FLOATING WORLD

Sydney Theatre Company Choreographer

artists: John Romeril, Richard Wherret, Paul Charlier, Ron Haddrick, Gary McDonald, Nigel Kellaway, Melissa Jaffer, Nigel Levings, Wayne Harrison; Sydney Opera House.

OSTRAKA

Entr'acte

Performer

artists: Pierre Thibaudeau, Elisabeth Burke, Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Matthew Serventy, Colin Offord, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space and Wharf Theatre, Sydney.

ON ARCHEOLOGY

Entr'acte

Performer

artists: Pierre Thibaudeau, Elisabeth Burke, Andrea Aloise, Nick Tsoutas, Matthew Serventy, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

1987 WALTZ

The Sydney Front Performer Director

artists: Roz Hervey, Mickey Furuya, Chris Ryan, Pierre Thibaudeau, Elisabeth Burke, Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Clare Grant, Sarah de Jong, Geoff Cobham, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

JOHN LAWS/SADE

The Sydney Front Performer Co-director

artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare Grant, Andrea Aloise, Sue-ellen Kohler, Simon Wise, Andree Greenwell, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

1988 THE PORNOGRAPHY OF**PERFORMANCE****The Sydney Front Performer Co-director**

artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare

Grant, Andrea Aloise, Sue-ellen Kohler, Elise Ahamnos, Andree Greenwell, Sarah de Jong, Geoff Cobham, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Adelaide, London, Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Amsterdam, Salzburg.)

THE BURNT WEDDING**The Sydney Front Director Performer**

created for World Expo, Brisbane.

Performers: Andrea Aloise, Nigel Kellaway, Elise Ahamnos, Clare Grant, Chris Ryan, John Baylis, Herb Robertson, Sue-ellen Kohler, Roz Hervey, Charlie Barry, Les Winspear, Nicci Wilks, Julia Rochelli, Lewis Jones. (Toured: Sydney Festival, Roskilde Denmark, Amsterdam, Salzburg.)

LAGOON PIECE**The Sydney Front Performer Co-director**

created for World Expo, Brisbane.

Performers: Andrea Aloise, Sue-ellen Kohler, Clare Grant, Chris Ryan, John Baylis, Nigel Kellaway, Elise Ahamnos. (Toured: Sydney Festival)

1989 PHOTOCOPIES OF GOD**The Sydney Front Performer Co-****director**

artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare

Grant, Andrea Aloise, Elise Ahamnos, Richard Vella, Pierre Thibaudeau, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

THE NUREMBERG RECITAL**(self produced)****Performer Director**

artists: John Baylis, Sarah de Jong,

Mickey Furuya, Simon Wise, Chris Ryan, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Perth.)

BATHTIME MANIA**Merlin International Performer Director**

Solo performance for Merlin International

Stage B, Darling Harbour, Sydney.

1990 TALES OF LOVE**Calculated Risks Opera****Performer Co-director**

artists: Richard Vella, John Baylis, Annette

Tesoriero, Peter Jenkins, Maike Kanis, Andrew Wilkie, Margie Medlin, Neil Simpson, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Perth.)

VOLCANO AND VISION**Calculated Risks Opera****Director**

artists: Rainer Linz, Paul Green, Annette

Tesoriero, Philip Dodd, Brian Hatfield, Margie Medlin, Greg White, Simon Wise, Fiona Allan, Graham Hilgendorf, Caroline Szeto, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

WOMAN IN THE WALL**(for Clare Grant)****Director**

artists: Clare Grant, Mickey Furuya, Sarah de Jong, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Auckland, NZ.)

THE TOY CART**Stalker****Director**

artists: Nigel Kellaway, Rosalind Crisp, Rachael Swain, Emily McCormick, David Clarkson, Robert Key, Michael Daly, Jo Travathan, Matthew Fargher, Nikki Raffin; Melbourne International Festival of Arts. (Toured, 1991-94, Sydney, Perth, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Bogota, Medellin, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paolo, Mar del Plata, Amsterdam, Breda, Hertogenbosh, Eindhoven, Delft, Rotterdam, Vlissingen, Arnhem, Enschede, Haarlem, Groningen, Leeuwarden, Belgrade, Bonn, Nuremburg, Wiesbaden, Dortmund, Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Saarbrücken, Braunschweig, Bremen, Kiel, Olednburg, Arhus, Helsinki, Valencia, Geneva, Zermatt, Basel, Linz, Antwerp, Brussels, London, Sheffield, Shizioka, Tokyo, Matsuyama, Nagoya.)

IDOL**Sidetrack Performance Group****Director**

artists: Jai McHenry, Regina Heilmann, Meme Thorne, Rolando Ramos, John Baylis, Peter Wells, Ian Bowie, Nigel Kellaway; Sidetrack Theatre, Sydney. (Toured: Melbourne, Canada.)

1991 DON JUAN (1st version)
director**The Sydney Front** **Performer Co-**

artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare Grant, Andrea Aloise, Elise Ahamnos, Annette Tesoriero, Raffaele Marcellino, Geoff Cobham, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

ORPHEUS**Ihos Opera****Director Performer**

composer: Constantine Koukias; Princes Wharf, Hobart.

A MATERPIECE OF TELEVISION**Sidetrack Theatre****Director**

A work developed for Contemporary Performance Week with 20 Sydney based performers. Associated artists: Peter Wells, Ian Bowie, Nigel Kellaway; Sidetrack Theatre, Sydney.

1992 DON JUAN (2nd version)**The Sydney Front****Performer Co-director**

artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare Grant, Andrea Aloise, Annette Tesoriero, Raffaele Marcellino, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Adelaide, Perth, Amsterdam, Klagenfurt, Copenhagen, Brussels, Linz, Salzburg, Dusseldorf, London, Hong Kong.)

FIRST AND LAST WARNING **The Sydney Front** **Performer Co-director**
 artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare Grant, Andrea Aloise, Simon Wise, Victoria Spence, Heidrun Lohr, Peter Wells, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

OP. CIT. **The Sydney Front** **Performer Co-director**
 artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare Grant, Andrea Aloise, Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero; Sidetrack Theatre, Sydney.

QUITE: a crisp execution
Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts **Director Performer**
 A site specific work developed with 15 Perth based performance artists utilizing the entire PICA building.
 Artists including: Nigel Kellaway, Mike Nanning.

THE TOURISTS **The Sydney Front** **Performer Co-director**
 created for the Sydney Festival.
 Performers: Andrea Aloise, Clare Grant, John Baylis, Nigel Kellaway, Chris Ryan, Yuji Sone.

1993

SKYDRIVING **Legs on the Wall** **Director**
 artists: Thor Blomfield, Beth Kayes, Brian Keogh, Bernadette Regan, Nigel Kellaway, Neil Simpson; Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

CHOUX CHOUX BAGUETTE
REMEMBERS **(self-produced)** **Performer**
 artists: Annette Tesoriero, Nigel Kellaway; Tilbury Hotel, Sydney. (Toured: Perth, Canberra, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, Hong Kong)

PORTRAIT OF AN INVISIBLE MAN (for Sarah de Jong) **Performer Director**
 artists: Sarah de Jong, Mara Kiek, Nigel Kellaway, Satsuki Odamura, David Montgomery; The Wharf, Sydney Theatre Company.

PASSION **The Sydney Front** **Performer Co-director**
 artists: John Baylis, Chris Ryan, Clare Grant, Andrea Aloise, Joel Markham, Simon Wise, Andree Greenwell, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

1994 HEAVEN Sidetrack Performance Group Choreographer
 artists: Don Mamouny, Jai McHenry,
 Regina Heilmann, Meme Thorne, Rolando Ramos, Peter Wells, John Baylis, Nigel
 Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

THIS MOST WICKED BODY (self produced) Performer Director
 artists: David Montgomery, Gay Bilson,
 Peter Oldham, Joel Markham, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space,
 Sydney.

1995 ORIENTALIA (for Sally Sussman) Performer
 artists: Sally Sussman, Andree Greenwell,
 Annemaree Dalziel, Andrea Aloise, Katia Molino, Xu Fengshan, Jiang Jijung, Bao Ping,
 Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

FRIGHT!! Sidetrack Theatre Director
 artists: Andree Greenwell, Keith Gallasch,
 Geoff Cobham, Neil Simpson, Jai McHenry, Regina Heilmann, Meme Thorne, Rolando
 Ramos, Dean Walsh, James Berlyn, Xu Fengshan, Janine Peacock, Nigel Kellaway,
 Annemaree Dalziel; Enmore Theatre, Sydney.

1996 FISH OUT OF WATER (for Deborah Pollard) Co-Director
 artists: Deborah Pollard, Joel Markham,
 Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway, Margaret Bradley, Suhandi Kosasih; Performance Space,
 Sydney.

MYSTERIES Splinters Theatre of Spectacle Co-director Performer
 artists: Knut Hamsun, Patrick Troy, Peter
 Haynes, Ivan Smith, Nigel Kellaway, Jai McHenry, David Branson, Virginia Anderson,
 Renald Nevilly, Ian Sinclair, Imogen Keens, Kaoru Alfonso, Stuart Vaskass ; Canberra
 Playhouse for the Canberra Festival.

**1997 THE SINKING OF
 THE RAINBOW WARRIOR The Song Company and AustralYSIS Director**
 artists: Colin Bright, Amanda Stewart,
 Roland Peelman, Nigel Kellaway, Annemaree Dalziel, Pierre Thibudeau, Ivan Smith,
 Kevin Davidson, Neil Simpson, Clive Birch, Jo Burton, Ruth Kilpatrick, Tyrone Landau,
 David MacKenzie, Nicole Thomson, Dean Walsh, Felice Burns, Roger Dean, Elizabeth
 Jones, Stephanie McCallum, Rob Nairn, Daryl Pratt, Ian Shanahan, Margery Smith;
 Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour Sydney, for the Sydney Festival.

**THE GEOGRAPHY OF
HAUNTED PLACES**

(for Erin Hefferon/PICA) Director

artists: Erin Hefferon, Josephine Wilson, Rob Muir, Derek Kreckler, Mike Nanning, Aadje Bruce, Mike Nanning, Nigel Kellaway; PICA, Perth. (Toured: Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Performance Space Sydney, Royal Court London, for London International Festival of Theatre)

**THE BERLIOZ our vampires
ourselves**

The opera Project Performer Director

artists: Annette Tesoriero, Dean Walsh, Keith Gallasch, Peter Wells, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney. (Toured: Hobart, Brisbane in 2001)

1998 THE TERROR OF TOSCA The opera Project

Performer Composer Director

artists: Annette Tesoriero, Jai McHenry, Regina Heilmann, Dean Walsh, Xu Fengshan, Peter Wells, Simon Wise, Annemaree Dalziel, Richard Montgomery, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

dISTRESSING THE DIVA

Stopera

Director Performer

artists: Nigel Kellaway, Vivienne Winther, Simon Aylott, Liliana Bogatka, Maria Danielle-Sette, Rachael James, Louise Morris, Jennifer Mueller, Sharon Olde, Emma Strapps, Tupe Tam-Yam, Jason-Scott Watkins, Timothy Wood, Matt Cox, Kent Forster; Street Theatre, Canberra.

THIS MOST WICKED BODY

Adelaide Festival

Performer Director

artists: Gerard Willems, Gay Bilson, Joel Markham, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Odeon Theatre, Adelaide.

1999 TRISTAN

The opera Project Performer Co-director

artists: Annette Tesoriero, Jai McHenry, Regina Heilmann, Michael Bell, Xu Fengshan, Keith Gallasch, Simon Wise, Bob Ostertag, Jane E., Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

THE QUERY

Urban Theatre Projects

Co-director

artists: Rolando Ramos, Xu Fengshan, John Baylis, Merlinda Bobis, Nick Wishart, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

2000 CROSSCUTS

Performance Space Performer coProducer

artists: Andrew Morrish, Brian Fuata, Shelley O'Donnell, Koon Fei Wong, John Gillies, Simone O'Brien, Julie-Anne Long, Simon Wise, Fiona Winning, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

2001 LITTLE GEORGE**The Song Company Co-writer Director**

artists: Clive Birch, Jo Burton, Mark

Donnelly, Ruth Kilpatrick, Paul McMahon, Nicole Thomson, Roland Peelman, Anatoly Frusin, Neil Simpson, Nigel Kellaway; Paddington Uniting Church, Sydney.

EL INOCENTE**The opera Project Performer Director**

artists: Regina Heilmann, Katia Molino,

Lynne Murray, Simon Wise, Richard Vella, Annemaree Dalziel, Paul Cordiero, Melita Rowston, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

AN INTERVIEW**WITH THE VIRTUAL GODDESS (for Rakini Devi) Director Performer**

artists: Rakini Devi, Cat Hope, Nigel

Kellaway; Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.

FA'AFINE**Urban Theatre Projects Director**

artists: Brian Fuata, Liberty Kerr, Damien

Millar, Simon Wise, Carlos Gomez, Harley Stumm, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

2002 KISS MY FIST**Performance Space Consulting Director**

artists: Brian Fuata, Hannah Furmage,

Shelley O'Donnell, Karl Velasco, Damien Millar, Gail Priest, Peter Oldham, Clytie Smith, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

ENTERTAINING PARADISE**The opera Project Performer Director**

artists: Regina Heilmann, Andrew Morrish,

Peretta Anggerek, Michael Bell, Annemaree Dalziel, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

WOMAN IN TRANSIT**(for Rakini Devi) Consulting Director**

artists: Rakini Devi, Simon Wise, Cat

Hope, Nigel Kellaway, Michelle Outram; Performance Space, Sydney.

I LOVE YOU xxx**(for Alicia Talbot) Director**

artists: Alicia Talbot, Simon Wise, Nigel

Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

2003 ANOTHER NIGHT: MEDEA**The opera Project Performer Director**

artists: Regina Heilmann, Peretta

Anggerek, Michael Bell, Nigel Ubrihien, Catherine Tabrett, Margaret Howard, Melissa Seeto, Annemaree Dalziel, Simon Wise, Michelle Outram, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

CANTATA**Stopera****Performer Director**

artists: Nigel Kellaway, Nigel Ubrihien,

Dina Panozzo, Annemaree Dalziel, Kauru Alphonso, Simon Wise, Vivienne Winther, Rebecca Collins, Judith Dodsworth, Louise Page, Peter West, Douglas Macnicol, Amar, Tara Bendall, Katherine Duhigg, Amalia Horden, Helen Duncan, Felicity Gallaher, Jane Gresham, Chris Gilbert, Philip Hartstein, Olga Haydon, Chris Nuttall, Katherine Owen, Jorian Gardner; Street Theatre, Canberra.

**2004 THE AUDIENCE AND
OTHER PSYCHOPATHS**

The opera Project Performer Director

artists: Katia Molino, Stephen Adams,

Amanda Stewart, Simon Wise, Peter Oldham, Barbara Clare, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space, Sydney.

**2005 32 SHORT SCENES
ON THE DIECHTERLIEBE**

Rosalind Crisp Collaborating Performer

artists: Rosalind Crisp, Simon Wise, Nigel

Kellaway. (created at the Center Internationale de la Danse, Paris, premiered at Performance Space, Sydney.)

2007 SINGING THE SPACE**Performance Space****Director**

artists: Amanda Stewart, Annette

Tesoriero, Timothy Chung, Catherine Tabrett, Vic Simms, Morganics, Brotha Black, Wire MC, Leichhardt Espresso Choir, Marlene Cummins, the Impact Hummers, Michelle Outram, Block Harmony, Ben Walsh Drumming Company, Clare Britton, Heidrun Lohr, Gail Priest, Simon Wise, Nicholas Wishart, Nigel Kellaway, Fiona Winning, Her Excellency Dr Marie Bashir; Performance Space at Carriageworks, Sydney.

SLEEPERS WAKE! Wachet Auf!**The opera Project****Performer Composer Director**

artists: Virginia Baxter, Jai McHenry,

Amanda Stewart, Josephine Wilson, Margaret Howard, Catherine Tabrett, Michael Bell, Simon Wise, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space at Carriageworks, Sydney.

**2009 THE RAMEAU PROJECT
Performer Composer Director**

The opera Project

artists: Nikki Heywood (replacing Regina

Heilmann), Annette Tesoriero, Bryoni Trezise, Heloise Pyne, Katrina Papallo, Catherine Upex, Steve Meyer, Ashley Kurlle, Michael Bell, Simon Wise, Dara Gill, Nigel Kellaway; Performance Space at Carriageworks, Sydney.

2011 LA CASA DI SIGNORI**Salamanca Arts Centre Co-writer Director**

artists: Marisa Mastrocola, Aaron Entresz,
Jason James, Nigel Kellaway; Peacock Theatre, Hobart.

**2013 BRIEF SYNOPSIS: a beautiful naked woman “of a certain age”
brutally stabs a young man to death**

The opera Project**Performer Composer Director**

artists: Katia Molino, Nigel Kellaway, David
Buckley, Heidrun Lohr, Richard Montgomery, Steve Meyer, Laura Moore, Catherine
Upex, Ashley Kurrle, Benjamin Au, Clytie Smith, Gary Dryza, Hans Bildstein;
Performance Space at Carriageworks, Sydney.

2014-2015 (works in development)**GLORIAS****The opera Project**

artists: Katia Molino, Nikki Heywood,
Kathy Cogill, Jiun Lim, Suki Wong, Nigel Kellaway.

PROSPERO'S BOX

artists: Annette Tesoriero, Cathie Travers,
Nigel Kellaway.

Appendix B

Biographies of principal artists contributing to *Brief Synopsis*

NIGEL KELLAWAY (actor, director and composer)

In a career embracing his skills as an actor, director, dancer, musician and contemporary performance maker, Nigel Kellaway's initial professional performance training was in music, majoring in piano and composition at the universities of Melbourne and Adelaide.

He was the first Australian actor to train with Tadashi Suzuki and his **Suzuki Company Of Toga** (1984-85) and also worked with butoh artists Min Tanaka and Kazuo Ohno in Tokyo. Over thirty-five years, he has created more than seventy full-length theatre, dance and music works with companies including **The One Extra Company**, **Sydney Theatre Company**, **Entr'acte**, **Terrapin Puppet Theatre**, **Sidetrack Performance Group**, **Legs on the Wall**, **Ihos Contemporary Opera**, the **Australian Dance Theatre**, **Stalker**, **Calculated Risks Opera Productions**, the **Song Company**, **Splinters Theatre of Spectacle**, **Urban Theatre Projects** and **Stopera** and for venues including **Performance Space** (NSW), the **Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts** (WA), **The Royal Court Theatre** (UK) and **Centre Nationale de la Danse** (France). He was a co-founder of the performance ensemble **The Sydney Front** (1987-93), touring extensively within Australia and Europe, to the UK and Hong Kong. Solo performance works include *PERFORMER* (1977), *GIVE ME A ROSE TO SHOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE* (1986), *THE NUREMBERG RECITAL* (1989), *THIS MOST WICKED BODY* (1994), a ten-day, two hundred and forty-hour performance marathon which toured to the 1998 **Telstra Adelaide Festival** and *SLEEPERS WAKE! WACHET AUF!* (2007). He has also directed solo performances for artists including Clare Grant, Deborah Pollard, Erin Hefferon, Brian Fuata, Rakini Devi, Annette Tesoriero, Marisa Mastrocola and Alicia Talbot. Over the past twenty years one focus of his work has been on contemporary music theatre. In 1997 he directed the Colin Bright/Amanda Stewart opera *THE SINKING OF THE RAINBOW WARRIOR* with the **Song Company** and **Australysis** for the **Sydney Festival** on Sydney Harbour, and in 2001 co-devised and directed *LITTLE GEORGE*, again with the **Song Company**. His collaborations with Canberra based **Stopera** have been *dISTRESSING THE DIVA* in 1998 and *CANTATA* in 2003. In 1996 he co-founded with Annette Tesoriero **The opera Project Inc.**, a loose ensemble of

actors, musicians and physical performers dedicated to the mission of reassessing "opera" (and its accoutrement) as a contemporary performance practice. Major works by the company have been *THE BERLIOZ – our vampires ourselves* (1997, toured nationally in 2001), *THE TERROR OF TOSCA* (1998), *TRISTAN* (1999), *EL INOCENTE* (2001), *ENTERTAINING PARADISE* (2002), *ANOTHER NIGHT: MEDEA* (2003), *THE AUDIENCE AND OTHER PSYCHOPATHS* (2004), *SLEEPER WAKE! WACHET AUF!* (2007) *THE RAMEAU PROJECT* (2009) and *BRIEF SYNOPSIS: a beautiful naked woman “of a certain age” brutally stabs a young man to death* (2013).

He served on the dance committee of the Australia Council from 1993-96 and in 1997 was awarded the Rex Cramphorn Theatre Scholarship by the NSW Ministry for the Arts. Kellaway has been a leader in the development of avant-garde and hybrid performance practices in Australia over the past three decades, and in 2004 was awarded a senior artist's Fellowship by the Theatre Board of the Australia Council to devote two years to his continuing research into theatrical, operatic and contemporary performance practices. Kellaway continues his role as Artistic Director of **The opera Project Inc.** and also works widely as a freelance director, performer and mentor.

KATIA MOLINO (actor) completed a Bachelor of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong. She has performed with companies including **Entr'Acte Theatre**, **Stalker**, **Theatre Kantanka**, **Marugekku**, **The opera Project**, **Urban Theatre Projects**, **Version 1.0** and **NORPA**, touring nationally and internationally. She studied for many years in Corporeal Mime with **Entr'Acte Theatre**, and travelled to Japan to train in Suzuki Actor Training with Tadashi Suzuki. With **Stalker** she conquered stilt-walking and aerial skills. With **The opera Project**, Katia has performed in *EL INOCENTE* (2000-01) and *THE AUDIENCE AND OTHER PSYCHOPATHS* (2001-04).

DAVID BUCKLEY (actor) studied at ACTT and has been part of the **stagejuice performance collective** since 2009. His physical theatre credits include **PACT Theatre's** *THE LOTUS EATERS*, Deborah Pollard's *BLUE PRINT* and **stagejuice's** production of *IN THE SHADOWS*. In 2009 he directed and produced *GALLERY* at **Shopfront Theatre for Young People** and in 2010 toured nationally with **Monkey Baa/Siren Theatre Co's** *FOX*. In 2011, he performed in Deborah Pollard's *WITHIN AND WITHOUT* and collaborated with Erica J. Brennan on *A FEAT INCOMPLETE* at **Shopfront Theatre**. He co-curated **stagejuice's** *FRESHLY SQUEEZED 2012* and in 2013 performed in **This Hour's** production of Shakespeare's *TIMON OF ATHENS*.

HEIDRUN LÖHR (photographic artist) graduated from the Institute of Photography in Munich, Germany. Over the past twenty years she has photographed the productions of many theatre and dance companies including **Belvoir St. Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Bell Shakespeare Company, Performance Space, Sydney Opera House, Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Force Majeure**, and all the work of Nigel Kellaway and **The opera Project** since 1991. She collaborates extensively with independent artists, dancers and performers, creating diverse performance works. With an Australia Council Fellowship (2009-11) and in partnership with the University of Sydney she began cataloguing her vast photographic collection creating a digital archive involving the multi media screen installation *THE ARCHIVE PROJECT – PROJECTIONS* at the Drill Hall, **Critical Path**, highlighting the achievement of a prolific and innovative contemporary dance and performance community within Australia.

STEVE MEYER ('cellist) began playing 'cello while studying flute at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and working as a flautist for **Opera Australia**. He completed a Diploma of Music in 2006 with a distinction in 'cello performance. As a chamber musician Steve regularly plays with the **Stables Quartet** and frequently appears as a flautist and 'cellist with contemporary ensemble **Halcyon**. He first performed with **The opera Project** in *THE RAMEAU PROJECT* (2009).

LAURA MOORE ('cellist) completed her Bachelor of Music Performance at the Victorian College of the Arts under the direction of Josephine Vains, also studying viola da gamba with Miriam Morris, and in masterclasses with Jordi Savall, Amie Hey, Laura Vaughan and Stanley Richie. She has participated in many ABC recordings with **Consort Eclectus, Josie and the Emeralds** and **Latitude 37**. In 2011 she participated in the Ironwood Developing Artists Program performing works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on period instruments under the direction of Rachael Beesley, Julia Fredersdorff, Nicole Forsyth, Daniel Yeadon and Neal Peres da Costa.

CATHERINE UPEX ('cellist) studied with Dorothy Sumner and Georg Pedersen obtaining her Bachelor of Music (Hons) at Sydney University in 1997. She has recorded for **2MBS FM** and **ABC FM** and performed with **The Renaissance Players, the Conservatorium Baroque Orchestra, Salút, The Sydney Consort, Lautetia, La Folia, Zarabanda, The Marais Project, the Emerald City Viols** and the **Seaven Teares Viol Consort** and with **The opera Project** in *ANOTHER NIGHT: MEDEA* (2003), *SLEEPERS WAKE! WACHET AUF!* (2006-07) and *THE RAMEAU PROJECT* (2009).

ASHLEY KURRE (double bassist) began playing at age four under the tutorage of Christine Belshaw and was a music scholar at St. Andrew's Cathedral School, Sydney. Having completed a Masters in Audio and Acoustics at the University of Sydney, Ashley is now studying Engineering, maintaining his music practice through the university's Jazz Society, Symphony Orchestra and as Director of Sydney University Music Theatre Ensemble. He first performed with **The opera Project** in *THE RAMEAU PROJECT* (2009).

BENJAMIN AU (pianist) enrolled at age six in the Junior Program of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. He won the HKPOC Rachmaninoff section in 2007, and in 2011 won the concerto section of the Sydney Eisteddfod. Since 2011 he has furthered studies at the Sydney Conservatorium with Gerard Willems, supported by the Molly McAulay Memorial Scholarship. Currently enrolled in his second Masters degree, majoring in operatic repertory and supported by the Sonja Hanke Memorial Scholarship, his concerns are in opera coaching, chamber music and historical music performance.

RICHARD MONTGOMERY's (lighting designer and production manager) principal areas of expertise are in technical production management and lighting design. He has toured nationally and internationally with artists such as Kate Champion, **Terrapin Puppet Theatre**, **La Boite**, **Gravity Feed**, **Melbourne Workers Theatre**, Ros Warby and **REM Theatre**. He has worked with companies including **Bell Shakespeare**, **Griffin Theatre**, **Sidetrack Performance Group**, **Sydney Festival** and the **City of Sydney** New Year's Eve. He was the start-up Operations Manager for **Carriageworks** in 2006 before securing his current role as Chief Operating Officer **Bundanon Trust**.

CLYTIE SMITH (stage manager and production coordinator) is a lighting designer and production manager. Her credits as lighting designer include *COPPER PROMISES* by Victoria Hunt, Scott Rankin's *BEASTY GIRL*, *TRUE*, *PURPLE DREAMS* by **Koemba Djarra**, *FATHOM* by Dean Walsh, *UNDER ATTACK*, *NEVER BEEN THIS FAR AWAY FROM HOME* and *MOUNTAINS NEVER MEET* by Martin Del Amo, *WHEN I WAS A BOY* by Stace Callaghan, *BULLY BEEF STEW* and *TOXIC DREAMS* with **PACT**. She has production managed at **PACT**, **Performance Space** and the **Ngiyaginya Festival** in Wagga Wagga (2011-12) and tour managed for **Marrugeku** and **Performing Lines**.

HANS BILDSTEIN (video artist) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich with teachers including Max Zimmermann. His career has involved furniture and interior design, scenic art for film and television, concept illustration, animation and other disciplines. Hans now produces work independently, mainly in graphics and painting, exhibiting in group and solo shows, most recently at the Sara Roney Gallery in Sydney.