

## *HOUSE OF HOMES*



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## **Theatrical Explorations of Home and Belonging**

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*Margi Brown Ash improvising with a young audience member,  
Queensland Theatre Company 2015  
Photo by Carly Komp*



*Margi Brown Ash  
Blue Room, Perth 2012  
Photo by Bev Jensen*





*Margi Brown Ash and Travis Ash in He Dreamed a Train,  
Brisbane Powerhouse 2014  
Photo by Dr. Benjamin Knapton*

## ABSTRACT

This arts-based thesis focuses on notions of mapping a home of belonging. By investigating creative ways to re-story our past, present, and future, it considers what we might do to satisfy this basic human longing and necessity. Born out of a personal need, the study could be seen as a response to the growing social problem of loneliness and anxiety throughout the Western world and, more particularly, in the arts industry.

Underpinned by a social constructionist paradigm, the research has engaged with a range of ideas and methods from Theatre, Postmodern Therapies, and the Human Potential Movement, as well as studies in Home culture and mythology. This interdisciplinary approach has been driven by my own arts practice, which was deployed to devise and stage three original performances—*Home* (2012, 2015), *Eve* (2012, 2017), and *He Dreamed a Train* (2014, 2017)—collectively entitled *The Belonging Trilogy*. These shows, generated over six years, became a way of writing new personal mythologies to create, and re-create, my own personal map of belonging in my world as a social artist. An outcome of this process was the development of the “Relational Impulse Cultural” (RIC) Process, a method that can enrich artists’ professional and personal lives.

The embodied inquiry has pioneered an artistic and therapeutic method that can be used for understanding and articulating *where* and *what* is “home” and “belonging.” While home is constantly changing, depending on who one is becoming, the dissertation details how it can be productively created through the active re-storying of Place/Space, Mythologies/Stories, and Relationships. This original framework offers a simple yet effective model of personal and professional transformation. Coupled with the RIC Process, the process moves the social

artist into a place of curiosity, vibrancy, and awareness, with an ability to push the boundaries, knowing that things constantly change. It is no longer a question of “Who am I?” or “Who are you?” but rather “Who am I becoming?” and “Who are you becoming?” Relationally, it allows for difference, diversity, and acceptance, improving the social bonds within our communities, both personally and professionally.

## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

DATE: NOVEMBER, 2017

Margi Brown Ash



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## GRATITUDE

*We're all relatively familiar with different theories of performance art such as "theatre of the oppressed" and "theatre of cruelty" and "epic theatre" and so on. What I viewed as the latest in La Boite's 2012 Indie season offering offers perhaps a new theatrical paradigm. A 'theatre of compassion', theatrical product that elucidates, highlights and draws out humanity's ability to be kind to one another, our fragility, our imaginativeness, our beauty and celebrates the way we understand our lives as stories.*  
(Downes, 2012)

One of the principles that emerged from the RIC Process (one of the major outcomes of this research) is the value of compassion and gratitude. When one embraces collaborative practice as a philosophy of living and working, then one is beholden to their workmates: theatre making is a collaborative practice, particularly when embracing what reviewer Brent Downes called a theatre of compassion, “a theatrical product that elucidates, highlights and draws out humanity’s ability to be kind to one another” (Downes, 2012).

There are many people inside the rehearsal room I wish to thank for their big-heartedness of spirit and their generosity of intellect, creativity and soulfulness.

My first gesture of gratitude must be to my life partner and father of my children, **Bill Ash**. Bill has made sure that I could take time to rehearse, reflect, and dream. He journeyed with us wherever we had to go—Egypt, Greece, Mexico—and came to rehearsals and performances every season, which I think would add up to over 300 hours of theatre viewing. I could not ask for a more supportive and loving companion.

**Assoc. Professor Leah Mercer** has been my long-term creative partner since the early 2000s, journeying with me throughout the world as we pushed boundaries and discovered things that surprised, disturbed, and delighted us. Her constancy, commitment, outstanding talent, and love of our devising processes has made her the perfect “theatre wife.” She has demonstrated that as long as we hold similar values, it doesn’t matter what happens; we will not only survive but we will thrive as a collaborative ensemble. We are now entering our 15th year together.

**Dr. Benjamin Knapton** has been part of *He Dreamed a Train* since its conception, gently guiding the rehearsal process so that we would achieve a work of art that opened hearts and minds. His consistency, loyalty, and sheer genius as director, designer, deviser, and executive producer has made the journey deliciously engaging and overwhelmingly successful.

**Travis Ash**, my youngest child, has been involved in *The Belonging Trilogy* since the beginning, in several capacities, as sound designer, musician, writer, and performer. His generosity of spirit, his enormous gifts as artist, musician, performer, and writer have made this experience life changing. His generosity knows no bounds and I will look back at this six-year experience as the most treasured performance moments of my life.

**Bev Jensen** designed and built the striking art installation for the *Home* seasons, dedicating hundreds of hours of work, creating a Perspex world, adding visual projections, fanciful props and costumes.

**Aaron Barton** designed and built two dramatic *Eve* sets for seasons 2012 and 2017, inventing an adventurous and daring playground for Eve to explore.

**Pauline Clark** of The Eve Langley Estate, who gave permission to use Eve Langley's words.

And then there are the many creatives involved *inside* the rehearsal room who provided high calibre work over an extended amount of time. They are, in no particular order:

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An exegesis does not happen in a vacuum, and I have been fortunate to have many people journey alongside me *outside* of the rehearsal room:

**David Brown**, my brother, who generously and lovingly agreed to my writing the play *He Dreamed a Train*, using the title of his book and fictionalising his journey with terminal illness.

**Micaela Ash** has been a wonderful sounding board for the last six years, helping me shape and refine this exegesis through stimulating conversations at the end of long writing days.

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## RELEVANT RESEARCH OUTPUTS FOR *THE BELONGING TRILOGY*

### 1. PUBLICATIONS:

1. *Home* (2012) by Margi Brown Ash. PlayLab: Brisbane.  
<http://www.playlab.org.au/publications/shop/home-by-margi-brown-ash-detail>
2. *Eve* (2017) by Margi Brown Ash. Forthcoming.
3. *He Dreamed a Train* (2017) by Margi Brown Ash. Forthcoming.

### 2. PROGRAMMED PRODUCTIONS:

1. *Home*: Metro Arts FreeRange Creative Development Season, 2011
2. *Home*: La Boite Independent Season, 2012
3. *Home*: Diva Series, Queensland Theatre Company, 2015
4. *Eve*: Metro Arts Independent Season, 2012
5. *Eve*: Blue Room, Perth, Independent Season, 2012
6. *Eve*: Double Bill, Brisbane Powerhouse, 2017
7. *He Dreamed a Train*: Sweet Program, Brisbane Powerhouse, 2014
8. *He Dreamed a Train*: Double Bill, Brisbane Powerhouse, 2017

### 3. INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE:

#### I. MATILDA AWARDS:

- a. Margi Brown Ash, Gold Matilda for Body of Work, *Home*, 2012, and *Eve*, 2012
- b. Nominated Best New Australian Play, *Home*, 2012
- c. Nominated Best Technical Design, *He Dreamed a Train*, 2014

- d. Nominated Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, Best Sound Design, Best Audio-Visual Design, Best Lighting Design, *He Dreamed a Train*, 2017

**II. BLUE ROOM AWARDS:**

- a. Margi Brown Ash, Member's Choice Award. Best Production, *Eve*, 2012
- b. Margi Brown Ash, Best Performance, *Eve*, 2012

**III. WINNER OF FUNDED PROFESSIONAL SEASONS:**

- a. *Home*: FreeRange Festival, Metro Arts, 2011
- b. *Home*: Independent Program, La Boite, 2012
- c. *Home*: Diva Program, Queensland Theatre Company, 2015
- d. *Eve*: Independent Program, Metro Arts, 2012
- e. *Eve*: Independent Program, Blue Room, Perth, 2012
- f. *He Dreamed a Train*: Work-in-Residence, Metro Arts, 2013
- g. *He Dreamed a Train*: *Lab Rats*, PlayLab, Brisbane, 2012
- h. *He Dreamed a Train*: SWEET Program, Brisbane Powerhouse, 2014
- i. *He Dreamed a Train* and *Eve*: Invited Guest Season at Brisbane Powerhouse, 2017

**IV. CULTURAL CHAMPION, Arts Queensland, 2014**

**V. Member of NATIONAL ARTISTIC TEAM QUEENSLAND THEATRE, 2016, 2017**

#### **4. CONFERENCE PERFORMANCES/PRESENTATIONS OF THE TRILOGY:**

- I. Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, Chicago, 2011: Presentation of a reading and participatory presentation of Home, Draft 3*
- II. Taos Institute and Houston Galveston Institute Conference, Galveston, 2011: Presentation of a reading and participatory presentation of Home, Draft 4*
- III. Theatre of the Oppressed Conference, Omaha, 2014: Presentation of a reading and participatory presentation of He Dreamed a Train, Draft 3*

## BRIEF CONTEXTUALISATION OF *THE BELONGING TRILOGY*

*The Belonging Trilogy* is a collection of three works I have written and performed: *Home* (directed by Leah Mercer), *Eve* (directed by Leah Mercer) and *He Dreamed a Train* (directed by Benjamin Knapton). Independently, these shows have won a Gold Matilda award and two Blue Room awards as well as nominations including best new Australian work, best actor, best supporting actor, best set design, best sound design and best technical design.

Each show stands alone as a unique vision of a woman tussling with her past and present in order to create a stronger sense of identity and belonging; viewed together, they create a complex and insightful vision of home and belonging in the 21st century. Performed by me and my son Travis, the works take the audience on distinctly different journeys through memory, myth, and world stories of the here-and-now with playful wit and boisterous theatricality.

### *Home:*

In this semi-autobiographical performance, audience members are transformed into guests visiting a welcoming home, where Mardi shares stories of her life and family. She blends these “ordinary” joys and tragedies with “extraordinary” stories of family and love—from the Egyptian gods Queen Isis and Osiris to everyday stories occurring around the world. This experience leaves audiences relishing and re-imagining what makes each of our stories remarkable in our understanding of belonging.

### *Eve:*

This fictional work is inspired by the experiences of author Eve Langley, chronicling her life as an artist whose journey and creative works challenge the female stereotype of the day. The brilliant, yet troubled writer was one of Australia's most original novelists, yet her prime writing years were spent locked away in a mental institution before her death in artistic isolation. Part memoir, part fiction, Eve is revealed as a woman at odds with her prescribed position; longing to be left alone to interpret the world through her beautiful prose yet yearning to be loved, to belong, and to be witnessed as the brilliant and timely female voice that she was.

### *He Dreamed a Train:*

*He Dreamed a Train* is the story of a woman and her entrepreneur brother as they face his premature death. After returning to the family's country home, The Woman is taken into a world of bittersweet imaginings and memories. Here she must re-story her narratives of belonging, to reconcile relationships and create a way forward. *He Dreamed a Train* is staged in a realistic farmhouse, which is transformed by projection mapping into a dripping palette of memory and imaginings.

# ROOM 1

## INTERACTIVE ARCHITECTURE

### 1.1 Introduction

The philosophies and thoughts contained within this thesis exist in the blurred borderlines between non-fiction and fiction — “truth and fibs; life and art” (Mardi in *Home*, p. 120).<sup>1</sup> The narrative of this thesis and its account of its contribution to knowledge is consistent with Kenneth Gergen’s vision of research, producing a form of knowledge relevant to “practices that can achieve better or more viable outcomes” (Gergen, 2015, p 281). Following Gergen’s lead,<sup>2</sup> I have attempted to move away from a more traditional form of scholarly writing in order to “explore a form of writing [and in my case also performance] that more fully embodies the relational thesis” (2009, p. xxv). I have embraced the multiple voices of my characters as well as textual and visual companions from the world of literature, visual art and research, in my relational inquiry into home and belonging, the central focus of this dissertation. I have been influenced by Terry Holbrook’s (2010) multi-genre process, outlined in “An Ability Traitor at Work: A Treasonous Call to Subvert Writing”. As a theatre maker I too endeavour to engage with a multi-genre process. Holbrook proposes that the researcher

juxtapose . . . objects and texts that diminish the role of words [and using text] not as a singular linear piece that politely builds its argument, but as an interactive . . . architecture that invites readers to move from genre to genre, from image to word, from narrator to narrator, and in and out of linearity. (Holbrook, 2010, p. 174)

Even though my intent is not to diminish the role of words, I am interested in the concept of moving away from a singular linear piece that courteously builds its argument, in order to create a robust,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this exegesis, I quote lines from the main characters (whom I play) in *The Belonging Trilogy*: Mardi in *Home*, Eve in *Eve*, and The Woman in *He Dreamed a Train*. The page numbers refer to those given in this exegesis.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Gergen is regarded by many as the grandfather of social constructionism and was one of my most influential mentors. Gergen believes that “traditional scholarly writing also carries with it strong traces of the individualist tradition. It is a genre that separates the knowing author from the ignorant reader; it positions the author as the owner of his or her own ideas; it often portrays the author as one whose mind is fully coherent, confident and conflict free. . . Yet, one’s form of writing is also a medium that carries a message, and in the present work it is a message that undermines the relational thesis I wish to advance” (Gergen, 2009, p. xxv). I believe that if I were to write in a more traditional tone, my message would also be undermined: this is a relational thesis and I wish to convey my findings using a relational tone.

multi-genre collaborative interrogation of home and belonging. Holbrook's method of using recursive, non-linear, and interactive compositions makes for generative work. Her proposition also describes what we strive to adhere to in contemporary performance making, implementing hybridity (in this case theatre and therapy), fragmentation, intertextuality (the interrelationship of the multiple texts within the work) and collaboration (Gattenhof, 2004). I borrow these tactics and approach my subject matter non-linearly, employing a multiplicity of stories that echo each other at various times, engaging with multiple myths and various art forms such as visual art hangings, audio visual interpretations and original music to explore what it means to belong. I engage with the numerous and varied roles I perform—that of woman, mother, wife, sister, contemporary performer and constructionist postmodern therapist<sup>3</sup>—with a robust commitment to creating works that inspire, entertain, and at the same time support positive change in our world <sup>4</sup>.

This thesis brings together both performative and therapeutic insights into the creation and performance of three stories questioning and exploring the concept of home and belonging. The perceptions and understandings that have emerged from this practice-led research have resulted in the performative outcome of *The Belonging Trilogy*, which comprises *Home* (with protagonist Mardi), *Eve* (with protagonist Eve), and *He Dreamed a Train* (with protagonist The Woman) with seven professional seasons and an arts-based therapeutic practice, Relational Impulse Cultural (RIC) Method, a transformative process for artists and others who wish to embrace a more generative approach to living well.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Harlene Anderson there are seven assumptions that make up the “postmodern tapestry” with regards therapy. The postmodern therapist maintains scepticism, moves away from generalisations, holds knowledge as an interactive social process, privileges local knowledge, believes language is active and creative not “static and representational”. Knowledge and language are transformational and postmodernism is but one narrative (Anderson, 2013, p.300). These assumptions wed well with my contemporary performance framework.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this exegesis, I use a softer tone, what we call in the therapy room a more tentative approach, using words such as “perhaps,” “what if,” “sometimes,” rather than direct statements of knowing. This is due to my constructionist philosophical stance, which holds firm to the belief that there is no one truth and therefore what I am saying is not necessarily true for the reader.



Part 1 of Room 1 summarises the interactive architecture of the exegesis, a performative research framework that explores knowledge-making through writing, performance and through three independent characters. I discuss the background of the research and how it first began in the world of therapy before moving into the embodied world of theatre. The performative works are grounded in traditional storytelling with contemporary configurations, as a means of interrogating, communicating and finally understanding what home and belonging can become. Part 2 considers some of the therapeutic influences and processes that have guided the evolution of the work. Part 3 clarifies the structure and narrative of the exegesis.

## **1.2 Part 1: A Performative Research Framework**

My opening lines in *Home* establish the premise of *The Belonging Trilogy*, though I was not cognisant of this at the time of writing them:

Who shall tell the story?  
And what story shall we tell?  
I'd like to tell a story (and it could be your story)  
that continues even when we walk away from this place  
so that we  
question,  
dance, and  
live to the point of tears.  
(Camus said that, I think.)

I will perform for you so that the extraordinariness of my ordinary life can be uncovered.  
I will perform my past and dream on its potential.  
I will invite some of you to join me.  
And what I will tell you is fact and it is fiction;  
truth and fibs; life and art.

(Mardi in *Home*, 2015, p. 120)

As I have been a professional actor/writer for 40 years, a performative way of creating knowledge is my default position: I communicate knowledge through doing rather than writing about what I did. Such a performative approach to research is becoming more widespread and popular in the 21st

century. Many disciplines have struggled with what social scientists Kitrina Douglas and David Carless (2013, p. 53) have labelled the missing “spirit” of research, the intangible quality that embraces what is unsaid, the voices that are lost, the complexities of relationships as well as the colour and movement of the research experience. Ethnographer Arthur Bochner (1997) endeavoured to rectify this once he recognised that his academic life was far removed from his lived experience. Upon hearing of the death of his father just before presenting at a national conference, Bochner suddenly realised that his two worlds had collided and he “was stunned to learn how tame the academic world [wa]s in comparison to the wilderness of lived experience” (1997, p. 421). He saw that the life of theory was removed from the life of experience, causing a sense of disconnectedness, so he gave himself the challenge to stop covering “the details of individual experience beneath a blanket of professional jargon” (p. 423). I have taken note of Bochner’s realisation, aiming to embrace a world of inquiry that integrates my academic self with my personal selves (Bochner, 1997, p. 424). Dancer Tami Spry (2011a) has written about integrating her academic self with her artist self, her unstated ideas “written from the body changes the body and vice versa; what is performed turns back on itself changing word and body” (p. 411). Spry performs her ideas; she gives an account of herself. Gender theorist Judith Butler suggested that it takes a provocation from another before we “start to narrate ourselves, or find that, for urgent reasons, we must become self-narrating beings . . . I begin my story of myself only in the face of a ‘you’ who asks me to give an account” (Butler, 2005, p. 11).

As a PhD candidate, I have been asked “to give an account” (Butler, 2005, p. 11) of my research process and outcomes, and I have chosen to do so through playmaking, performance, and writing. I have illuminated issues of home and belonging by grounding the exploration in poetic text,

metaphor, and myth. I have become a “self-narrating” being, articulating three stories that make up *The Belonging Trilogy*.<sup>5</sup>

Rebecca Solnit stated that not only do we tell stories but that stories tell us:

too often, stories saddle us, ride us, whip us onward, tell us what to do, and we do it without questioning. The task of learning to be free requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them, and then become a story-teller. (2013, p. 4)

I was driven to re-author my stories that “tell [me] . . . what to do”, those taken-for-granted stories of motherhood, housewife, and actor. Social constructionist philosophy helped me ask the right questions, to name the invisible discourses and then re-author the story, “the task of learning to be free” (Solnit, 2013, p. 4).

### **1.2.1 Performative Researcher**

I am in the profession of performing stories because I believe that stories have the power change how we are in the world.<sup>6</sup> By performing my research (as shown on the videos), as opposed to only presenting my scripts as data, one of my objectives for this exegesis is to make overt the spaces that sit around the performer’s words and body; acts that were not spoken out loud or written down, but can be observed and inhabited. These spaces, redolent with emotions and ideas, resonated in the space between actor and audience.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I have provided links to the video archives of the three plays in Rooms 4, 5, and 6. I feel, however, that the experience of watching the videos (two-dimensional) is a diminished one in comparison to watching the shows live (three-dimensional); however, the terrain dictates it.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, I am not alone in this. Gottschall (2012) tells the story of Greek philosopher Plato (as does Eve in *Eve*), who “banished poets and storytellers from his ideal republic for, among other sins, peddling immoral fare . . . But Plato was wrong. Fiction virtually always puts us in a position to judge wrong doing . . .” (p. 130). “Story—the sacred and profound—is perhaps the main cohering force in human life” (p. 138).

<sup>7</sup> This was evidenced by feedback from an audience member at a 2015 performance of *Home*, where they commented: “Your story is our story, is my story is their story. You wove your story into my heart, touching the connections and spaces between my life and yours. You were my mirror and my shadow, and you inspired me to grasp life a little more strongly, obtusely and uniquely” (Appendix 7). Throughout the exegesis (usually in the footnotes), I have quoted audience members’ responses to the performances. These responses were written after the shows, either on paper provided or expressed to me via email. All comments have been de-identified and are included in Appendix 7. While purely anecdotal, these comments are useful guides to how the plays were received.

These intangible qualities seem to be the attributes that Bochner (1997), and Douglas and Carless (2013) thought to be sometimes missing from much research. Performative research can inspire, contextualise, and embody the stories being told and in so doing connect in multiple ways to the audience. Just as the shaman<sup>8</sup> bridges the gap between soul and earth, so the performer journeys on behalf of their audience, towards an embodied, emotional, and empathic understanding of what it is to be human. For this to happen, the performer/writer is required to delve into their own depths of experience and understanding, withdrawing from their everyday life for months in their efforts to deconstruct and reconstruct their emerging story. They then return to the theatre to share the work, hoping that through the ritual of what could be called a pilgrimage,<sup>9</sup> they will be able to awaken within their audience new meaning.

### 1.2.2 Exegesis

This exegesis discusses my performances *Home*, *Eve*, and *He Dreamed a Train* (in-text references to the latter will be as *Dream*) in an effort to understand what it means to map one's own home of belonging despite ruptures, social obstacles, and self-limiting beliefs. I also detail the evolution of my training in the Relational Impulse Cultural (RIC) Method in Room 7. This training grew out of the six years of research, moving from what was initially called *ImpulseTraining* in my Master's research (Brown Ash 2009)<sup>10</sup> to a cogent and user-friendly mapping tool for the artist's enrichment.

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<sup>8</sup> I discuss the shaman in *He Dreamed a Train* in Room 6.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss pilgrimages in Room 2.

<sup>10</sup> This doctoral research is a continuation of my Master's research, centred around growing a more developed and inclusive approach of working with artists, as well as writing/performing my own scripts .

### 1.2.3 Emerging Questions

This research is about *re-creating* one's map of home and belonging<sup>11</sup>, incorporating the constant ruptures that occur throughout life. To do this, I needed to go beyond my habitual world and enter the world of the unknown by asking the following questions:

1. How do we pay attention to what we don't know we know?

I often use this question in the rehearsal studio, and it is one borrowed from my creative arts therapy lecturer Dr. Warren Lett. Richard Rohr, in his book *Falling Upward*, called this "the task within the task" (2011, Introduction, para. 3). The first half of life, Rohr suggested, is spent "discovering the script, and the second half . . . actually writing it and owning it" (2011, The Invitation to a Further Journey, para. 10).

2. What are we really doing when we are doing what we are doing?

Rohr recommended that we ask ourselves this question in order to understand our impact on others (Rohr, 2011, Introduction, para. 3).

Asking myself these two questions led to introspection, the first step towards understanding the notions of home and belonging. Throughout the years of research (and throughout this thesis) more questions arose, questions including "What is fact, what is fiction, what is truth, what is fibs, what is life, what is art?" (asked by me through characters Mardi and Eve), "What if we were socially constructed?" (p.35), "Can art actually make home?" (p. 60), "How do I belong in this ever-changing world?" (p. 73), "What myth am I living?" (p. 79), "How can I understand belonging if I do not have a deep understanding of what it is not to belong?" (p.95), "How do I remain my best self and at the same time create art, as well as attending to the pressing needs of nurturing and supporting my family?" (p. 207), "What did Eve's tension between mother/wife/ and artist/writer mean regards to creating a map of belonging? What can I learn from this exploration of Eve's bounded self (p. 209),

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<sup>11</sup> The emphasis here is the act of *re-creating*, rather than *searching for* or *discovering* home, in line with my postmodern therapeutic stance advocating self-agency: we have the capacity to change our own stories once we have had the opportunity to see things differently, hear things differently and think about them differently.

“How can I even pretend to understand what it is to belong when it is so easily ruptured by illness, death and dying?” (p. 8). My method was to constantly question facts, fiction, truth and fibs in my articulation of what it means to belong, simply summed up in the question “What is home and belonging and how do I create it?”

#### **1.2.4 Writing the Self through Performance**

According to Sarah Bakewell (2011), 16th-century French philosopher Montaigne was the first person on record to have written about himself “doing what he was doing.” Unlike his male contemporaries who preferred to record their greatest achievements and the history of the day, Montaigne’s writings were more of a “free-floating” exploration (Bakewell, 2011, Chapter 1, para. 5) that focused on ways of living in the world. He wrote about what he did moment by moment, day by day. Similarly, through my research, I endeavoured to focus on ordinary ways of being in the world through the eyes of three different characters, Mardi, Eve, and The Woman. It was the ordinariness of the everyday that connected with the audience; as the Queensland Theatre Company noted on its website “She blends these ‘ordinary’ joys and tragedies with ‘extraordinary’ stories of family and love. This experience will leave you relishing and re-imaging what makes each of our stories remarkable” (Appendix 1).

I wrote, produced, and performed in these plays after multiple creative developments, several of them in USA and Mexico. From 2012 to 2017, I engaged in seven professional performance seasons in Australia, in either Brisbane or Perth. *Home* was published by PlayLab (2012) and there is an upcoming publication in 2018 of *The Belonging Trilogy* (PlayLab Press). These three free-floating plays stand alone, yet are firmly connected to my central question of the notions of home and belonging.



In the iconic book *The Newly Born Woman*, French philosopher Catherine Clément described her co-writer Hélène Cixous's writing as "a writing halfway between theory and fiction" (Cixous & Clément, 1996, p. xi). I chose to inhabit this halfway landscape as I unpacked, indwelled,<sup>12</sup> created and wrote about the works. For all three scripts, I began with collage,<sup>13</sup> moving into creative writing, then into embodied performance, and back again, always grappling with the questions mentioned before, "How do we pay attention to what we don't know we know? What are we really doing when we are doing what we are doing?" Moreover, another question continued to emerge in all three plays and became a central motif, repeated several times, in various ways, in both *Home* and *Dream*: "What is fact, what is fiction, what is truth, what is fibs, what is life, what is art?" (*Dream*, 2017, p. 239). In *Eve*, the question was more insistent, "Fact or fiction?" and was repeated several times throughout the script, reminding the *Eve* audience that the two could not be separated.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.2.5 The Background Story of the Research

According to writer Carolyn Heilbrun, Eve said to Adam "My dear, we are in a state of transition" (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 3). It was this transitional state, a most liminal space/place, that I found myself at the beginning of this research process; indeed, I was experiencing radical personal change. I was engaging with a contemporary performance framework<sup>15</sup> in an under-resourced and risk-adverse society that saw theatre as entertainment rather than a vehicle of change. I participated in a theatre

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<sup>12</sup> "Indwell" is a word used in creative arts therapy and also in our rehearsal room, where we stay a while, take time to think through a thought, not trying to solve anything, just allowing it to float to the surface when the time comes. Sometimes a slow process, it is always a rich and transformative one.

<sup>13</sup> This writing process, beginning with collage, moving into creative writing, then onto the floor to embody the ideas, became part of the rehearsal ritual and is an important element of the RIC Process. This is expanded upon in Room 7.

<sup>14</sup> Joy Thwaite (1989) wrote an excellent biography of the novelist and poet Eve Langley. Thwaite inferred that Langley had been diagnosed as a schizophrenic at Auckland Mental Hospital; however, there were never any hospital records to suggest this. Fact or fiction? My position stood on the side of caution: Eve Langley was eccentric, not mad. In the performance, I use Eve Langley's own words to state this fact: "My madness as they call it, seems to me to be a logical solution to my living arrangements" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 184).

<sup>15</sup> Contemporary performance's aim is to dissolve the hierarchies in the artistic field and embrace a range of characteristics including appropriation, fragmentation, intertextuality, collaboration, hybridisation, site-specificity, the use of non-linear narrative and visual and non-text based performance (Gattenhof, 2004).

industry that was blissfully unaware of gender inequity,<sup>16</sup> and, moreover, was part of a society where women were, after a certain age, “invisibilised.” In the world of therapy, I was practicing as a postmodern collaborative therapist in a culture that supported a modernist, medical model approach to health. Furthermore, I was experiencing shifting family dynamics, with my four children reaching maturity and leaving Brisbane to pursue studies and careers. At the same time, my husband was beginning his transition out of the structure of corporate life into his own coaching business. Finally, I was slowly becoming aware of being part of a gerascophobic world (*geras* meaning old age, and *phobos* meaning fear), and I saw my contemporaries engaging in all sorts of procedures to slow down the ageing process. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, ageism can “be found in almost every sphere of public life. It doesn’t just exist—it thrives. Disturbingly, unlike other forms of discrimination, age discrimination and ageism don’t yet seem to be at the point of being stigmatized” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p. 3).

Due to these multiple challenges, I stood in liminal territory, an unsteady and uncertain place of not knowing. Victor Turner defined the liminal as “neither here nor there . . . betwixt and between” (Turner, 2008, p. 95), while Heilbrun suggested that “the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing or wants to be doing” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 3). I waited in this territory of liminality for a few years, engaging in postgraduate degrees (both in therapy and in performance) in order to question the what, the where, the when, the how, and the why. As I observed in my journal at the time, “Time after time, year after year, she wrapped each question carefully and very gently placed them into her book, and then placed the book behind her biggest front tooth . . . ‘it’s safe there’ she thought. Always ready . . .” (author’s journal entry, 2010).

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<sup>16</sup> This is changing, but slowly. In 2015, I co-founded Women in Theatre Bridge Club, a group of capable Brisbane women artists who work towards changing gender inequity in Brisbane theatre. Also, it is clear that the programming of the theatre companies in Australia in 2017 and 2018 now incorporate more stories about women, rather than only stories about men or women’s relationships with men, and there is an attempt at equity in directing and writing roles.

### 1.2.6 Stretching while Waiting

In her innovative book, *“Stretching” Exercises for Qualitative Researchers* (2010), Valerie Janesick discussed the need for accessing the intuitive side of the researcher in their search for knowledge, and she proposes many exercises to help the researcher. I found her suggestions helped me incorporate my artist self with my academic self. I began by re-reading inspirational books. I studied Ray Soulard’s edition of *Rilke’s Letters to a Young Poet* (2001), noting what Rilke said about patience: “Be patient . . . and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue . . . Live the question now perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer” (2001, p. 14).

My writing journey required self-discipline and courage; as Ann Lamott suggested, “To participate [in the writing world] requires self-discipline and trust and courage, because this business of becoming conscious . . . is ultimately about asking yourself ‘how alive am I willing to be?’” (Lamott, 2007, p. 236). I was aware that I needed to look *into*, not just *at*, my life as performer/therapist,<sup>17</sup> mother, wife, crone, daughter, sibling (author’s ‘grey journal’, June 2010) in order to become conscious of own vulnerability and, by doing so, challenge my own sense of aliveness and what that means in relation to home and belonging.

### 1.2.7 Collaborating from Afar

As a performer, I was aware of the generative and transformative power of collaborative practice. As a postmodern therapist<sup>18</sup> I was also aware of how impactful collaborative ways of working can be

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<sup>17</sup> I was not interested in writing a linear autobiography; rather, I wanted to interrogate transitional moments that had the greatest impact on who I was becoming, initially as therapist, then as performer, and finally as both.

<sup>18</sup> A postmodern therapist embraces a collaborative approach to the therapy session, helping the client deconstruct the presenting problem story, providing the opportunity to re-story and reinvent their lives. According to leading researcher and collaborative therapist Harlene Anderson there are seven assumptions that make up the ‘postmodern tapestry’ with regards therapy: the postmodern therapist maintains scepticism, moves away from generalisations, holds knowledge as an

when deconstructing behaviours and ideas. Very early in the formation of my ideas or “hunches,” I collaborated with a Taos<sup>19</sup> colleague in New York City, Dr. Saliha Bava, allowing the words to flow in an effort to understand what was wanting to come to the surface. I asked her:

What if my research was about “The researcher’s vulnerable self: ways of communicating personal stories as an example of a journey into self-knowing?” or “What can performance do to enlighten and enrich my journey of elder, artist, counsellor?” (author’s journal, February 11, 2011)

As I look back after several years of research, I am cognisant of how these questions have gradually permeated my inquiry cycles, the multiple selves of the author, the essential vulnerability of the process, the awareness of ageing and creativity, and the importance of staying fully engaged and aware.

A month later, I wrote to Saliha:

Perhaps I could devise performances with multiple lenses, dialogues that keep changing, multiple selves and potent space between...  
Perhaps I choose to perform several famous psychologists . . . Freud, Jung, Erikson, **I don’t know** . . . Perhaps out of these fractured performances I get to understand how language works; perhaps I will understand more about how we are constructed. (e-mail correspondence, March 15, 2011)

The final production of *Home* was a bricolage of performance moments where I came to an understanding of how language works and how powerful it is. Otta Ness and Tom Strong (2014) have described how conversational practices—i.e., using language in particular ways—brings significant meaning to the fore. It was the collaborative conversations that my director Leah Mercer and I engaged in when rehearsing *Home* that contributed to significant discoveries in the rehearsal

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‘interactive social process’, privileges local knowledge, believes language is active and creative, not ‘static and representational’ and finally postmodernism is but one of many narratives (Anderson, 2013, p. 300 in Bray & Stanton, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Taos Institute, based in the USA, is a leading organisation that focuses on constructionist, collaborative, and appreciative ways of being in the world. I became a Taos Associate in 2012.

room: a “yes and”<sup>20</sup> approach. This was also my process with Ben Knapton, director of *He Dreamed a Train*. Each inquiry cycle of the process presented new challenges, alerting me to the importance of committing to generative “languageing”<sup>21</sup> as we developed the shows.

In my final correspondence with Saliha, I wrote: “This [research] is a journey of ‘coming home’: my last-ditch effort to find a fit between the performer in me (who has played for over 40 years) and the therapist who is still an adolescent (10 years)” (e-mail correspondence, April 2011).

I wrote about how I hoped to facilitate workshops that explored therapeutic creativity. I had already set up a monthly class called “Supervision for Artists”—five sessions of two hours—in order to test postmodern therapeutic frames within the acting studio. I thought my PhD data would be these workshops. However, as is usually the case with practice-led research, there was a shift in direction due to becoming more politicised within my theatre community where inequality was more overt than in my therapeutic community. I noticed that my focus was turning to gender dynamics. As I recorded my daily experiences in my journal, prompted by Janesick’s (2010, p. 96) suggestion to notice and reflect on what she called “mini dialogues with the self,” I wrote

Why is the female voice not valued like the male voice? To be silenced or to speak out . . . this was the polarity that I played with . . . I chose to use the voices of my characters to speak, characters that had a profound effect on me . . . (author’s ‘writer’s block’ journal, June 16, 2010)

In this journal entry, I talked about silencing, and one of the very last lines in *The Belonging Trilogy* states “I will no longer be silent. I step off the stage . . . I walk away” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 254). It seems that the re-mapping of The Woman’s journey had begun years before, and it took the trilogy pilgrimage to clarify the way forward.

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<sup>20</sup> “Yes and” is an important tool in the RIC rehearsal room. It avoids blocking any suggestions; it doesn’t shut down the offer or the person making the offer; it encourages participation; and it grows the idea into something else.

<sup>21</sup> The importance and power of language is discussed in Room 2. The power of language is also interrogated in Room 7.

### 1.2.8 An Emerging Map of My Creative Practice

How creative work evolves is invariably complicated. Because this research took place over a substantial amount of time, questions and ideas kept changing. While I was not sure if the research was to be located in the world of therapy using performance or if it was to be located in performance using therapeutic framework, I was clear about my motive. In Man Booker Prize–winner David Grossman’s *Writing in the Dark*, a book I read at the beginning of this research while on a pilgrimage to Israel, the author discusses the necessity of stripping away defensiveness, security, and protection in order to write the way he needed to (Grossman, 2008), reinforcing Lamott’s earlier provocation, “How alive am I willing to be?” I decided to allow myself to love the questions, as Rilke suggested, without the protection of knowing. At least for a while. Even though I was holding tightly onto Rilke’s advice, everywhere I turned was a pile of books (“books growing like stalagmites, from floor to ceiling, they are my walls” [*Home*, 2015, p. 131]) filled with concepts to be considered. For example, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* reminded me of how asleep we can be:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (Eliot, 2013, p. 135)

As I examined, explored, and reflected on the trilogy, I became aware of Eliot’s “silence.” I needed to wake up.

### 1.2.9 Storyteller as Researcher

A storyteller’s task is to share stories that connect and delight, awakening what one audience member of *Home* called “a gift” within the listener. Her anecdotal comment highlighted the significance and impact of stories: “You have re-emphasised the beauty and importance of stories and their universal gift,” she wrote, “Everyone who has experienced this work has been given a gift of varying shape



and content; but undoubtably [*sic*] a gift filled with love” (audience member, viewing of *Home*, 2015, Appendix 7).

The theatre performer’s role is to present a story to their audience, one that may not even relate to them overtly, but that on a crucial and soulful level will enliven and awaken something, somewhere, and the audience leaves the theatre with more options for awakened lives.<sup>22</sup> The narrative therapist’s role (as a storyteller of sorts) is quite similar. In collaboration with their client, there is an unpacking and re-authoring of stories to empower and generate new ways of being in the world. Initially when creating *Home*, I wondered if I was to be a performer who embraces a therapeutic framework or a therapist who performs? As the years progressed, this distinction didn’t seem as important.

### **1.2.10 Two Worlds Side by Side**

The two worlds of therapy and of performance coalesced in spite of themselves. Reviews of *Home* (see Appendix 2) did not describe it as therapeutic, but talked about the healing experience of seeing and participating in the play:

... a piece of theatre that comforts and reassures us, because Margi Brown Ash has proved Thomas Wolfe wrong—you can go home again, because home is here and now, wherever love is ... (Cotes, 2012)

We literally hold hands with the performer and the message is powerful. “Your story is my story,” is the continually echoed peace anthem of the show (Burton, 2012)

Tears of joy. Tears of sadness. Tears of empathy tears of understanding. The beauty of your words touched deep inside me your story is partly my story thank you for the inspiration (audience member, viewing of *Home*, 2015)

... theatre of compassion (Downes, 2012)

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<sup>22</sup> Another audience comment after seeing *Home* supports this: “Your story is our story, is my story, is their story. You wove your story into my heart, touching the connections and spaces between my life and yours. You were my mirror and my shadow and you inspired me to grasp life a little more strongly, obtusely and uniquely” (audience member, viewing of *Home*, 2015, Appendix 7).

I finally got what I came for. Thank you for making me feel connect and engage [*sic*]. I know it means something deep in my heart but I can't put it into words yet. Thank you for your vulnerability. (audience member, viewing of *Home*, 2015)

### 1.2.11 Connectedness, Storytelling, and Ritual in *Home*

In *Home*, Mardi as storyteller begins by walking into the theatre as if part of the audience, greeting individual audience members with “So glad you could come,” and inviting people to feel as though they belonged, at least for a while.<sup>23</sup> After a short time, she says to the audience “Let’s begin, shall we?” As Mardi, I step onto the stage area and call out to the musician<sup>24</sup> who is playing the piano: “Hi Trav, I’m home.” Slowly and deliberately, I perform an opening ritual<sup>25</sup> at a steady pace. I place my clear Perspex suitcase on the Perspex table, open it, take out a folded piece of cardboard that transforms into a paper house, light a small candle, place it inside the house, place the paper house on a floating piece of Perspex above me, consider my audience, and begin. In the first few minutes of the *Home* performance, I set up the value of connection, the significance of storytelling (in this case, the story of Queen Isis, one of the most powerful goddesses of Egyptian mythology), and the importance of ritual. All three of these elements are enhanced by the anecdote from Camus, who urges us to live a deeper, more vibrant life.<sup>26</sup> These crucial elements—connectedness, the significance of sharing stories, ritual, and a willingness to be vulnerable—would become the vital elements of re-mapping one’s home of belonging.

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<sup>23</sup> This same technique, of overtly inviting people to feel they could belong, at least for now, is one of the tools of RIC, with the facilitator coaching from the side lines. I attended Deborah Hay’s workshop in Denmark during 2005, where the provocation “What if this was where you belong?” was used throughout the coaching session (author’s notes).

<sup>24</sup> Travis Ash is my fourth child and performs both as musician and actor in all three plays as well as writing his own monologues.

<sup>25</sup> Rituals became very important in the performance, and consequently became an elemental part of the RIC Process. See Room 7 (and Appendix 4).

<sup>26</sup> Thus far in this thesis, I have quoted three different authors (Lamott, Grossman, and now Camus) who have encouraged me to embrace vulnerable ways of being, the very lesson that Queen Isis teaches Mardi in *Home*, and the essence of belonging, something I would find out by the end of the study.

### 1.2.12 Tension in *Eve*

I wrote *Eve*, which is inspired by the Australian novelist Eve Langley, initially out of a personal need. I wanted to understand Eve's sense of belonging and her artist self in relation to her role as a mother because I was battling the same tension every day, as were some of my friends. Eve bluntly tells her audience that she and her husband have "created intricate rituals to keep the children contained so that we can work" (*Eve*, p. 192). She promptly places the pram outside the door and locks herself inside. Eve confides in her audience:

We managed for quite some time; even with the pressures of marriage and children, we still managed, sometimes, to work.  
Yet, every day, peevish and sullen words would fling themselves across the hut:  
"You're bloody grumpy when you can't paint, husband."  
"So are you when you can't write, wife."  
"Am I the obstacle to your most precious work?"  
Knowing full well that he and the children were mine.  
Poetry is not welcome in this house full of peevish men. (*Eve*, 2017, p. 195)

It seems, in Eve's case, that there are no apparent solutions to her mounting torment. With no available help, a "semi-detached husband . . . [who] lives alone, in town, with another" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 197), and no friends to call on, Eve is isolated and alone in her hut. "The deserted-house feeling comes over me" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 199). She knows about rituals; however, the rituals she chooses are not suitable for her circumstances. The same applies with her adopted stories. Her story about Oscar Wilde, whom she imagines herself to be when things get tough, empowers her as an artist but not as a mother and certainly not as a "domestic-self." Eve is alone, whereas in *Home*, Mardi draws around her a community of like-minded people (overtly demonstrated by inviting 14 members of the audience up on stage to perform with her); engages in meaningful ritual; and is guided and inspired by the re-storying of the great myth of Queen Isis.

### 1.2.13 Silencing Dreams in *He Dreamed a Train*

Performance can offer the artist surprising opportunities of insight while engaging with metaphor, ritual, poetics, and movement. Emily Dickinson proposed a distinctive approach: "Tell all the truth

but tell it slant—success in circuit lies” (Dickinson, 1999, p. 494). I heeded this advice as I began to write *He Dreamed a Train*, a challenging play about a demanding topic. Initially, I was writing it as a way of coming to terms with my brother’s terminal illness. As a creative arts therapist, I was aware of the therapeutic benefits of writing, providing a compelling path towards self-knowing (Bolton, Field, & Thompson, 2006). I also knew that this was a meaningful topic that was applicable to everyone at some time of their lives. However, despite my desire for the play to be about my brother, as my director and I worked on the floor, I was taken in another direction, something that is commonplace in practice-led research. I ended up exploring the overwhelming pattern of silence within families, what the character of The Woman refers to as a big hole: “a big bloody hole that sits in the centre of our living room that I used to own” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 243). A problem more often solved in the therapy room than on stage, silence is, according to Rebecca Solnit (2017)

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...the ocean of the unsaid, the unspeakable, the repressed, the erased, the unheard. It surrounds the scattered islands made up of those allowed to speak and of what can be said and who listens. Silence occurs in many ways for many reasons; each of us has his or her own sea of unspoken words. (Solnit, 2017, Chapter 1, para. 1)

This exegesis is perhaps my sea of words, an opportunity to write my way to new meaning of belonging. As I worked through the script writing, the productions, and the reflections, I realised how often the therapist in me emerged.

### **1.3 Part 2: Discovering Therapeutic Developments within the Work**

Throughout the years of creating, I noticed there were therapeutic constructs that presented themselves quietly at first, but, once perceived, became part of the research foundation. These included the value of hosting each other within the collaborative relationship; a developing awareness of the impact of gender bias; the consequences of constructing a personal mythology; and, finally, a conscious understanding of my responsibility regarding the impact of the work on audience members.

A surprising outcome presented itself as the rehearsal period progressed, one that emerged slowly at first, building on the outcome of my Master of Arts, *ImpulseTraining* (Brown Ash, 2009), and moving into a discrete rehearsal protocol that empowered the actor's ability to contribute to their own and other people's home of belonging. Below is a brief summary of these therapeutic contributions to the working process, which will be expanded on throughout the exegesis.

### **1.3.1 An Enriched Collaborative Relationship**

I first met Harlene Anderson, co-creator of Collaborative Therapies, at her International Summer Institute Conference in Mexico in 2010. I had studied and applied her collaborative practice work during my Master of Counselling and in my own arts counselling studio, but there was a major difference between learning the theory and sitting with her, hearing the tone of her voice and her selective use of language, as well as watching her carefully chosen yet relaxed body language. Anderson reinforces the idea of hosting her client. She talks about the hosting metaphor, clarifying the *interactivity* of it by introducing the concept of The Story Ball (Anderson, 2007, p. 47). The Story Ball is a compressed make-believe ball made up of all the stories that impact a client's life. The client invites the therapist to listen and explore the story. The ball continuously passes between client and therapist as they explore the emerging stories together <sup>27</sup>.

On reflection, I realised that as I wrote *Home*, I used the concept of the story ball in two ways: firstly, with my director, as we grew the *Home* stories; and, secondly, with my audience. My audience and I held the story ball together, tentatively, slowly, respectfully. Through my hosting of the audience and exchanging stories with them, the audience's stories were awoken. We both became storytellers, the play shifting from being monological to dialogical in every way. Hosting and collaborative

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<sup>27</sup> This was to be a prime value in the performance of *Home*: hosting the audience and at the same time allowing the audience members to contribute to what was happening on stage, in a two-way exchange of stories.

conversations were also highly valued within the rehearsal rooms of all three plays, and much care went into providing an aesthetic environment in which to work, allowing time to consider issues that arose as we passed the metaphorical story ball among us, building on each other's contribution, fostering trust and confidence within the ensemble.

### **1.3.2 Making the Invisible Visible**

Before I began my training as a social constructionist therapist, I was invested in the essential, “wadded” self, what Kenneth Gergen (2009) called the bounded being. I was a performer trained to look at character through a modernist lens: I was taught to psychologise. Training was about the world within. Little time was spent looking at the social and political discourses that impacted each character. As actors, we examined the visible discourses such as the political and social climate of the era that could impact the world of the play, but rarely did we discuss the invisible debates that influenced the characters' lives, such as gender bias and prejudice.

I was part of a theatrical world where the equality that feminists had fought for was embedded in my industry, or so I thought. However, after reading Butler (1988), who sees gendered bias as an inheritance of deposited acts—layer upon layer of sediment, year after year—I gradually became aware of how critical it was to consider gender as a performative act, rather than a natural process (Butler, 1988). Simone de Beauvoir (2014) proclaimed, “one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman” (p. 3). In the final play, *Dream*, The Woman examines Butler's (1988) legacy of sedimented acts. This became particularly acute when performing two of the trilogy plays back to back in the “Double Bill” (July 2017). Playing The Woman (*Dream*) and Eve (*Eve*) in quick succession for several months awoke in me a profound embodied understanding of the performance of gender. These two independent characters from unrelated time zones and different places were dealing with

the same performance of gender: how to survive and thrive in a gendered world. Inevitably, one would influence the other.

#### **1.3.4 Remapping Belonging by Engaging with Multiple Stories**

As a therapist, I facilitate my clients in their journey of re-negotiating how they wish to belong in the world. In a similar way, I was bringing into question my everyday experiences as I re-mapped what it meant to be in the world through the lens of my characters:

1. *Home*'s Mardi searches everywhere for a sense of belonging in a strange city, enlisting the help of Queen Isis (her mythological companion), before she finally realises that she can re-create it herself.
2. Eve, the archetypal artist/mother struggles for decades against the cultural and social discourses of her time (post–World War II). Her struggles are partly solved through the imaginings of her artistic ancestor, Oscar Wilde. Her battle, just like Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* (the myth woven throughout the *Eve* script), is overt and requires imaginative thinking to overcome her sense of unbelonging.
3. The Woman in *Dream* primarily represents the potency of gender politics within a family, and manages to find a working solution towards re-mapping her way to belonging through storytelling and ritual.

There was no explicit map to follow, something The Woman comes to understand at the end of *Dream* ("There is no map to follow. I step off the stage. I walk away", [*Dream*, 2017, p. 253]). In the final decision to step away, she is able to step towards a more generative map of becoming.

Just as my three characters did, I too was able to step away, and in so doing, begin to re-map a new story, a new personal mythology, one that questions the cultural map of gender, expectation, and

limitations that women, sometimes unknowingly, consent to. However, creating a personal myth is not a simple process. Larsen proposed that we question whether or not we are just repeating a habitual mythic prototype or whether we should embrace Yeats's proposal:

... is the true meaning of personal mythology ... simply to discover that we are repeating a traditional mythic pattern, or as Yeats suggested, that we are in touch with a still alive 'supernatural' which requires us to create new mythologies with the very stuff of our lives ... (Larsen, 1996, p. 11)

Yeats's uncanny and mystical evocation captivated my imagination and led me to explore higher consciousness in my third play. I re-mapped my sense of home and belonging to incorporate not just what I thought I knew, but what I didn't know I knew. My task was to create new mythologies out of the very stuff of my life, and by performing these stories over and over again, something shifted.

### **1.3.5 Responsibility as an Artist**

When I began my Master's degree in collaborative therapies in the early 2000s, I started to modify my ideas regarding identity. I became passionate about a new constructionist way of observing the world: what if, rather than discovering who I was, I had the potential to create my own identity? The question was no longer "Who am I?" but rather "Who am I becoming?" As my therapeutic training increased, so did my desire to bring these social constructionist ideas into the rehearsal room and onto the stage, to share these new ways of looking at identity with my audience. With this objective came responsibility: what I was asking my audience to participate in needed to be respectful, safe, and generative, just like in the therapy room. Researchers Kaufman and Libby (2012) examined what happens to people's sense of identity when readers of fiction care deeply about characters, to the extent of actually feeling and thinking like that character. They found that "experience-taking," or acquiring the experiences of the characters, has the capacity to change the lives of the readers. Would this be relevant to theatre audience? One of my objectives in undertaking this creative research was to provide my audience with an opportunity to experience-take, to step into the shoes of the



characters I portrayed in order to experience different ways of being in the world—at least for a while.

### **1.3.6 New Acting Methodology: The Emergence of RIC**

The evolution of my dissertation was to become one of the most exciting adventures I had ever embarked upon. I became an investigator, a sleuth, a detective, determined to create impactful stories of belonging, yet at the same time embrace rehearsal practices that were empowering. Having submerged myself in postmodern therapies for over a decade (philosophical processes developed as an alternative approach to the medical model), I realised how useful this would be in my rehearsal room, working from a collaborative and strengths-based framework.

In postmodern therapies, the client is positioned as the authority of themselves. The therapist is no longer designated as the expert; rather, they are a co-facilitator of change, standing alongside the client rather than in front of them. Working as a postmodern therapist, I experienced the joy of witnessing the significant changes that took place when the client had the courage to be their own expert. I wanted to work in the rehearsal room in a similar way, considering the following questions:

1. What if I focus on strengths rather than on what is not working?
2. What if one's personal life is a crucial element to stage work and not relegated to outside the rehearsal room?
3. What if one trusts one's own bodily responses, believing that one's body, as well as one's mind, can address whatever needs to be resolved?
4. What if the actor has autonomy?

This was not about seeking new rehearsal and performance processes, so much as addressing what I considered my own outdated working habits. Employing a social constructionist lens, I wanted to

“look at the familiar with scrutiny, with new eyes and ears, to see and hear it differently, to understand it differently, to articulate it differently” (Anderson, 2007, p. 334). For me, this meant a shifting of my level of consciousness within the rehearsal room, from the traditional approach (in which I was schooled) to a more inclusive and empowering one. I knew the limitations. Hesse’s character Steppenwolf argues that “All I can give you is the opportunity, the impulse, the key. I help you to make your own world visible. That is all” (Hesse, 2001, p. 204), and I agreed: a different register of process, a way of being in the world that opens the performer to awareness, and understanding of consciousness, one that shifts away from the binaries of right and wrong, good and bad, yes and no, and instead embraces interconnectedness, collaboration, awareness of invisible discourses, responsibility and leadership potential.

The RIC Process, which I now identify as a new acting methodology, grew slowly throughout the research process and then moved into maturity while I was conducting acting workshops at QUT Acting Academy in the last two years of my research journey (2016–2017). RIC also grew substantially when I directed Queensland Academy of Creative Industries’ (QACI) Year 10 acting students in a devised show based on *The Belonging Trilogy* called *Coming Home*,<sup>28</sup> where the students paraphrased *The Belonging Trilogy* to make it age appropriate, applying RIC processes to their working methods <sup>29</sup>.

As demonstrated above, the six-year journey was not only eclectic, but exceptionally productive, creating original theatrical works and also establishing an emergent acting methodology that our theatre company, The Nest Ensemble/FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE, will embrace each time we create a new work. It has become my preferred way of working with actors in the industry, as it

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<sup>28</sup> *Coming Home* was a wonderfully rich experience working with Year 10s at QACI, where Dr Benjamin Knapton and Travis Ash worked alongside me to create a collaged version of the trilogy. This is expanded on in Appendix 5.

<sup>29</sup> In Room 7 I expand on the RIC Process, a major outcome of this research. Appendix 4 is an outline of a typical RIC Process.

opens up opportunities and resources for the artist to call upon, moving them towards their agentic<sup>30</sup> home of belonging.

### **1.4 Part 3: Map of Research**

Below is a mapping and listing of the research to guide the reader through the exegesis. The map may not be the territory, as the saying goes, but it will elucidate the steps taken as I journeyed through the research terrain, exploring the notions of home in my efforts to interrogate, understand, and re-story the maps of belonging. I have opted to set out this exegesis within a somewhat traditional framework with an introduction, literature review, methodology, creative works, and outcomes in my effort to clearly navigate the emerging terrain, knowing full well that my topography is messy, like all creative practice, and non-traditional. It does not fall into clean categories; rather, each room interacts with the next, challenging assumptions and blurring lines.

The map encompasses seven “Rooms” (chapters) that interrogate the notions of home and belonging. I begin with mapping the territory followed by an examination of the literature that has impacted and enriched the research, focusing on Social Constructionism, Home Theory, and Mythology. A Methodology Room sets out the eclectic methods chosen, including practice-led and practice-based research, PALAR Action Research, and an adapted MIECAT Inquiry. The next three rooms, or chapters, examine the three plays *Home*, *Eve*, and *Dream*. Finally, in Room 7, I examine the outcomes of the research, including the three productions that make up *The Belonging Trilogy*, as well as appraising the RIC Process that emerged as a complementary text alongside the practice-led research.

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<sup>30</sup> I use “agentic” in line with Albert Bandura’s definition: “the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life” (2001, p. 1).



*Figure 1: Mapping of My Home of Belonging*

### 1.4.1 Room Outline

1. Room 1: An Interactive Architecture, a contextualisation of the research, which embraces both a performative stance and a therapeutic perspective.
2. Room 2: Literature Review, which includes the three theoretical pillars that contributed to and enriched the work:
  1. Part 1: Social Constructionism, from the perspective of how we apply it in the postmodern therapy room to create change.
  2. Part 2: Home Theory as inspirational stimuli and influential philosophical understandings of the significance of the work.
  3. Part 3: Mythology—both cultural and personal myths, bringing the world of storytelling resolutely into the world of healing, tapping into the wisdom of the ages.
3. Room 3: Methodologies
  1. Methodology: The methodologies employed include practice-led research, which allows the embodiment of the practice to guide the work, followed by practice-based research as I explore the notions of home and belonging.
  2. Methods:
    - i. Creative Practice, beginning in the rehearsal room, and developed through a holistic Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) model, which expanded the scope of action research to incorporate collaborative inquiry. It comprised creative developments and performative

readings, followed by recurrent Reflective Practice, recorded in multiple journals, collages, blogs, emails, and telephone calls.

- ii. Adapted MIECAT Inquiry: using multi-modal art approaches, I deconstruct and reconstruct pre-reflective knowing in the assembling of my text, embracing “What I don’t know I know.”
- iii. Pilgrimages are incorporated as a method of inquiry, being both motivational and inspirational, generating authenticity of place and story. Journeys included Egypt, Israel, Palestine, and Greece.

4. Room 4: *Home*

- 1. Video link to the Queensland Theatre Company Season 2015.
- 2. Script of 2015 season at Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane.
- 3. Discussion about how *Home* came into being; the many creative developments that led to its evolution from a single narrative into multiple stories of connection, engaging with Harper’s (2008) notions regarding multiple texts and creative writing.

5. Room 5: *Eve*

- 1. Video link to the performance at the Brisbane Powerhouse, 2017.
- 2. Script of the 2017 season, Brisbane Powerhouse.
- 3. Discussion about how *Eve* came about and how important this exploration is in my understanding of the notions of belonging and unbelonging.

6. Room 6: *He Dreamed a Train (Dream)*

- 1. Video link to the performance at the Brisbane Powerhouse, 2017.
- 2. Script of the 2017 season, Brisbane Powerhouse.

3. Discussion about how *Dream* begins as a threnody, grows into a deconstruction of family relationships, and finally proves to be an exploration of consciousness.

## 7. Room 7: Coda

1. There are three major outcomes of this PhD *The Belonging Trilogy* made up of three shows, staged between 2012 and 2017. This room summarises the creative developments, the seasons, and the achievements of the plays.
2. Relational Impulse Cultural (RIC) Method: I describe the generative and transformative methods that have emerged from the research to become a training that can be utilised by artists and those who want more creativity in their lives.
3. This thesis, which sums up the story of the research.

## 8. APPENDICES:

1. Evidence of seven professional seasons: programs/posters/press releases.
2. Outline and reviews of *Home* (2012).
3. Adaption of the MIECAT Process, which forms a part of RIC.
4. RIC Training: an example of how the method works in the studio.
5. QACI Documents: a summing up of the experience of creating an adolescent version of *The Belonging Trilogy*.
6. Reviews of *The Belonging Trilogy* (2015, 2017).
7. Audience responses to *Home* (2012, 2015).
8. Audience responses to *Eve* (2012).

The following Room is a discussion focusing on the three main theoretical drivers that shape this research: Social Constructionism, which is the paradigm that guides the research; Home Theory, which focuses on how philosophers, anthropologists, geographers, and artists view home; and finally, the power of Mythology, which can help us understand who we are becoming and motivate us towards generative change.



**ROOM 2**  
**ROOM OF LITERATURE:**  
**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM,**  
**HOME THEORY, AND MYTHOLOGY**

**2.1 Introduction**

This room is a conversation about the underlying methodologies and philosophies that I have employed to interrogate and guide the re-authoring of stories of home and belonging and, in turn, the deconstruction of the whole process, including my own re-awakening. Social constructionism has been widely adopted by multiple disciplines and it is through the field of collaborative and constructionist therapies that I approach this paradigm.

There are three discrete sections in this chapter:

1. Part 1 focuses on defining social constructionism, the guiding methodology. I chose a postmodern, social constructionist approach to guide the construction of my characters' realities as well as to explore the exegetical concepts/philosophies/politics of home and belonging. I unpack the importance of language; the embracing of multiplicity of selves and diversity of stories; the influences of historical and cultural discourses that impact our lives (in particular, gender); and the influence of power relations. All of these act as openings to understanding the construction of my characters and, in turn, myself.
2. Part 2 focuses on home theory, providing inspiration and background for the study, embracing popular philosophers', anthropologists', and geographers' reflections as well as artists' musings about what they consider home to be. Not surprisingly, this rich tapestry of theory influenced the outcome of the thesis in a profound way.
3. Part 3 discusses the power and far-reaching effects of mythology. I briefly look at how women have been re-visioning myth in order to find a stronger and more affirming sense of who they are becoming. This re-storying of cultural mythology coupled with re-authoring our

own personal stories and narratives that encompass us result in what is now known as our personal mythology.

All three philosophical frameworks have contributed substantially to my understanding and growing awareness of what home and belonging can signify. They have had a profound influence on the shape and texture of the plays' storylines; the approach to how my collaborators and I devised the narratives; the manner in which I wrote the stories; the methods we used rehearsing the script; the way in which I performed the plays; and, finally, the way I deconstructed the story of the research.

## **2.2 Part 1: Social Constructionism<sup>31</sup>**

Kwee, Gergen and Koshkawa (2007) noted the difference between what was regarded as a traditional view of creating knowledge and a social constructionist view. They wrote about how social constructionism is in

striking contrast to several hundred years of western thought that views knowledge as built up from the individual's observations and rational thought. For constructionists however, whatever there is becomes meaningful to us primarily as a result of our relationship to others. (Kwee, Gergen and Koshkawa, 2007, p. 299)

I first became aware of this relational philosophy when I began my training as a social constructionist therapist in the early 2000's. Several years later I journeyed to Pennsylvania to study with Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen. They handed me a thin book called "Social Construction" (2004). In it they stated

The foundational idea of social construction seems simple enough, but it is also profound. Everything we consider real is socially constructed. Or, more dramatically, Nothing is real unless people agree that it is. (2004, p. 10)

From this insightful understanding, a whole new way of doing therapy emerged, where, as therapists, we not only attended to the language our clients spoke but *how* they used language to describe their

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<sup>31</sup> Throughout this thesis I am using a social constructionist philosophy as used in the therapy room. It is not intended to give an historical look at the development of social constructionism.

situation. Gergen and Gergen summed this up as ‘double listening: for content and for consequence’ (2004, p. 16). Constructionist ideas invited what Gergen and Gergen labelled “radical pluralism” (2004, p. 20), an embracing of multiple ways of doing things: “To declare The Truth is to set language into a deep freeze, and thus reduce the realm of possibilities for new meanings to emerge” (2004, p. 25). I was so enlivened by the constructs of this philosophy that it became my way of being in the world, not only in my professional practice as therapist, but I could also see the value of adapting it to my theatre practice.

As I discuss social constructionism in this chapter, I have chosen language often used in the field of collaborative practice. The language could be regarded as more poetic than what is usually demanded in academia. Shotter and Katz (1996) coined the term “social poetics” as a way of wedding practical language with the aesthetic, creating helpful meaning of difficult-to-express ideas through poetic expression: “Social poetics, in other words, is about people finding and creating together an optimal language for their experience” (Strong, 2002, p. 465). In a similar way, I have used words throughout this exegesis that I employ in the therapy room; for example, “unpacking,” “sparkling differences,” “flirting with,” “linguaging” and “dreaming on.” These words not only describe and stimulate what is happening but also the feelings that surround it. I have found that they are most useful when working in theatre.

### **2.2.1 The Re-Authoring of Stories to Create New Self-Narratives**

While women make meaning of their everyday lives through stories or self-narratives framed by dominant misogynous cultural meta-narratives, a re-authoring can occur when women create alternative meanings associated with new self-narratives (Lee, 1997, p. 1).

The feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye (1983) discussed how these dominant meta-narratives—the social and historical discourses of our culture—create social realities, resulting in almost half of the population struggling:

Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere . . . it is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. (Frye, 1983, p. 23)

Encouraged by Frye’s metaphor, I became aware of my need to widen the field, to step back and take a macroscopic view of the dominant meta-narratives/discourses that could rule the lives of my three characters, Mardi (a performing artist/wife/mother in *Home*), Eve (a writer/wife/mother in *Eve*) and The Woman (a sister in *Dream*), in order to understand and write their stories.

I wanted to create my characters with new eyes and ears, “to articulate [them] . . . differently” (Anderson 2007, p. 34). I wanted to “dream on” powerful characters and in so doing know that they could step back and see the whole of Frye’s cage. A social constructionist philosophy gave me the tools and the reasoning with which to do so.

Social constructionism, as used in this exegesis, includes theories such as collaborative practice, narrative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, and solution-focused processes. Social constructionism asks questions such as “What if we were socially constructed?” “What if language, relationship, and an awareness of dominant discourses (including power/knowledge/gender) contributed to who we were becoming?” And, theoretically, “If this is so, does this mean that we can re-create this construction-of-self whenever we need/wish?”

### 2.2.2 Social Constructionism as a Philosophical Stance<sup>32</sup>

My relationship with social constructionism continued to grow as I developed my own creative arts studio called 4change coaching. Using a constructionist approach, I worked with artists to help them re-story, or re-create, a new construction-of-self. After years of further study, I was invited to become an Associate at the Taos Institute, an international research organisation based in the USA that was co-founded by Professors Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen, and that focuses on social constructionist practices. Finally, I became a lecturer/subject coordinator of the Master of Counselling in social constructionist therapies at Queensland University of Technology for several years. So, it is not surprising that I chose social constructionism as my primary research framework: it has influenced and shaped my everyday life as well as my working approach for over a decade.

Harlene Anderson (2013) believes that a constructionist approach to working could be reframed as a philosophical approach to living because it is not only a way of *looking at* the world but also a way of *living and relating in* the world (Anderson, 2007). Anderson sees collaborative practice as a postmodern philosophy of life, providing us the opportunity to look at the familiar with scrutiny, with new eyes and ears to see and hear it differently, to understand it differently, to articulate it differently (Anderson, 2007, p. 34).

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<sup>32</sup> My use of a social constructionist stance specifically relates to how I use it in my professional practice as therapist. Throughout the thesis there are references to social constructionist thinking, and these references are, by their very nature, personal and powerful influences.

### 2.2.3 Feminist Leanings

Another methodological postmodern perspective I was influenced by was feminist theory, in particular material feminism<sup>33</sup>, closely related to social constructionism. Together, they provide a scaffolding to examine the effects of the dominant stories in society about women and particularly their personal stories of gender, culture, and historicity in relation to home and belonging. These cultural/societal stories contribute to how they live their lives. By constructing new stories and testing not-quite-known stories (using mythology), the three characters of the trilogy manage to re-author their lives and in so doing create their place of belonging and un-belonging, albeit differently.

For centuries, women have turned to one another to listen to each other and tell stories about their lives, because, as argued by founding academic feminist Carolyn Heilbrun (1988), “We know we are without text and must discover one” (p. 44), and it is through relational conversations that we scaffold our stories together. This is precisely what all three characters do: they enter into conversations with their audience. In *Home*, these conversations are an overt exchange, with both audience and actors sharing Anderson’s story ball. In the other two plays, these conversations are more implicit but just as powerful. Heilbrun (1988) affords a strong provocation for my characters to engage with. In her classic text “Writing a Woman’s Life,” she wrote:

We must begin to tell the truth, in groups, to one another. Modern feminism began that way and we have lost, through shame or fear of ridicule, that important collective phenomenon . . . It is perhaps only in old age, certainly past fifty, that women can stop being female impersonators, can grasp the opportunity to reverse their most cherished principles of “femininity.” (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 45)

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<sup>33</sup> Briefly, feminism concerns itself with the advocacy of the rights of women. Women and men are both human beings and therefore deserve equality. Men and women are also different, and therefore women deserve to be able to represent themselves (Bullock & Trombley, 1999). Materialist Feminism focuses on women as an oppressed class due to material conditions and social relations. Material Feminists are of the opinion that history, race, class, sexual preference and socioeconomic factors aide in the construction of gender. The influences that the material world places on women oppress and contain women’s everyday lives (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1999).

Heilbrun wrote this in 1988, yet it is still relevant and a challenge I engage with willingly, both as myself and as my three characters. Through my characters, I wanted to tell the stories of mature women, women who wanted to be the centre of their own lives, rather than only part of a man's story. A social constructionist approach to writing their stories, with vulnerability and honesty, helped these ageing characters stop being what Heilbrun called female impersonators. Their job was to interrogate the patriarchal forces and cultural constructs that restricted their potential. They therefore needed to be critically alive and brave enough to step aside from Judy Sharkey's "cover stories" (2004, p. 507). Sharkey's text reminds us of the imperative to move away from our cover stories—those safe stories of survival—and perform our secret stories, the stories of our lived lives.<sup>34</sup>

Bolton built upon the cover story idea:

Our stories can only too easily be essentially self-affirming and uncritical. Or even worse they are censoring tools: "cover stories" (Sharkey, 2004). Such self-protectiveness can ensure our stories are not exploring sensitive issues, but are expressions of what we feel comfortable with, or would like to be. For experiences to be developmental—socially, psychologically, spiritually—our world must be made to appear strange. (Bolton, 2006, p. 204)

There needs to be a commitment to step into this strange world of the unknown, the muddle of Jean-Francois Lyotard's "unthought" (1992). Lyotard suggested that "we write before knowing what to say and how to say it and in order to find out, if possible . . . the thought is here, muddled up in the unthought, trying to make sense" (1992, p. 103). As I wrote the scripts, I needed to examine and question "the taken-for-granted" by "making the familiar strange and the strange familiar" (Bolton, 2006, p. 210). As Martin Heidegger (1999) proposed, "At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary" (p. 394).

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<sup>34</sup> Sharkey was influenced by Clandinin and Connelly's (1996, p. 25) distinction between cover stories, secret stories, and sacred stories in the lives of teachers.

### 2.2.4 Forming Rather Than Informing

In order to get to the bottom, to “make strange” my characters’ explorations, I expanded and interrogated their choices. I wanted to demonstrate through their dialogue how language defined them—*forming* them rather than *informing* them:

all constructionisms share an emphasis on language as communication—contrasting with the more usual emphasis on language as representation. In addition, communication is viewed as ‘forming’ persons and worlds—rather than informing pre-existing entities. (Hosking, n.d.)

A social constructionist scaffolding helped deconstruct my characters’ forming-of-selves, their experiences of relationships, and their potential for change. I began by discussing with my director the social, cultural, political, and historical discourses that impacted the characters’ lives, such as gender and patriarchy, and then sought out other stories, including mythology and fairytales that would amplify these struggles. I was most interested in who these characters had the potential to become, rather than just focusing on who they were. Social constructionist researcher John Shotter clarified this shift in perspective:

Let me explain . . . We are not human beings but rather human becomings. We are in it together, perpetually going on together and creating our selves. Our being human, our being a person, is something that we continually have to aim at, to try to be. Life is a task. (e-mail between Shotter and Rober, quoted in Rober, 2017, p. 493)

A subtle yet profound shift in thinking, Shotter’s remarks helped me stop psychologising the characters and focus more on the social construction of their lives and their chosen actions: What were they aiming for? I will now discuss in more detail the important elements of social constructionism that I have engaged with, including the importance of language, multiplicity, historical and social discourses, and power relations. It is important to note that these delineations are artificial, for these constructs or principles cannot be separated in practice; rather, they constantly interweave with each other.



### 2.2.5 The Sensitisation of Practice: Use of Language

Social constructionists see language as central to the construction of identity (Gergen, 2011). David Evans (2014) proposed that

within discourse, language is much more than words and phrases and disembodied sounds but rather the coming to life of social interaction...language is embodied and expresses ways of being in the world through the creation of meanings which relate to us in terms of identity. (Evans, 2014, p.3)

Dian Hosking (1999) agrees, stating that language includes not only the actual words written or said, but *how* they are said and what body language accompanies these spoken words.<sup>35</sup> Lynn Hoffman (2007) proposed that a person listens not only to the words, but how they *see* the words being spoken. Hoffman (2012) recalled a conversation with the late Professor Tom Anderson about his view on language:

Language is . . . defined as all expressions . . . to talk, write, paint, dance, sing, point, cry, laugh, scream, hit . . . When these expressions, which are bodily, take place in the presence of others, language becomes a social activity. Our expressions are social offerings for participating in the bonds of others. (Hoffman, 2012, para. 31)

Concurring with this, Johnella Bird interpreted language as feelings as well as thoughts, visions, dreams, and imagination (Bird, 2000, p. 29), also focusing on what is said as well as what is not said. Language is not just a means of communicating what we already know. Rather, it is the road to understanding what we do not think we know. As Gergen (2001) clarified, “language for the postmodernist is not a reflection of a world but is world-constituting. Language does not describe action but is itself a form of action” (p. 158). Language “does not ‘reflect’ social reality but rather produces meaning and *creates* social reality” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). It is through language that we construct our sense of self, and this sense of self is “a feeling-tinged communicative choreography between [people], beyond merely exchanging words” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 157).

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<sup>35</sup> Hosking includes in her definition of language as performative not only written and spoken language, but “non-verbal gestures, voice tone” and even “artefacts of human activity,” such as “interior layout and décor, music” (Hosking, 1999, p. 119).

Communication, then, is a choreography of words (what is said and what is not said) as well as feelings, thoughts, dreams, imagination and body language in all its forms.

From the point of view of a playwright, this was fascinating. Suddenly, the whole play of language became more imperative as I created characters whose use of language actually constructed them at the time of utterance, and in the uttering created what Heidegger (2011) labelled as “a house of being” (p. 147).<sup>36</sup> And in each of the characters’ house of being, I had the challenge of building their home of belonging using language and symbol, always with the awareness of the invisible discourses that presented themselves, unknowingly.

### **2.2.6 Symbols and Language**

Chris Brickell (2006), in his exploration of social constructionism, included the symbolic meaning that people attached to communication. Added to this, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in their seminal book *Narrative Inquiry* highlighted the importance of using language of wakefulness, rather than language of criticism, when re-authoring one’s story. Roger Lowe (2005, p. 4)<sup>37</sup> named the awakened space between talker and listener the “shimmering dynamic”—that space that sits between the dialogue and body movement of the actor and their audience, where meaning is negotiated. By being awake to a broader understanding of the power of symbolic and awakened language, I became more aware of the subtleties that stories could possess, and how I could tentatively challenge the dominant story of motherhood, of gender, and of age in my characters’ lives and consequently in my own through the performance of language and all its components.

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<sup>36</sup> Heidegger (2011) continued: “Language is the house of being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home” (p. 147).

<sup>37</sup> Lowe states that “Meaning does not result from a meeting of individual minds, but arises within the “shimmering dynamic” of inter-bodily movements, and dialogically structured encounters” (2005a, p. 4).

### 2.2.7 Multiplicity of Selves and Diversity of Stories

By embracing a collaborative and constructionist scaffolding when creating *The Belonging Trilogy*, I was interested in exploring the multiplicity of selves within the characters as well as their multiplicity of stories. A constructionist philosophy helped move me away from the modernist idea that there was an essential or bounded self out there to be discovered. Rather, the self changed depending on where it was and who it was with. In the trilogy, the narrators within all three plays are clearly “multi-authored polyphonic selves” (Anderson, 2007, p. 16). Mardi in *Home* describes this multiplicity of selves in the opening section of the play:

I am just 60 years old. Six decades of stories past. You'd think I'd know who I am by now . . . But I no longer believe that there is one true self . . . You know, “the real me,” “my authentic self”. But . . . I do find that idea inviting. It is full of the comforts of certainty. But, aren't I a work-in-progress? I am all of my past and all of my future, I am every person I've ever met, every place and time I've ever been. I am huge and so are you. I am: Mexico, London, Egypt, New York, Houston, Sydney, Brisbane . . . 2008 . . . 2002 . . . 1998 . . . Sydney . . . my old hometown. (Mardi in *Home*, 2015, p. 125)

Salgado and Hermans (2005) supported this premise by proposing that the self is “multiple, varied, changeable, sometimes as [a] chameleon that changes with the context, sometimes as a double-faced Janus with opposite sides—but always as a differentiated and complex entity” (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 3). According to Salgado and Hermans, throughout the communication process, both within the individuals involved and among the people exchanging stories, the “I” changes position depending on what is being said and done. Each “I” position has a different story and the individual becomes “a complex narrative process” (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 9). In *Eve*, the protagonist constantly changes position. One moment she is Virginia Woolf, another she is Oscar Wilde. She is the artist, the little girl, the wanderer, the wife, the mother. In every situation, she is different, and it is that difference that makes trouble for her. The character seems to be aware of postmodern ideas relating to multiplicity of selves and stories, and in her prologue, she sets up her philosophy: she clearly communicates to her audience that, due to multiple causes, she had responded logically to her living arrangements, even though her husband sees her as unreliable and dangerous. She happily

inhabits multiple stories at the same time. Time and place are fluid for her as she moves through the landscapes of her mind:

I am the little girl, sitting by the fire reading every book in the shire library, who loves to dance on air with wings of gold.

I am the woman who yearns to be a man, so she is free work and live the life of the adventurer, the artist, the serious poet.

I am the woman who is visited on a regular basis by artists who sit a hemisphere away, writing perfection: Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Oscar Wilde, even Flaubert. I am them, and they are me, Siamese twins, if you like.

I am the artist who writes 10 pages about a leaf—so detailed, so intoxicated with the language of Australia, this wide brown land I adore. I drive my editors barmy.

I am the old woman who dies alone, her face eaten by rats.

I am the body not found for a month, unknown and bloated, unloved, and covered with parcels, hundreds of tiny parcels that I have wrapped for you. (Eve in *Eve*, 2017, p. 185)

In *Dream*, The Woman is not consistent in her responding to her brother's illness. Her attitudes and stories change depending on time, space/place, and relationship. She is also open to change. In her communication with her imaginary brother, she softens, demonstrating that we do not act individually, but respond to what is happening around us. Throughout *Dream*, we see how The Woman is socially and culturally influenced by her family: the source of her thinking is not so much inside herself but in the farmhouse and the family stories that have gone before. This could also be said about Mardi in *Home*:

What actually thinks within a person is not the individual himself but his social community. The source of his thinking is not within himself but is to be found in his social environment and in the very social atmosphere he 'breathes'. His mind is structured, and necessarily so, under the influence of this ever-present social environment and he cannot think in any other way. (Fleck, 1979, p. 47)

The Woman's sense of self comes from her multiple memories across time and space—the many stories that make up her life. These memories, emerging from her social environment, create who she is becoming.

Social constructionist researchers are interested in how people's memories can begin to create some sort of "me":

Memory allows us to look back on our behaviours and experiences, to select those that seem to 'hang together' in some narrative framework and look for pattern, repetitions and so on that provide us with the impression of continuity and coherence. What we think of as 'personality' is thus seen as an effect of memory and our search for meaning and pattern in our experiences. (Burr, 1995, p. 30)

With the characters' multiple memories and multiple relationships, along with the multiple events that made up their lives, I began to understand who my characters were becoming. They were dialogical<sup>38</sup> selves: "Truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110, quoted in Shotter, 1997).

Even though the plays consist of long passages of apparent monologues, they are, much of the time, dialogical, directed to the audience with an improvisational capacity to respond. Throughout each performance of all three plays, there is space to improvise, depending on what is happening at the time, oft-times incorporating audience members' laughter, gestures, and utterances. As well as memory and dialogue, throughout my scriptwriting, I needed to remain alert to the historical and cultural discourses, those "taken-for-granted ways of talking, writing and theorizing" (Lowe, 2004, p. 14) that could influence and shape my characters' outcomes unknowingly.

### **2.2.8 Historical and Cultural Discourses**

The constructionist stance challenges the dominant historical and cultural discourses in psychology by making explicit the powerful hold that culture, society, and power relations within society have on the individual, shaping who they think they are and where they belong. As a narrative therapist, I

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<sup>38</sup> Monological discourse involves "fixed transmission of unchanging ideas and status inequities" while dialogical discourses are seen as happening between "social relationships of equal status, intellectual openness and possibilities for critique and creative thought." (O'Connor & Michaels, 2007. p 227).

have been trained to notice the cultural, social, and political factors as well as the power structures that impact people's lives. My self-appointed aim as a constructionist playwright has been to offer an opportunity for my audience to "envision" and "live into" their own collaborative way of re-storying and re-dreaming their own personal history (Madsen, 2006), at the same time as they watch my characters perform. Chris Brickell (2006) highlighted that historicism is another construction, things shifting over time, and emphasised the importance of being aware of this shift. History brings with it discourses that can limit our way of thinking and communicating. This is prevalent in *Home*, evidenced in the scene from school, when Mardi talks about her teacher Mr. Tonkin, who taught her racist beliefs. This lens of misunderstanding took Mardi years to interrogate, and it happened dialogically when in conversation with her New York room-mates years later. Lock and Strong (2010) describe unchallenged beliefs as packaging our thinking: "We package our thinking and talking in particular ways . . . we generally regard things the way we do because that is how they are predominantly talked about. Such talking and thinking usually becomes taken for granted". (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 275)

Our choice of language "is hardly a neutral activity" (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 276); our packaged thinking is reinforced and encouraged within a society where concepts can be assumed. An extraordinary example of how language and history changed gender politics for centuries can be found in Margaret Myers's (2000) unique study, "Searching for Data about Ladies' Orchestras":

The latter-day Aristotelians—Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Weininger and in Sweden, Stringberg—were all the rage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were published/republished in cheap popular editions and quoted in daily newspapers/popular press. Their ideas permeated most educated people's thinking. They were all thoroughly misogynist, and denied women all creative and artistic capacity, as had their forefather, Aristotle. These misogynist ideas were projected on any woman who embarked on a public, professional career in occupations defined as masculine or creative. Such a woman had to be prepared for ridicule and castigation. She might be accused of being essentially male or essentially immoral. (Myers, 2000, pp. 206–207)

In the *Trilogy*, the characters all attempted to embark on professional careers in the creative fields and were thwarted, though perhaps not as vigorously as the Ladies of the Orchestra. Mardi in *Home* conscientiously re-writes her own history in order to create a way out of her gendered and no-so-artistic family history. Eve is seen as odd in the least, and mad in the extreme, and is consequently punished. The Woman in *Dream* is, due to family histories, dismissed, apparently not worthy of inclusion in family decisions, and as such her artistic life does not rate a mention in the entire play, reflecting the status of the artist in her family of origin in the 1970s:

Many women's lives in the 1960s and 1970s were still organized around Victorian stereotypes of the loving mother and dutiful housewife. Influential feminist writers of the time criticized psychiatry. They argued it was one of the main ways society-controlled women. Women who did not behave 'properly' risked ending up in psychiatric care. Many feminist writers also criticized psychoanalysis, the then-dominant approach in psychiatry. They argued Freud's focus on sexual fantasies, and the fact that most of his patients were women, rehashed old ideas. It was similar to hysteria being labelled a 'women's problem' that should be cured by finding a man. (Bisol, 2017, p. 30)

The controlling of women through the medical model of the time was exactly what happened to Eve Langley when she was committed for seven years to Auckland Mental Asylum for not behaving properly. The Woman in *Dream* was groomed to fit the stereotype of the loving sister who never questioned and cleaned up after her brother, and Mardi's story echoed a somewhat Victorian approach to family life and she had to work hard to not only uncover it, but to change it.

Simone de Beauvoir was one of the first researchers to talk about the social construction of gender, which she did in her iconic book *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 2014), hailed by some as a "feminist bible" (Thurman, 2010). In this work, de Beauvoir discussed issues including sexuality, reproduction, family, and the workplace, believing that the social construction of a woman had limited her way of being free in the world. Women had expected ways of performing, something all three of my characters were well aware.

Decades later, Brickell prompted us to keep in mind what material feminists considered a crippling concern, that differences in gender were due to “structural inequity” existing because men appropriate women’s labour power (2006, 102). This is certainly the case in *Eve* and *Dream*, and, to a lesser degree, in *Home*. The women characters are subjugated both socially and materially by the men in their lives and, in the case of Eve, does not appear to recover. We see Mardi in *Home* recreating her reality (with the help of Goddess Isis) to find a suitable compromise, but she could only do this with the overt support of her husband who, despite his conditioning, strives to address the masculine constructs that defines him. We see The Woman in *Dream* walk away from the constructs that bind her, regaining her freedom but losing her financial security. The historical and social discourses that circle my three main characters support the construct of the all-powerful Anglo-Saxon white, heterosexual, middle-class male.

### **2.2.8 Power Relations**

I first became overtly aware of the implicit nature of power discourses when studying narrative therapy with Michael White in the early 2000s. White was strongly influenced by Michel Foucault, who believed that power and knowledge were inseparable and that both concepts shaped our lives (White & Epston, 1990), often without us being aware of it.

The important power constructs that I needed to deconstruct as I wrote and reflected on my plays revolved around gender equality, myths of motherhood, and dominant stories of belonging. The power of gender bias was often implicit and repressive, yet was generally accepted as the norm. The mythologies that surrounded motherhood have an “emotive tenor” (Leira & Krips, 1993, p. 85). Stories associated with *where* one belongs and *how* one belongs—including mythical, cultural, and social stories—are invariably influenced by the patriarchy, and limit personal agency, preventing mothers and wives from achieving self-agency.



### **2.2.9 “Sparkling Differences”**

In the therapy room, I endeavour to bracket out my preconceptions, and step back to see, hear, listen, and feel the whole picture. My aim is to listen carefully for the dominant powerful stories that the client assumes to be true as well as their “common sense” stories that can be habitually powerful. Once these dominant true and common-sense stories are identified, there is opportunity for “sparkling moments,” those other ways of seeing, to come forth (Gonçalves et.al., 2009, p. 5). In so doing, people “experience a sense of personal agency” and “a capacity to intervene in their own lives and relationships”; to construct alternatives that re-author, re-construct, or re-narrativise their lives (White & Epston, 1990, p. 16).

In the writing studio, I endeavoured to do the same, to find the characters’ sparkling differences and once on stage, my job was to perform their agency. Throughout the three plays, the power/knowledge discourses (particularly gender) were ever present and needed to be examined, prodded, and re-storied. *Mardi* and *The Woman* construct new sparkling stories, re-authoring with passion and determination. This process is expanded on in Chapters 4 and 6. *Eve* stands outside this construction; while she does re-write her story, it is not to her advantage, or so it seems.

Nevertheless, she does create a sanctuary, a place/space she can return to again and again, that holds her treasures and her beloved writing. It is more than a floor plan, more than coordinates on a map. It is the very essence of creativity.

## 2.3 Part 2: Home Theory

### 2.3.1 Introduction

This research was an invitation to plunge through time and space, to beckon the memories and dreams of the past, in order to awaken and create new notions of home and belonging. To do so, I engaged not only with the physical re-creation and re-storying of home and belonging in the *Trilogy*, but also with home philosophy and poetics in order to interrogate and re-formulate my understanding of home. Home means different things to different people. For French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, it is “our first universe” (2014a, p. 30),<sup>39</sup> a haven, a secure place to retreat to when things get tough, as well as a space within, where an individual can feel, imagine and create a sense of home (Tuedio, 2002). Exploring such ideas, Part 2 reviews some of the relevant literature of home that speaks to and expands the notions of the *Trilogy*. I consider an array of academics, including anthropologists Carin Tunaker and Dame Mary Douglas; geographers Ann Buttimer, Robyn Dowling, Alison Blunt, and Edward Relph; and philosophers Janet Donohoe, James Tuedio, Otto Bollnow,<sup>40</sup> Heidegger,<sup>41</sup> and Bachelard, the last of whom wed the field of philosophy with the world of metaphor. I also contemplate how artists including Geraldine Brooks, creator of a comprehensive series about home for ABC Radio National (2011), and Nobel Prize winner Doris Lessing, one of my favourite novelists, talk about home and belonging. In particular, Part 2 looks at definitions of home and how home is both created and understood in terms of space/place, language, symbol, memory, self, art, nostalgia, and even as a place of resistance. In all three plays, though they are divergent, each has re-created home through these elements. They represent a space, both internally and externally; a place with a floorplan and opportunities for relationships of grace and tension, with both self and others.

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<sup>39</sup> Bachelard was strongly guided by his “enthusiasm and respect for the life of the imagination, for what he calls the imaginary” (Gaudin, 2014, Introduction, para. 1). This passion is what attracted me to his body of work, being an artist and a homemaker.

<sup>40</sup> Bollnow called home one’s “spatial center” (Bollnow, 1961, p. 3), with which I concur.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger saw the uncanny, or unhoming, as “not being at home in the home”, rather an estrangement from the house yet experienced from within (Wigley, 1995, p. 110). This is of interest for the *Trilogy*’s unfolding because all three characters experience this sense of disaffection within the home, at some time.

All three homes embrace a unique aesthetic, albeit in different ways and in doing so provoke memory, symbols, and imaginings of what home could entail, culminating in an understanding of the importance of *making* home, rather than just *being* at home, a crucial step towards self-agency and belonging.

### **2.3.2 Home Is More Than a Floorplan**

A place of complexity and rupture, home is slippery in nature and contingent on the self and the relationships that inhabit it. As such, home could be seen as a valuable site/sight of change, which sits at the very centre of this research. Home in all three plays begins as a subjective place, embracing and protecting the characters, “the house allow [ing them] . . . to dream in peace” (Bachelard, 2014a, p. 30). It provides a space where the characters integrate and grow their personal mythologies, memories, and dreams, and thus map the “topography of [their] intimate being” (Bachelard, 2014a, p. 27). The home is “the spatial centre of the life of the individual . . . a firm dwelling place [so as to avoid] be[ing] dragged along helplessly by the stream of time” (Bollnow, 1961, p. 3).

The *Trilogy* characters have troubled relationships with their dwelling place. Even though the characters’ very identities are, if we accept Bachelard’s claim, “physically inscribed” (Bachelard, 2014a, p. 34) on the space, they find themselves dragged along by time until their pressing need to problematise their dwelling place is realised, and create a deeper sense of home and belonging through poetic form. According to Bachelard (2014a), the poet will always be more evocative than

the philosopher because they can articulate a yearning of home and belonging through metaphor and poetry, the language of the soul.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.3.3 Home as Space/Place

According to David Benjamin (1995), even though many people *think* they know what home is and say they understand it, it is impossible to define and clarify in a rational way. Home is often conceptualised as a physical place of security or a state of mind in which we find solace (Tuedio, 2002), but I am particularly drawn to one of Janet Donohoe's (2014) more relational suggestions of what home can be, which was influenced by the work of geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Donohoe (2014) pointed out that a house is more than a physical structure. It is a place where we only invite our friends or acquaintances. This is particularly interesting when considering *Home* where Mardi brings onto the stage 14 audience members. They begin as audience members, yet quickly become friends,<sup>43</sup> moving around the physical stage design (the place) of Mardi's house, which soon becomes home, with cups of tea and conversation. Donohoe (2014) proposed that one's house has the power to impact on the way we act in the world, reflecting our character and arranging our behaviour:

The house is where we develop a certain style of acting in the world. In many ways it reflects our character in the way in which it is decorated and arranged. But the house arranges us too just as any building arranges us, but in a much more fundamental and determinate way. (Donohoe, 2014, p. 22)

This is a useful definition, as it highlights the importance and priorities of creating a world on stage full of action that reflect the characters' ways of being in the world. In *Home*, there are transparent etched Perspex panels, symbolic of what Queen Isis calls excruciating vulnerability, allowing

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<sup>42</sup> It appears that Bachelard straddled both worlds, wedding the language of philosophy with the language of metaphor (Gaudin, 2014, Introduction, para. 3) when he expanded our understanding of home.

<sup>43</sup> One of the responses from an audience member of *Home* season 2015 confirmed that they most certainly felt more than an acquaintance: "A true emotional journey that I not only felt I was taking with you but also with my fellow audience members as we cried and laughed and trusted each other when participating as well as watching" (See Appendix 7).

everyone's stories to shine through.<sup>44</sup> In *Eve*, we step into the hut, the nest, the nook in which Eve can hide away (Bachelard, 1994, p. 91). Finally, in *Dream*, the farm house rearranges The Woman's response to her task at hand, drawing her into memory, burying her in images of fire, ice, memories, and dreams. The homes in all three plays literally rearrange the women's identities and the women are not sure whether to leave or stay.

Seeing home as foundational to our identity, our "dwelling-place of being," Relph (2016) proposed that it is not just a house to be lived in; rather, it is an "irreplaceable centre of significance." Anne Buttmer (2015) expanded this centre by bringing into view the horizon in relationship to place, an exchange between home and horizon. She clarified:

like breathing in and out, most life forms need a home and horizons of reach outward from that home. The lived reciprocity of rest and movement, territory and range, security and adventure, housekeeping and husbandry, community building and social organisation-these experiences may be universal. (Buttimer in Buttmer & Seamon, 2015, p. 170)

It is this tension between home and horizon, here and there, that is central to all three plays. Home provides the security needed, but at the same time it can imprison. All three characters experience this friction as they grapple with their sense of home. Mardi has a very amusing line that sums up her conflict regarding home: "Brisbane," she says, "the place we love to hate and hate to leave" (Mardi in *Home*, 2015, p.142). On one hand, we desire adventure; on the other, we yearn for the sanctuary of home, the known map of the familiar.

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<sup>44</sup> The intention for the design was to have all the AV images projected through the Perspex to the back wall, a way of suggesting that our memories morph depending on where we are and what we are doing. Due to limitations of space and budget, this was not possible; however, occasionally, the projector's images hit the Perspex and distorted the projected image, just like we distort through memory.

### 2.3.4 Nostalgia, Tension, and Resistance

For centuries, philosophers and artists have conversed and depicted “the human yearning” to *find* home (Boscaljon, 2016, p. 1), none more so than *Wizard of Oz*’s Dorothy,<sup>45</sup> a character I played in the 2014 Brisbane Festival while writing *Dream*. L. Frank Baum articulated this yearning by embracing metaphorical and naïve storytelling (in the best sense): “There’s “no place like home” (Baum, 1900/2006, p. 23). Within Dorothy’s landscape of yearning sat memory, fundamentally connecting her to family traditions and rituals (Donohoe, 2014). For Dorothy, the solace of home, the known map of the familiar, was far more desirable than the risky colourful and challenging world of Oz. In the *Trilogy*, the yearning or desire to belong is paramount, but it was in the performing of the plays that I came to a fluid understanding of the tensions that home can bring. I realised that home is far more than a feeling. Home, for me, has to offer challenges for growth, to provide access to Buttimer’s horizon (Buttimer & Seamon, 2015).

And in this challenge, could home also be a place of un-homing?<sup>46</sup> A place of relational and ontological insecurity and isolation? While home can hold a feeling of nostalgia, it can simultaneously command a resistance to the control and power that it can provoke—what Douglas labelled a “tyrannous control over mind and body” (2012, p. 53). The home is not only a space of belonging, but can, at the same time, be one of alienation (Blunt & Varley, 2004). Eve felt this when she pronounced: “*The deserted-house feeling comes over me. That sense of being locked up. That sense of having a loose blind hanging in my face*” (Eve in *Eve*, 2012, and in *italics*, 2017, p. 199). Home can be a place of intimacy and a place of violence, a space of desire and the location of fear (Blunt & Varley, 2004). In other words, home “is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life” (Blunt & Varley, 2004, p. 3).

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<sup>45</sup> The beloved classic by L. Frank Baum was given a postmodern slant under the direction of Steven Mitchell Wright at the 2014 Brisbane Festival.

<sup>46</sup> Masgrau-Peya (2004) directed me to Freud’s paper on The Uncanny (1919). Freud is credited as being the first person to come up with the term “unhoming.”

As seen in all three plays, human life fluctuates between the good and the bad (Mardi's parenting adventures), peace and violence (Eve's relationship with her husband), "what is truth, what is fibs, what is life, what is art" (*Dream*, 2017, p. 238). Home has been described as compliant, morphing depending on our imaginations, social standing, economical positioning, cultural background, political situation as well as being our psychological state (Malik, 2016, p. 193). The fact that everyone is their own expert in what home means creates a field of multiple interpretations, many of them useful when trying to figure out how to re-story one's sense of home and belonging.

### **2.3.5 Is Home a Starting Place?**

Even though David Benjamin's (1995) premise of home defying rational deconstruction sat heavily within me, not so with others. For example, Kramer had no trouble in deconstructing home—more specifically, suburban life—in just three words. She proposed that it was emblematic of Australia's "cultural dead heart" (Brooks, 2011). The starting point of all three plays would support and develop this partisan (yet very appealing) premise, but not so the endings where philosophical and mythical understandings move the characters to create a surprisingly rich and fecund understanding of home and belonging, and in turn, myself.

In the powerful 2011 Boyer Lectures that were titled *The Idea of Home*, Brooks began with a generic meaning of home, before she delved into her understanding of what home can be. "In dictionaries," she explained, "definitions of home are various . . . 'a place of origin, a starting position' . . . 'a goal or destination' . . . 'an environment offering security and happiness' . . . 'the place where something is discovered, founded, developed or promoted. A source'" (Brooks, 2011, Lecture 1). Certainly, this starting place, this source where something is developed, is the central focus of my journey. The

homes depicted in the three plays are, first and foremost, physical and geographical places where the social lives of the characters are developed and then explored relationally.

Tunaker's definition of home expanded Donohoe's earlier offering, suggesting that home "may be conceived as a physical space, such as a building/house, a geographical space such as a street, a town or a community, or a place where meaningful social relationships and /or kinship are fostered" (Tunaker, 2015, p. 2). This definition, emphasising meaningful social relationships, proves a useful one, especially when committing to a constructionist relational framework. But the *Trilogy* ended up exploring more than relationship, space, and place. While each play is socially, geographically, and physically situated, at the same time the characters embrace metaphorical and mythical landscapes that represent their internal worlds. The *Trilogy* serves as a site where characters battle ordinary domestic issues by engaging with mythical, metaphorical, and philosophical ideas. It is this tension between the domestic place and the mythical and philosophical spaces—the ordinary and the extraordinary—that is explored at depth: the un-homed space that sits next to the characters' sense of home.

### **2.3.6 Are Our Belongings Symbolic of Home and Belonging?**

We spend a lot of time collecting things and re-arranging our belongings in our home.<sup>47</sup> The symbolic significance of what we collect and place within the home adds significant value to our understanding of belonging, including the social and symbolic meanings attached to the home's aesthetics: its architecture, furniture, artefacts, design, and so on.<sup>48</sup> Malik proposed that the furniture

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<sup>47</sup> Webley (2010) has written about people who take this to the extreme; within the *Trilogy*, Eve could be referred to as a hoarder, where stacks of manuscripts litter her home along with old photo frames and dolls. Cultivated weeds even grow out of the floor. Eve "anthropomorphises" her manuscripts: they become her babies and she treats them as such. This helps explain what Malik (2016) proffered: that objects collected in the home could illuminate emotional and psychological ruptures.

<sup>48</sup> Pleasure seeker Oscar Wilde, who figures largely in *Eve*, offered that one should have nothing in the house "that has not given pleasure to the man who made it and is not a pleasure to those who use it" (Briganti & Mezei, 2012, p. 199).



and objects within home (along with the home's location and architecture) can “describe and explain the emotional and psychological intricacies of its inhabitants” (Malik, 2016, p. 196). Certainly, in the *Trilogy*, the aesthetic design and the chosen furniture and artworks are intended to produce a sense of security for its inhabitants (Colomina, 2012), or its opposite. Eve would flee to her bathtub or sleep inside her fireplace whenever she felt vulnerable. Mardi would retreat to her lounge studio and make a cup of tea. And the opposite also occurs. Whereas Eve's fireplace is her place of sanctuary, it suddenly becomes a portal to the mental institution and we witness Eve being dragged back in time, powerless to divert the course of action set in motion by her husband.

In *Dream*, the artwork comes alive, spilling onto the floor and into The Woman's body with unpredictable grace, creating an uncanny unsettling. The set of eggs on The Woman's shelf,<sup>49</sup> symbolising the home's potential, is quickly removed, wrapped, and packed away. There is to be no more potential in *Dream*'s farmhouse, yet memories from the objects and artefacts are powerful and keep pulling her backwards, dragging her into the past. The rituals that she set up with her brother—the acting out of stories, the exploration of the tunnel—and a multiplicity of memories overcome her, making home strange, an un-home. It is no longer a symbol of belonging.

### 2.3.7 Is Home a Memory?

One's house is “inhabited” by memory, as demonstrated in all three plays: “Remembrance is moulded into the material and physical structures of the domestic space” (Bahloul, 2012, p. 258). In *Dream*, the memories of The Woman are physically projected onto her body as she sits reminiscing the days of her youth. She should have been warned, because, as Professor Edward Casey (2000) suggested:

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<sup>49</sup> The eggs were used more in the first season of *Dream*. Although they remained on set in the second season, they were no longer packed away, but they were touched and referred to. The decision to not actually pack them away was a pragmatic one.

Nostalgia leads us to invoke the following principle: *in remembering we can be thrust back, transported, into the place we recall*. We can be moved back into this place as much as, and sometimes more than, into the *time* in which the remembered event occurred. Rather than thinking of remembering as a form of re-experiencing the past *per se*, we might conceive of it as an activity of *re-implacing*: re-experiencing past places. (p. 201)

Her memories of places in her childhood awake within her stories that may or may not have happened. Is it the stories of place or the relationship with her brother that she yearns for? She becomes trapped in her imagination as she grapples with these thoughts, all contributing to her growing sense of un-home, of not-belonging anymore. For most people, memories constantly change, becoming diaphanous as they morph and then reform, as physically demonstrated by the video projection in *Dream* where literally thousands of daydreams and experiences shift from the walls to wash over The Woman.<sup>50</sup>

Moving from the literal into the metaphorical, the contraction and expansion of memory occurs in all three plays, particularly in *Dream* and *Eve*, as walls visually come tumbling down. *Dream*'s walls fall via images projected onto the entire set. *Eve*'s walls fall (in the first and second seasons, 2012) by literally tearing them down.<sup>51</sup> The walls of the houses set up the boundary between inside and out, so for *Eve* to tear her walls down is a profound act of vulnerability. As Bollnow (1961) stated, "Man carves out of universal space a special and private space and thus separates inner space from an outer space" (1961, p. 3). So, when we choose to rupture this boundary, as *Eve* does herself, and which is done to The Woman, things are bound to reposition themselves. The space that is revealed on the other side of the theatre's fourth wall, where the audience sits, could be described as dangerous and open, whereas inside *Eve*'s hut (in the third season, it is inside her bathtub) she is hidden and

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<sup>50</sup> Writer Georges Spyridaki metaphorically and physically created such a home, where walls would actually shift at his beckoning, protecting him from the weather as he day-dreamed, and expanding his horizons at other times (quoted in Bachelard, 2014, p. 53).

<sup>51</sup> In the first two seasons, we had paper walls surrounding the hut and *Eve* forcefully rips them down early on in the show. In the third season, the one shown here, the paper walls are converted into a shower curtain that surrounds the bath. Early in the show, *Eve* rips it down to see to her audience.

protected (Dekkers, 2011). The rupture of moving from inside to outside has to occur in order to widen Eve's horizons, to awaken her memories, to tell her story. This also happens in *Home* and in *Dream*. By inviting the audience into the characters' inner private space, their shelter, their intimate space, their stories can be shared, interrogated, and re-authored.

### **2.3.8 Home Is the Body of the Self**

Blumen, Fenster, and Misgav (2013, p. 6) have asserted that "bodies are intimate homes",<sup>52</sup> and that the home can be seen as the place of the body. The house or dwelling, made into a home by embodiment-of-self, holds relationships and experiences<sup>53</sup> that either support or deny the growth of the inhabitant. Eve's environment does not support her growth, nor does The Woman's farmhouse. It is Mardi's red home, one of "see through" openness, that contributes to her self-understanding and self-agency.

Jacobson (2011) examined the relationship of body and home, believing that our bodies have an "ecological character" (2011, p. 3) and therefore cannot be studied in isolation. Because people inhabit gendered roles, women's and men's bodies will respond differently to the home front (Jacobson, 2011, p. 3). Home can be an embodiment of dreams or nightmares, social occasions or violence. And at the same time, home can be "intimate, a resonant chamber [and] a mirror of the self . . . For the house is not merely walls, doors and windows, but a doorway beyond, a 'capacity' of the senses and spirit . . . We dwell in the home. The home dwells in us" (Troutman, 1997, p. 143).

Theatre is in a perfect position to reflect these binaries of self and home. All three characters dwell in their homes and their homes dwell in them. The representation of the inner self by the outer

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<sup>52</sup> Blumen, Fenster and Misgav (2013) went on to say that "in Western tradition, the house—the space where one lives and stations one's body—embodies the home. The place of living is converted into a home by becoming an imagined idealization of notions such as privacy, intimacy, exclusiveness, secrecy, sheltering and even sanctity" (2013, p. 6). I respond to "imagined idealization of notions" and it returns me to Blunt and Dowling's definition of home being one's "spatial imaginary" (2006, p. 2). Home, it seems, is a place of the imaginary, spatial, and embodied.

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger describes dwelling as the "basic character of being" (quoted in Dowling and Blunt, 2006, p. 3).

environment informs all three poetic performances. In *Home*, the interior of the home installation is light, floating, and transparent—a place of clarity. In *Eve*, the set is raw, organic, and harsh, open to the elements, a place of shattering dissension, which is representative of Eve’s internal landscape. In *Dream*, the set is unkempt with a feeling of emptiness and alienation, echoing the fragility of The Woman’s inner landscape. The importance of the set design in these performances is paramount, particularly considering Bachelard’s romanticised belief that “the house acquires the physical and moral energy of a human body. It braces itself to receive the downpour, it girds its loins” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 46).

### **2.3.9 Home Is Family**

It is fortunate if one embraces Bachelard’s offering of the home girding its loins, especially if we talk about home being family. Loving at best, volatile at worst, home can be seen as a sense of longing to be family, “a locus of intense emotional experience . . . providing an atmosphere of social understanding where one’s actions, opinions, and moods are accepted” (Despres, 1991, p. 98).

Yet, Eve finds her sense of home so challenged with no social understanding of who she is and who she is becoming. Home seems to be the opposite of a sanctuary or place of safety, security, of belonging. It is definitely not the body of self. Mardi, in *Home*, hesitantly at first, makes sure that her actions, opinions, and moods are acceptable and fit in with local family life, and in so doing re-stories her Brisbane life into a tale of belonging, though not without some compromise. In *Dream*, The Woman finds little acceptance of who she is becoming in relation to her brother and her old family home and, coupled with her gendered family history, realises by the end of the play that there is no longer any security in the old homestead. She grows her self-agency. She walks away, though definitely not empty. The Woman leaves with a deep understanding of consciousness, a place of belonging when there is no longer a family to embrace.

### **2.3.10 Home Is a “Spatial Imaginary”**

Thus far in this discussion, home has been seen to be a holder of memories, a space of retreat, a place of relationship, a yearning, and a site of tension. Dowling and Blunt (2006) combined all of these components, suggesting that home is a “spatial imaginary” (2006, p. 2), because it connects not only spaces with places, but feelings with social occasions as well as memories throughout all of time. Home is complex and multi-layered. This is what I was endeavouring to communicate throughout all three plays, the complexity, the fluidity and the uncertainty of home, not to mention its joyful and transformative moments, as it enfolded the relationships and experiences of the past.

### **2.3.11 Home Is Art and Art Is Home**

Knowing that I felt as much at home on the stage as I did in my own home, I continuously asked myself a question throughout my research: “Can art actually make home?” Outside of my family, art is my way of life.<sup>54</sup> I wanted to understand, and consequently re-create, what makes life worth living, what brings us home. A body of theory explores the relationship between home and art, implying that works of art can in fact move us towards an understanding of the culture of home and also provide us a means of recreating the home of our memories: “aesthetic artefacts and cultural products reveal the complex way in which culture supports our work of homecoming and homemaking. We cultivate and construct homes from the beauty and ugliness that we find in memories and in the material world” (Boscaljon, 2016, p. 5).

I wanted to create a trilogy of belonging that was like “a book that would tremble on the shelf” (Grossman, 2009), and I knew that to create such a trembling book, I needed to look deeper than my linear calendar of achievements or the latest home design magazine. Elena Ferrante (2016) in her

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<sup>54</sup> In *New Philosophy Magazine*, T. S. Eliot was quoted as feeling similarly when he stated that culture was more than just knowledge, but “a way of life.” He said, “Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living” (Eliot, 2016).

recent book *Frantumaglia* insisted that women need to move beyond the domestic world, which requires maximum aspiration, impudence, and non-compliance. When interviewed by Michael La Pointe for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, her instructions were wise, bold, and dangerous: “the task of a woman writer today is not to stop at the pleasures of the pregnant body, of bringing up children, but to delve truthfully into the darkest depth . . . writing requires maximum ambition, maximum audacity and programmatic disobedience” (Ferrante quoted in La Pointe, 2016).

All three protagonists in *The Belonging Trilogy* were artists, but did they live up to Ferrante’s demands? Only one of them had Ferrante’s audacity and programmatic disobedience. Eve demonstrated how to push the borders of home to include a bolder approach to creating. Eve wrote with passion and excess:

My husband says you need embrace more domestic things like making me a cup of tea. MAY THE PLANETS COLLIDE BEFORE I EMBRACE THE ORDINARINESS OF DOMESTICITY. (Eve in *Eve*, 2017, p. 187)

She makes sense of her home of belonging through her writing, and I made sense of her writing through performing.

### **2.3.12 Home According to Artists**

So many writers have written about home, about raising families in houses, but even more about the darker internal depths of being a woman in search for belonging. Author Carmel Bird, in her anthology *Home Truth*, talked about home being bound up with identity (Bird, 2010). Australian author Gabrielle Lord underlined that home can be cosy and snug for some but not others. For Lord, home is “something wide, generous and accepting. A place of sanctuary and refuge” (Lord 2010, p. 28). She wrote this while sitting in Jerusalem, the city where the first play of *The Belonging Trilogy* was conceived, a place many people call home, regardless of ethnicity, religion, age, or social class.

According to Lord, home “is anchored in a sense of unquestioned belonging—of acceptance. A deep sense of everything being understood, accepted and forgiven” (Lord, 2010, p. 58).

If home is anchored in an unquestioned belonging of acceptance, then what is the opposite of home? Often used in reference to refugees and their absence of home, “un-home”<sup>55</sup> comes from *unheimlich*, the German word that Freud coined, initially equating it with “uncanny.” Heidegger grew the term to mean the fundamental groundlessness of our existence, a profoundly felt sense of not-being-at-home, wherever one was (Buchoul, 2013<sup>56</sup>). Samuel Buchoul’s interpretation of Heidegger’s concept is the clearest definition I could find for a very complex concept, but one that is central to this study. While experiencing un-home, many artists turn to their art form in search of an answer, and I will end Part 2 by examining how artists go in search of home.

### **2.3.13 Artists in Search of Home**

Marion Halligan (2010) believes that in every book she reads, she takes up what she calls a “temporary home” and when she writes, she takes up “residence for a while” in the draft she is writing (p. 143). Halligan is not alone. In her essay “Home Triptych” (2010, p. 175), Andrea Goldsmith noted that she also finds home in her books; they fill the rooms of her house, “thousands of them”, just as Mardi’s house in *Home* is crammed with books— “growing like stalagmites from floor to ceiling. These are my walls” (Mardi in *Home*, 2015, p. 130). In her books, Goldsmith “found a natural home in the mutable texture of narrative. And it is a home in uncertainty. You pick up a book and you don’t know where it will take you, but you trust it can take you somewhere” (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 175). Goldsmith (2010) also wrote about finding home in the oddest of places,

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<sup>55</sup> An unusual word and one that is hard to find in the dictionary. *Miriam-Webster* dictionary defines it as “to make homeless”. *Oxford Dictionary* doesn’t have a definition.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Buchoul is an inspiring young philosophy student who began The Institute for the Study of Texts, described on its website as a “pioneering, participative network for philosophy and literature.” His personal website consists of a collection of papers exploring fascinating philosophical issues such as those written by Heidegger.

one being the Antarctic, where she is flagrantly happy as she stares into the loneliness of this often-imagined place. This reminded me of Eve, staring into the great Australian loneliness, though for Eve this act brings with it a sense of *unheimlich*: “you could see written on the hills of Australia the words of the great Australian loneliness, that old disease of mine” (Eve in *Eve*, 2017, p. 198).

Goldsmith, on the other hand, sees the Antarctic as a metaphor for the imagination, full of wonder and mystery, a place she calls home: “I stand among ice and icebergs surrounded by icy mountains on all sides; I stand in the cold and shuffling silence. I recognise this place from dreams, from yearnings, from the punch of illusive passions. I feel as if I have come home” (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 175).

Sometimes home can be obfuscated and mysterious. After experiencing shattering loss, Goldsmith wrote about home as the absence of her loved one. Reflecting on the panicked emptiness she felt, she quoted Australian poet Bruce Beaver:<sup>57</sup> “Your absence is always intolerable. You are where my home begins and ends” (Beaver quoted in Goldsmith, 2010, p. 6). Queen Isis could have said the same thing on the death of her husband Osiris. Eve may have offered the equivalent on the disappearance of Oscar after her time in the Asylum. The Woman could have uttered something similar about her brother. Home, in some instances, is absence, rather than presence; *unheimlich*, rather than *heimlich*.

Goldsmith (2010) talked about how, following her loved one’s death, their home became “a cage, a cell, a barbed-wire enclose” (p. 186), no longer a sanctuary but an “endless solitary confinement. I rage and rage within these walls” (p. 186). Similarly, Eve, in her loneliness, with her semi-detached

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<sup>57</sup> An interesting aside: Bruce Beaver is one of Australia’s greatest poets and he wrote at a similar time to Eve Langley. The difference was he had the overwhelming support and love of his wife. Clarke writes in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that “It would be no exaggeration to say that without her love and steadfast care, much of Bruce Beaver’s output—12 books of verse and several novels—might not have been written” (Clarke, 2014). I think of Eve and wonder about what could have been.



husband “living in town with another”, rages within her place of solitary confinement: “I sit as meekly as possible in my cell and I paint it with little fancies and I live the life of one sealed within a coin” (Eve, in *Eve*, 2017, p. 199). When Goldsmith (2010) grieved, she turned to the vast library in her home, “fiction most of all”. It rescued her from no longer wanting to belong to this world. It was the imaginative world of the novel where she “felt properly alive again” (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 191). Goldsmith writes how she hovered over her books: “I am two thirds of the way through: how it pulls me along, how it pulls me away from myself. I settle into the couch and read my way home” (Goldsmith, 2010, p. 191).

“To read my way home”, to write my way home, to perform my way home, to play my way home: the artist can make their home through their work or the work of others. Doris Lessing also found home in books: “What was my own, where I belonged, was the world of books” (quoted in Arnold & Meskimmon, 2015, p. 257). But sometimes the world of books is not big enough. Many women artists leave home, sometimes travelling across the world, sometimes closer at hand, in response to things such as marriage, domestic violence, war, poverty, work, or just the yearning for freedom.<sup>58</sup> On arrival in the new place, there is still “a desire for a place to call home” (Arnold & Meskimmon, 2015, p. 258), and many artists (including myself) use their creative practice to re-create their home of their longing.

### **2.3.14 Recreating My Home of Belonging**

Visual artist and sister of Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell<sup>59</sup> put much energy into creating her home of belonging through lovingly tended gardens, artwork, and decoration, referred to by many as a tour de

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<sup>58</sup> Doris Lessing left her home in South Africa for London because “The farm lay about her like a loved country which refused her citizenship” (Lessing, 2000, p.31).

<sup>59</sup> Bell’s paintings and home decorations “shout and scream in a cacophony of colour and shape, rude lines and sudden gentle shading. We need synaesthetic metaphors to accommodate Bell’s vision: a whole symphony of impure sounds hurtles off her canvases” (Elkin, 2017, p. 1).

force. Mardi also surrounded herself with gardens, artwork, and a huge library in her efforts to create a home that nurtured. Visual artist and writer Marion Arnold never stopped moving, stating “I do not go back, I go forward (Arnold & Meskimmon, 2015, p. 260),<sup>60</sup> making herself at home everywhere she went through engaging with her works of art. Utilising her memory, she creates in each country an environment that brings her home: “my new home is colonised by books, and objects and artworks familiar to me and strange to others” (Arnold & Meskimmon, 2015, p. 260).<sup>61</sup>

The concept of what Arnold and Meskimmon (2015, p. 262) call a “plurilocal” home,<sup>62</sup> a fluid home where one can belong in several places at the same time, is an appealing image, particularly in the constantly changing world of Mardi. This concept is explored by visual artists such as Korean artist Do Ho Suh (Meskimmon, 2011), who uses home as a central motif in his art making to find multiple sites of home. Do Ho Suh created a series of installations using nylon and silk to re-make his Korean childhood home, a home-as-art installation for galleries around the world (Meskimmon, 2011, p. 2). He demonstrated, as did Goldsmith and Lessing, though this time through visual artmaking, that home no longer needed to be in the same place, with a fixed foundation. Home could be in many places.<sup>63</sup> And it is this slant in the home theory that contributed to my dreaming-on what home could be. What if home is not “being home” but rather “becoming home” or “making home” through one’s own efforts, wherever one is in the world? This notion fitted well within my constructionist framework. The question to ask is not “Who am I?” but “Who am I becoming?” It’s not “What is home?” but “What can home become?”

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<sup>60</sup> These could also have been the words of The Woman in *Dream* as she left the stage at the end of the show: “I will not go back. I will go forward.” Perhaps I will add this in the next rendition.

<sup>61</sup> Mardi also went to great lengths to create a home that nurtured, with books growing like stalactites, “they are my walls” (*Home*, 2015, p.130). She embraced art, ritual, and community in her efforts to create a home where people would come to celebrate life. During the creation of *Home*, a group of friends met each Tuesday and created “rooms” in the garden, a la Edith Walling, and parts of the show were rehearsed in the relevant parts of the garden or in the lounge room studio where many of the scenes were set.

<sup>62</sup> This makes me ask the question: “What about a pluri-spatial home?” In other words, a home of many dimensions.

<sup>63</sup> This is what *Dream*’s Woman learns in her journey to her home of origin: that home is elsewhere, not necessarily a physical location, but a spiritual one. Although not explicitly stated, the inference at the end of the play is that she walks away towards something else, a higher consciousness perhaps.

### 2.3.15 Something *Unheimlich* Haunts Our Efforts to Return

It is not unusual to return to a place of memory, that place of home, to rediscover or reconnect with a loved one (Boscalion, 2016). There is such a strong relationship between memory and place, which The Woman in *Dream* seems aware of. She returns to her childhood farmhouse in order to mourn the passing not only of her brother but also of her inheritance, the physical structure of the farm. In the acting out of ritual, where she steps off the stage, she is able to free herself, to “walk away.” Eve continually returns to the past to reclaim a sense belonging that she cannot find in her New Zealand abode. In *Home*, Mardi depicts Queen Isis returning to the land of the dead to reconnect with her husband again and again and again. The ritual of return gives Queen Isis the strength to continue her legacy to the world.

When trying to return home, anxiety sits close, and Heidegger (1996) called this *unheimlich*,<sup>64</sup> Freud’s notion of the uncanny, a profound felt sense of not being at home: “Something *unheimlich* haunts our efforts to return home: this lesson manifests in the agony of Gilgamesh, the plight of Odysseus . . . and still echoes today . . .” (Boscalion, 2016, p. 1). The heroines in *The Belonging Trilogy* also experience the *unheimlich* at different times: Mardi yearns for her artistic home before the domestic took over; Eve finds that she cannot fit in her domestic home despite her best efforts; and The Woman finds in the farmhouse a sensation of not being at home, a stranger “in a familiar land” (Boscalion, 2016, p. 2).

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<sup>64</sup> See Buchoul (2013) for one of the clearest explanations of Heidegger’s concept of the *unheimlich*.

### 2.3.16 My Home of Becoming

I actively embraced this viewpoint of “becoming home”<sup>65</sup> because it provides hope and potential and because, as a narrative therapist, I knew that this way of thinking works. What if we constructed our lives (our home) out of the narratives we told? What if we became our stories (inhabited the stories of home)? Every narrative therapist believes that stories do not just reflect life; they actually shape it. Prochaska and Norcross (2014) suggested that “Stories don’t mirror life; they shape it. Narrative therapists, like fine literary critics, help us to construct new meanings and new interpretations about who we are, who we have been, and what we can become” (2014, p. 413).

The task of *The Belonging Trilogy* was to deconstruct the old stories of home and to construct new ones. These new stories needed to be “consciously constructed as liberating stories” (Prochaska & Norcross, 2014, p. 413). Here, a social constructionist paradigm is useful because it allows us to understand how the stories of home are constructed from dominant discourses within the family of origin, the culture (including religion), and society (both past and present) at large. In fact, these dominant discourses often “delineate the issue in a win–lose bi-polar way of thinking” (Becker et al. 2003, p. 183), which reduces the ability to think creatively. For new stories about home and belonging to come forth, we need new ways of talking about it. One of the most powerful ways of seeing things differently is engaging with poetics. Hence, my research into what artists have thought about home.

Heidegger (1982) proposed that “We might perhaps prepare a little for change in our relations to words. Perhaps this experience might awaken: all reflective thinking is poetic and all poetry in turn is a kind of thinking, the two belong together” (Heidegger, 1982, p. 136). With reflectivity and poetic

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<sup>65</sup> This sense of a home of becoming has contributed enormously to RIC Process. The actors are provided an opportunity to reflect on and execute how they could “become home” or “make home,” rather than just “being home.”

leanings, we can create new ways of thinking and speaking about home. Irish poet David Whyte (2003) skilfully described the power of a good line of poetry:

In the silence that follows a great line  
You can feel Lazarus deep inside  
Even the laziest, most deathly afraid part of you  
Lift up his hands, and walk toward the light.

With a new languaging, we can “walk toward the light” in order to explore the fluidity of home.<sup>66</sup> Just as Mardi physically re-makes her multiple homes in *Home* using Perspex boxes and panels as she moves through decades and continents,<sup>67</sup> so too can we “make home” rather than just “be at home,” and we can do it over and over again. Because making home using a poetic frame is an ongoing endeavour, it gives one an opportunity for self-agency.<sup>68</sup>

Arnold and Meskimmon (2015, p. 263) explained “*Being* at home suggests arrival,” as though “a ‘natural’, ontological status [has been] granted to the subject in their ‘proper’ . . . ‘home’.” However, if we emphasise the verb “making,” then we open up to alternative and more liberating and creative stories about home. I can make my own home, regardless of where I am in the world. This sits as a core principle of the RIC Process, creating poetic pathways to a liberating self-agency and in so doing so, making one’s home of belonging regardless of circumstances.

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<sup>66</sup> Home is represented in *Home* by Bev Jensen’s memorable moveable installation consisting of a Perspex table on wheels, three small Perspex boxes engraved with symbols, a light Perspex suitcase, and three etched Perspex panels representing doors and windows. The etched Perspex panels float off the floor and hang from the lighting grid with fine fishing wire, the panels suspended in space. They represent three walls, one with a door, one with a small window and a tiny drawer, and one with a larger window and a hand. They provide a temporal and spatial playground that allows the actor to jump time zones and countries effortlessly. Because the panels are gossamer, when light and images project through them, shadows are created and distorted, creating a layering effect on the images on the back wall. As Mardi moves through the panels, she knocks them, and the transparent doors catch the light as they sway, changing the lighting state, almost as though moving through time.

<sup>67</sup> Mardi not only creates her multiple homes with the three Perspex boxes; inscribed within those boxes are symbols of mythology, another foundational pillar of making home. See Part 3 of this chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Self-agency is always the goal in the therapy room. Bandura’s (2009) definition of self-agency incorporates past, present, and future: we evaluate, we modify (through reflection), and we dream on our future: “Through cognitive self-guidance, humans can visualize futures that act on the present; construct, evaluate, and modify alternative courses of action to gain valued outcomes, and override environmental influences” (Bandura, 2016, p. 164). I find this very applicable in the rehearsal and therapy room.

### 2.3.17 Conclusion

We have all embraced and been embraced by some sort of home, be it a house of straw, sticks, or bricks, and consequently have some sort of understanding of what home means or could mean to us, with everyone's definition being slightly different. The meaning of home is also dependent on one's experiences, one's memories, and one's current circumstances. The meaning and importance of home are even more urgent when we experience what each character in the *Trilogy* experienced at some time—crisis (Boscaljon, 2016)—those transitional moments where things shift, skidding us into the unknown, times of the *unheimlich*. These sliding moments shake the characters' nuclei, threaten their psychological state, and morph their imaginations (Malik, 2016, p. 193).

The three protagonists experience transitional and transformational moments that draw them towards or away from home. In all three cases, home has different temporal and spatial meanings. For Mardi, home is more often than not “a private and intimate space that invokes a sense of security, unconditioned warmth and rootedness” (Malik, 2016, p. 193), but it is a place she puts effort into making, rather than just being. For Eve, home is a rollercoaster, what Douglas (2012) described earlier as having a “tyrannous control over mind and body” (p. 53), and it is when she can no longer escape into her fierce and uncanny imagination that she becomes undone. She is unable to *make* her home. Her self-agency is unavailable to her for some time. For The Woman, the farmhouse is no longer the intimate, secure, and unconditional place of her childhood where she felt safe. Now there is tension between what was and what will be. Home is no longer the place she thought it was. It has a different feeling and she needs to rupture her attachment to the place in order to make herself a new home, a home of belonging. She needs to write herself back into her world.

## 2.4 Part 3: Embedding Mythology

### 2.4.1 Introduction

One of the main tasks of a narrative therapist is to help clients understand how stories can change depending on how we look at them. David Denborough, one of the resident therapists at Dulwich Centre,<sup>69</sup> has clarified the underlying concept of reframing stories that are no longer working:

Our lives and their pathways are not fixed in stone; instead they are shaped by story. The ways in which we understand and share the stories of our lives therefore make all the difference. If we tell stories that emphasise only desolation, then we become weaker. Alternatively, we can tell our stories in ways that make us stronger, in ways that soothe the losses, in ways that ease sorrow. (Denborough, 2014, Preface, para. 1)

In a similar way, I wanted to employ myths in the *Trilogy* as a way of helping thicken and strengthen the domestic stories within the plays. The weaving of the mythical and the local stories provided ways of seeing things differently and, in doing so, allowed opportunities to create more empowering outcomes. It was the reframing of the three embedded myths<sup>70</sup> within the trilogy that helped illuminate the re-authoring of *Mardi*, *Eve*, and *The Woman*. Denborough (2014) highlighted how re-storying can be of benefit in the therapy room, and is also an important understanding for this thesis:

When our lives have been more tragedy than triumph, too often this is because other people have written the stories that influence our lives, or because broader powers such as sexism, violence, racism, or poverty have become the authors of the storylines of our identity. (2014, Preface, para. 4)

In *Eve*, the tragedy, rather than the triumph, of *Eve* is clear. Throughout the play, I endeavoured to show the dominant discourses that influenced and altered *Eve*'s life, including poverty, sexism, and violence. With *Mardi* and *The Woman*, tragedy seems too potent a word; however, patriarchal and gender discourses had a profound influence on their stories up until they decided to do something about it. The revised myths within the plays helped debunk these dominant discourses and in doing so helped reframe the character's stories.

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<sup>69</sup> Dulwich Centre in Adelaide (founded by the late Michael White and Cheryl White) is one of the leading educational narrative centres in the world and where I engaged in several training courses in the mid-2000s.

<sup>70</sup> Each play has a myth embedded within: in *Home*, the chosen myth is from Ancient Egypt, Queen Isis and Osiris; in *Eve*, it is Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*; and in *He Dreamed a Train*, it is Plato's The Myth of Er.

Part 3 will consider the power of mythology as a fluid path towards deeper understanding of the complex stories that make up our lives. I have divided the review into two parts, the first focusing on personal mythology, the act of creating one's own myth of sorts, in order to live a rich and vibrant life. Personal myth incorporates the great cultural stories,<sup>71</sup> along with personal stories of courage, philosophies, and ritual, cultivating and engendering deeper ways of becoming. This is followed by cultural mythology, what Margaret Atwood referred to as "the human smorgasbord" (2006, p. 1), a host of stories that stimulate and provoke. But first, I will rationalise my motivation of weaving revised myths into the three stories in the first place. According to Joseph Campbell,<sup>72</sup> myths echo through the generations, helping us live better lives:

Myth basically serves four functions. The first is mystical . . . what a wonder the universe is . . . Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery . . . The second is cosmological dimension—showing you what the shape of the universe is . . . The third function is the sociological one—supporting and validating a certain social order . . . a fourth function of myth . . . is the pedagogical function of how to live a human life under any circumstances. (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 38)

Reading this, it is clear that myths are powerful, guiding our choices and helping us understand how we operate in the world. Carolyn Larrington (1992) expanded upon this by focusing on how myths provide a way to think about ourselves:

For Westerners, our interpretation of our mythological heritage conditions the way in which we think about ourselves. Myth has been appropriated by politicians, psychiatrists and artists, among others, to tell us what we are and where we have come from. (Larrington, 1992, p. ix)

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<sup>71</sup> These cultural myths constantly change, for they are living myths. Many writers have revised myths and fairytales through a feminist lens to make them relevant and powerful for women, such as Margaret Atwood (*Penelopiad*, a revisioning of Penelope in *The Odyssey*) and Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber*, a revisioning of fairytales). The original stories are patriarchal.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Campbell, one of the pioneers in modern mythological study, has written dozens of books on the subject, one of his most famous being his classic, *The Hero's Journey* (1990/2003). Campbell proposed that there was a monomyth, a universal story of the hero common to most cultures. He sees the pattern of the hero's myth as a suitable metaphor for generative growth within the human being. *The Hero's Journey* has had a profound impact on script writing and film making.



If myths tell us what we are, and if myths primarily portray women as wives, lovers, helpers, victims, or witches, then there is a problem to solve regarding the mythic storying of a woman's self-agency. This is complicated by the fact that myths go beyond language. Mythic awareness "keeps our imaginations at a level where emotion and meaning have a home but where rational analysis has no entry" (Moore, 1996, p. 233). In this world of emotion and imagination, women are not often portrayed as powerful in their own right, apart from Athena, who was born out of her father's head rather than her mother's womb. However, there has been a strong movement over the last few decades to revise myths, so that women can write themselves back into the great stories. Feminist Judith Plaskow (2005) proposed that "since stories are the heart of tradition, we could question and create tradition by telling a new story within the framework of an old one" (2005, p. 30). Holding this idea, I was then encouraged by Cixous's call to arms:

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

Feminist poet Adrienne Rich (1979) proposed that when we re-vision, we should see things differently, approaching the old texts anew and creating a new and significant direction: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival" (Rich, 1979, p. 35). Reading these words gave me the courage to re-write my stories anew and, at the same time, to enrich the scripts with the wisdom and power of mythology. Using as much boldness as I could muster, I rewrote parts of the myths (although Travis Ash re-wrote *He Dreamed a Train's* Myth of Er) and emphasised others, in ways that would nurture and generate new ways of understanding. Cixous talked about the editing of herself, something I was so familiar with: "I was there with my big pair of scissors, and as soon as I saw myself overlapping, snip, I cut, I adjusted, I reduced everything to a personage known as 'a proper woman'" (Cixous, 1991, p. 30). I too had constantly modified

myself to fit into the cultural landscape. And then I read another passage from Cixous's classic (1991) *Coming to Writing*, where she described how, in spite of the barriers she had to overcome (gender bias, cultural prejudice, patriarchal institutional regulations), nothing could prevent her from writing herself back into history. She urged us to follow and walk beyond the codes, away from the fear, outside the social constructions of womanhood, and end up where we began, the place of innocence and possibilities:

As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and with joy, the words diverge, you are no longer enclosed in the maps of social constructions, you no longer walk between walls, meanings flow . . . the air circulates, desires shatter images, passions are no longer chained to genealogies, life is no longer nailed down to generational time . . . and you are returned to your innocences, your possibilities. (Cixous, 1991, p. 49)

It was important for me to write *The Belonging Trilogy* in order to recognise and to move beyond the social constructionist “codes” that shaped me and my characters and also beyond the mythological structures that have been absorbed and embedded into our culture. Just like Cixous, I wanted to “tear the veil from my throat” (Cixous, 1991, p. 36), break down Cixous's walls, and redefine what informed my life at an unconscious or unknowing level—to elicit new “innocences,” new “possibilities.” Therefore, with determination and not a little hesitancy, I turned to myth,<sup>73</sup> knowing that it would not be an easy venture, but also recognising that: “Mythological thinking, simply defined, involves the quintessential human ability to address the large questions of existence using symbolism, metaphor and narrative” (Feinstein, 1997, p. 508).

I held a strong belief that understanding mythology was vital because I was addressing one of the largest questions that a human being faces, that of “How do I belong in this ever-changing world?”

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<sup>73</sup> Entering this mythic world, I was aware that many could dismiss myths “as merely the quaint and fanciful ‘nursery stories’ of evolving cultures on their way toward superior rational, scientific mental processes” (Taylor, 1998, p. 4); however, myth is far more than just a story, it is at the very centre of ancient wisdom. Luc Ferry believes that mythology is “the foundation for that great edifice of Greek philosophy that would subsequently sketch out, in conceptual form, the blueprint of a successful life for human kind, mortal as we are” (Ferry, 2014, p. 1), always keeping in mind that unless we storytellers revise the myths to some degree, we are reducing women to roles of service only.

There were good precedents in this regard. In 2006, Bill Moyers interviewed several internationally renowned writers for a PBS series focusing on faith and reason, where author Anne Provoost saw mythology as a way of clarifying what we don't understand; novelist Jeanette Winterson saw myths as an avenue to understanding the human condition; and Joseph Campbell proposed that these ancient myths connected us to our inner mysteries. So, my notion to embed myth as a mirror to the main story was a sound one: it would help clarify what I did not understand or even "what I didn't know I knew." When I understood that I could change not just my own story but also the mythological stories that I told, I created another gateway into stories of making belonging. So, I surrounded myself with paper, just as de Beauvoir had: "all dog-eared and covered with cross-outs . . . written on different sizes of paper with different inks and even in different scripts" (Bair, 1991, p. 285). Similarly, just as de Beauvoir had difficulty integrating her philosophical stance with her fiction, so I faced the quest of wedding my social constructionist approach within my stories at the same time as re-writing and re-weaving the chosen myths. I also wanted to be loyal to my need of making the ordinary world "strange" for a while, so that I could interrogate my own assumptions, biases, and limiting behaviours.

When I am in the role of collaborative therapist, my focus is to help bring about change by coaching clients as they dream on personal stories that no longer work for them and, in so doing, invent new ways of becoming. They re-story their problem story and, in this way, we begin to create a new map of what I call "My Map of Belonging".<sup>74</sup> This is also the role of the constructionist storyteller, to re-tell the stories that return us to our "innocences" and our "possibilities" (Cixous, 1991, p. 49).

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<sup>74</sup> My Map of Belonging is the consequence of engaging with the RIC Process, one of the outcomes of this research. At the end of the six weeks of study, the artist has a deeper understanding of their "who, what, where, when, how and why." See RIC Process in Room 7 as well as Appendix 4.

### 2.4.2 Personal Mythology

Creating a new personal mythology is something that researchers, therapists, writers, and psychotherapists have been exploring for decades. Jung (2016), who dedicated his later years to exploring myth and archetypes, was cognisant of this need:

I was driven to ask myself in all seriousness: “What is the myth you are living?” . . . I took it upon myself to get to know “my” myth, and I regarded this as the task of tasks, for—so I told myself—I simply had to know what unconscious or preconscious myth was forming me, from what rhizome I sprang. (Jung, 2016, p. 267)

This quote resonated deeply with me. Unless we know what is driving us—the preconscious myths, “those edges that flirt with us” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 237)—we remain in the unknown. This is particularly pertinent for women because the myths that flirt on the edge of our consciousness are predominantly patriarchal and controlling. Some people regard mythology as nursery tales (Ferry, 2014), but mythology can also be viewed as being part of the psyche of the individual—often “things that we suspect are there but can’t quite name them” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 237). Creating these performances provided me with the opportunity to examine the things that “flirted” with me and my characters, just outside of consciousness. I explored the space, the place, the environment, the relationships, and the myths. In so doing, my senses were awakened to the crucial need and power of story to bring “new ways of thinking, being and doing to social challenges in the world” (Houston, 2012, p. 78). I took on this challenge and, with a re-storied Goddess Isis as my mythological companion, known for her power, passion, and persistence, I began to assemble the practices that now frame the RIC Process (see Room 7 and Appendix 4).

“Your personal mythology” June Singer said, “is . . . the vibrant infrastructure that informs your life, whether or not you are aware of it. Consciously and unconsciously, you live your mythology” (Singer, 1997, Foreword, para 1). Larsen (1996) also pointed out that our personal mythologies are often reflected in the larger cultural myths, the canon of timeless stories. Krippner examined this

relationship between mythology and personal mythology, defining myths as internalised yet ancient stories that “address existential and spiritual human issues . . . they can be cultural . . . familial, or personal in nature” (Krippner, 1990, p. 138).

Feinstein (1997) advocated that it is crucial for us to understand myth because it gives one the opportunity to address the big philosophical questions of life using symbols, metaphors, and story. But we also need to understand the new myths that are being grown by women who want to write themselves back into the stories of old, not as servers, waiters, or lovers, but as powerful and proactive agents. Dis-ease can happen when we live the wrong personal myth: “A personal mythology that is unable to serve as a bridge to deeper meanings and greater inspiration than an individual can find in the outer world is typically accompanied by a nameless anxiety” (Feinstein, 1997, p. 508).

It is no wonder that many women carry an anxiety without a name. Peggy Orenstein (2000) called it the “hidden curriculum [which] teach[es] girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue” (p. 35). Without affirming and active myths, stories that create the bedrock of our culture, we, as a culture, are in trouble. The understanding and retelling of one’s personal stories, augmented by cultural revisionist myths and fairytales, is a way of deconstructing inhibiting discourses and constructing new personal mythologies for myself, my characters, and for my audience, mythologies that could explicitly address the existential and spiritual issues of belonging. For this to occur, however, the audience would be required to suspend disbelief in order to integrate the chosen myths, what French philosopher Ricouer (1978) referred to as a work of resemblance. This involves the audience accepting that there is some kind of similarity between the two stories, and then being willing to engage their imagination to find new resonances and connections. This metaphorical and imaginative borderline between the two stories would create a potent access point

to the “untranslatable information,” which “yield[s] some true insight about reality” (Ricouer, 1978 p. 143).<sup>75</sup> If we accept both the ordinary *and* mythical stories bumping up against each other, alternative ways of thinking and new resonances could occur, enabling a new way of re-perceiving home and belonging.

In his introduction to *Thinking through Myths*, Schilbrack inferred that myths “[can] disclose alternative worlds” (2002, p. 1). Drawing on the James Hillman (1983) school of archetypal psychology, how these stories are told could help us construct our future, our own alternate worlds: “The way we imagine our lives is the way we are going to go on living our lives. For the manner in which we tell ourselves about what is going on is the genre through which events become experiences” (Hillman, 2015, Chapter 1, Section 5, para. 14).

Exploring the intersections and resonances of our mythologies can enable imaginative disclosures or revelations that offer opportunities to create clear and inspiring stories to live by, especially if we, as women, pay attention to writing ourselves back into the canon. I have endeavoured to do this, albeit tentatively. It was only in the creation of the work, performing them multiple times, and exposing myself to philosophers such as Cixous and Clément that I realised this; and if I were to rewrite the plays today, I would re-story the myths to a far greater degree. I do have the opportunity to do this in a different capacity when I facilitate the artists in the RIC Process.

### **2.4.3 Cultural Mythology**

Myth has been described as the first “self-help” psychology (Greene & Sharman-Burke, 2017, p. 8), a way of understanding our embodied reality by examining the way we think about and feel our lived

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<sup>75</sup> After witnessing the revised mythical story and purposely engaging imagination, new meaning would be potentially in tension with previously held literal meanings of what home means. This strategy would provide an opportunity to re-think our understanding of home and belonging.

experiences. Campbell, in an interview with Tom Collins, stated that he believed that myths provide the wisdom needed to live a rich and impactful life and saw them as a way of getting in touch with our very being, even getting “into [our] gut” (Campbell in Collins, 1986, p. 52). A student and friend of Campbell, Stephen Larsen built on Campbell’s legacy. In his book *The Mythic Imagination*, Larsen (1996) expressed the importance of reconnecting to our mythical ancestors, our roots of belonging. Jean Houston (1987), also a close friend of Joseph Campbell, in her book *Search for the Beloved*, invited her readers to inhabit their wisdom, their higher selves, with what she called a mythic journey of transformation. Houston, in her personal lectures and experiential workshops, deeply engages with mythology because of its powerful function in our lives, which she sees as composing “the culture and consciousness of entire civilisations” (Houston, 1987 p. 101). In her unique way, Houston is able to use original myths and re-story them to fit our modern world, helping individuals feel inspired and full of hope. Mary Catherine Bateson, in her foreword to Houston’s autobiographical text, *A Mythic Life* (Houston, 1996), discussed Houston’s desire and commitment to inhabit a life of continual mythic dialogue in order to compose anew the many parts of herself.<sup>76</sup> One of the prime functions of mythology, according to Houston and Campbell, was pedagogical: to offer people a way forward in the adventure of life. In an interview with Bill Moyer, Campbell stated:

We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. And where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world. (Campbell, 1988)

This famous quote of Campbell’s, often recalled by Houston in her lectures, encapsulates how integrated these great stories are (often unknowingly) in the lives of ordinary people today. As Campbell remarked, “The latest incarnation of Oedipus,<sup>77</sup> the continued romance of Beauty and the

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<sup>76</sup> Houston chose well, for the goddess she was inspired by was Athena, one of the most powerful goddesses in the history of mythology (author’s notes from a workshop with Houston in Greece, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> I am alerted to the fact that it is Oedipus on the street corner, again confirming the dominant male stories that we hold dear. Where are the women? Still behind Cixous’s wall?

Beast, stands this afternoon on the corner of Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the light to change” (Campbell, 2008, p. 2).

I was drawn to how easily relatable Campbell’s writings are, and also to Houston’s experiential exercises that focus on cultural and personal mythology; in particular, the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris—one of the greatest love stories ever told. I was introduced to the myth at the beginning of my research while engaging in a pilgrimage in Egypt, facilitated by Houston and Peggy Rubin in 2010. Coached by Houston, a group of us engaged in Queen Isis’s journey of love, death, murder, birth, and resurrection as we travelled the Nile. The generative experience of the pilgrimage and the reflective practice that I engaged in called up my own mythic story as I explored the story of Queen Isis and her own becoming. She drove me to ask the same question that Jung asked of himself decades before: What myth am I living? As I re-storied parts of Isis’s myth in *Home*, I summoned her world to enrich my own domestic story. She lit me from within with her strength to love unconditionally, her passionate yearning to be with her beloved, her tenacity despite adversity, her teachings of excruciating vulnerability, and her ability to take firm and powerful action at the same time as articulating her anger and joy:

As she pries open the coffin’s lid,  
the great wheel of time rolls backwards  
and she begins to spin.  
Her arms become great-feathered wings  
and she flies above the corpse of Osiris.  
“The wind of my wings, bring breath to your lungs,” she cries,  
and, at that moment, the dead awaken.  
(*Home*, 2015, p. 121)

Queen Isis, a passionate woman of action, brought Osiris back to life. Although initially this appears to be the same story told through millennia, of woman being subservient to man, it is far more than that. Yes, Queen Isis loved. But she also actioned. She did not collapse. She was determined to find her husband’s corpse and build temples to honour him. And in the honouring of Osiris, she



discovered that if we talk about our loved ones who have died, “Say their name, bring them beer, and raisin cake” (*Home*, 2015, p. 123), they shall live on: “As long as we live, the dead shall live” (p. 124). Queen Isis became the greatest teacher and sage of the land, so, in the telling of Mardi’s story in *Home*, I gently invited Queen Isis to illuminate Mardi’s imaginative world so that her life moved into impassioned action, moving from the plainness of homemaking into a more luminous, fertile, and active place of belonging. And in so doing, she provided Mardi with avenues to help other people awaken to their stories through action.

The story thickens. Mardi finishes Queen Isis’s story with this realisation:

Now it seems to me  
Queen Isis has re-dreamed their story.  
Out of loneliness, she creates relationship.  
Out of ritual, she finds hope.  
And out of tragedy, she rebuilds her love.  
Again, and again and again.  
(*Home*, 2015, p. 124)

The re-storying of Queen Isis’s old story allows us to see with new eyes, in imaginative and generative ways. We witness how Queen Isis moves from loneliness to connectedness, from despair to hope, from tragedy to love. Queen Isis is prominent in *Home*, weaving her miraculous ways of being throughout the play. Her spirit is also present in *Eve* and *Dream*, even though she is never mentioned by name.

*Eve* and *Dream* were driven by an engagement with two myths, *The Selfish Giant* and the Myth of Er, respectively. These myths were utilised in order to illuminate the ruptures of home and belonging. *Eve* and *Dream* exemplify crisis points within the home, or what we call in the constructionist therapy room, critical incidents. These two plays, along with their mythical underpinnings, problematise home: does one belong when one feels un-homed? And how can one

feel at home when faced with the transitional zones of death and dying? While these works are discussed in later chapters, there are some points worth making here about the mythologies used. *The Selfish Giant* is my favourite Oscar Wilde story, and I am classifying it as a modern myth because it possesses all the hallmarks of being one. It is timeless, it teaches us how to live: we learn about betrayal, love, and loss (expanded in *Room Eve*). In *Eve*, Oscar Wilde, classified as Eve's other self, upholds the spirit of Queen Isis, stepping in and taking over when Eve cannot cope "Oscar can take it, always remember, Eve can't. Can't take anything" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 191). By the end of the play, however, the myth diverts and reconnects Eve with the universe. *Room Eve* (Room 5) talks about this further.

*Dream* features a re-storying of the Myth of Er, written by Travis Ash. When I first heard the original Myth of Er, the fear of my brother's death suddenly dissipated, because, as instructed within the myth, there is life after death. Er reveals that we can discover a sense of belonging even after crossing the River Styx.<sup>78</sup> The ritual of stepping out of the play at the end, however, encapsulates the spirit of Queen Isis, and her spirit provides opportunity for the protagonist to move into passionate action rather than passively waiting for things to change, as Penelope did (in the non-revisionist versions of the Odysseus myth) for centuries. In other words, The Woman takes up Cixous's challenge and moves beyond codes, walking away from the social constructions that are constricting her. She will no longer walk between walls (Cixous, 1991); rather, she steps through the fourth wall of the stage set and walks away:

You dreamt so many dreams.  
You dreamt about a train,  
but dreams require means  
and you just smiled, and gave your means away.  
I will no longer be silent.  
There is no map to follow.  
I step off the stage.

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<sup>78</sup> For *Dream*, Travis Ash rewrote the Myth of Er from the point of view of a seven-year-old boy, full of misadventure. As a seven-year-old, Er became the Dragon King and defied the fates.

I step away.  
(*Dream*, 2017, p. 253)

The act of stepping off the stage is the last physical action of the entire *Trilogy*, an embodied commitment to change. The future for The Woman is yet to be written, but if we dream on her story for now, she walks backstage, “the air circulates, desires shatter images, passions are no longer chained to genealogies, life is no longer nailed down to Generational time” (Cixous, 1991, p. 50), and she begins to re-write her story, for, as Cixous proclaimed, “Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (Cixous, 1976, p. 875).

#### **2.4.4 Conclusion**

*The Belonging Trilogy* is informed by three major theoretical frameworks: social constructionism, home theory, and mythology. All of these frameworks have contributed to the re-storying of home and belonging. A social constructionist slant allows for a robust interrogation of the multiplicity of influences, particularly the implicit ones, that manipulate and control us. Once identified, they can be altered or adjusted, returning us our self-agency by telling our stories differently.

Home theory brings into the rehearsal room new and exciting ideas to probe home’s potential and strengths, as well as its limitations and imperfections. The diverse interpretations of what home can be, offered by philosophers, geographers, anthropologists, and artists, have not merely provided abundant stimuli as powerful provocations in writing the script, but have actually provided an answer. We make home. Home is active, rather than passive. The question “How do we make home?” is partly answered by mythology, and the re-mythologising of the ancient stories, renegotiating our personal myths and listening passionately to Cixous’s call to arms when she cries “Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). This is exactly what happened as the research unfolded; there was a rewriting

of my personal text, by my 'own movement', and, with that, there was an invitation for others to do the same.

Rooms 4, 5, and 6 discuss the three productions and how they evolved and changed with each inquiry cycle until they 'made' their home of belonging. The next room is a celebration of the methodologies, methods, and tools used in this vital exploration into home and belonging.

## **ROOM 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: CHARTING *THE BELONGING TRILOGY* AS A CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Room 2 outlined my engagement with social constructionism as a philosophical framework for the study, in addition to the central concepts and theories that sensitised the work in its focus on home and belonging. This included examining the theories and metaphors of home through the eyes of philosophers, anthropologists, geographers, and artists, as well as investigating the significance and power of mythology, both cultural and personal. This room will address the exegetical task of outlining the central processes employed to achieve an understanding of the nature and challenges of belonging, in a way that promotes reflection and change. To do this, the room outlines the paradigmatic practice-led and practice-based research principles that are suited to a social constructionist approach. The room then turns to strategies and methods employed to develop the work, including the action research cycle and an adapted MIECAT inquiry method.

#### **3.2 Poetic Approach to Research**

After I spent my first year researching, reading, and setting up collaborative conversations to explore the concept of belonging, my research focus became clearer when I wrote and performed my confirmation presentation, beginning with:

As I stand here  
I cannot help but think of Wittgenstein  
when he writes about knowing something so deeply,  
but as soon as someone wants to know what that is,  
... no longer able to explain it (Wittgenstein. (1953/2004)  
But I'll try. Like Wittgenstein, I am not concerned about facts and figures ...  
I want to understand something that is already there.

Something that I somehow don't yet understand. (Brown Ash, 2013, unpublished)

The concept of “home and belonging” impacts on everyone, either longing for one's home or having the luxury of being home. Belonging is one of Maslow's basic needs of survival in his famous triangular Hierarchy of Needs (2013), yet there seem to be as many definitions of what home and belonging could mean as the number of people who populate the world, as evidenced in the previous chapter. I decided to start where I was at, and in collaboration with my directors, Leah Mercer and Benjamin Knapton, to explore what I thought home could mean. As the writing grew and thickened,<sup>79</sup> so did my predilection for poetic expression. I moved from a more conversational tone in my script writing to one of poetic cadence. Noticing this, I realised that I valued the poet's contribution to play-building. This was new for me. Perhaps, as Wittgenstein says, it had been there all along, but I could not name it. Sometimes, I think it was performing Eve Langley's words in the early 1990s that awoke my poet, but she stayed quietly waiting until *Home* began. Eve knew that poetry could do what ordinary conversation could not: “It has the ability to invite the audience to feel the knowledge, to feel the meaning” (Pelias, 2004, p. 11). As Ronald Pelias articulated, “Without [our] heart pumping its words”, we are “nothing but an outdated dictionary, untouched” (2004, p. 7). Some modernist psychologists believe that poetry is not the language of the clear-thinking perceptive individual (Levine, 1997); psychologists heal the troubled mind by bringing the imagination into line. However, in our postmodern world, we are more likely to embrace the poem as knowledge because it is more than just logic or emotion. Pelias tells us that the poem

will not be contained, reduced to mere logic or emotion.  
It always wants more . . .  
. . . more pleasure  
Passion  
Poignancy.  
It's always ready to mold you  
Ready to grab hold  
Ready to possess you.

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<sup>79</sup> Throughout this document, I engage in language from the therapy room. The word ‘thicken’ is a common one in the constructionist and narrative therapy room, meaning the story is becoming more dynamic, more generative, more transformative.

The poem is always more than can be said.  
It finds its power in the ineffable  
In the space between words. (Pelias, 1999. p. 76)

This made for a perfect description of the research that I wanted to read, engage with, and dream on. Just like Pelias, I wanted to be “grabbed” by it, changed by it. Whyte (2003) proposed that the “poet lives and writes at the frontier between deep internal experience and the revelations of the outer world”. If the researcher who embraces poetics sits in this in-between space, they have the ability to “dream with open eyes” (Lawrence, 1997, p. 7).<sup>80</sup> This was my intention in this exegesis.

### 3.3 Exegesis: An Inquiry into Belonging

Nigel Krauth (2011) recalled that back in the 1980s, the general belief was that artists were not seen capable of critically examining their work for scholastic ends. Fortunately, this has changed somewhat. If bold enough, the artist can break new ground and challenge current methods (Krauth, 2011). I endeavoured to do this through *The Belonging Trilogy* by researching innovative and poetic performance, by engaging with diverse practices, including a postmodern therapeutic approach, and by using a contemporary performance framework. I wanted to research original ways of creating poetic theatre that would support generative change.

The move to poetics represented a strengthening commitment to invent a new territory of exploration and in so doing, extend my understanding of belonging. Initially, I felt as though I was perched on high, looking down into a landscape of art, therapy, and domesticity, reminiscent of the penultimate scene in *He Dreamed a Train*:

And I trace my map till I reach the moon, the moon that slowly covers the sun,  
and I look down into your small crowded house.  
Seven rooms made of bricks,  
seven rooms thick with dust.

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<sup>80</sup> Quote from T.E. Lawrence in his book *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: “All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake up in the day to find it was vanity, but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible” (Lawrence, 1997, p. 7).

To be packed, sealed and stored when the time comes,  
When I step out of my way.  
(*Dream*, 2017, p. 252)

Although this verse refers to The Woman's experience in her brother's home, it could very well have been written by my researcher-self, unpacking, rather than packing, my research terrain. In the beginning, my creative research felt like an eclipse, the moon slowly covering the sun, what Annie Dillard described so profoundly when she wrote "I turned back to the sun. It was going. The sun was going, and the world was wrong" (Dillard, 2016, p. 9). In my efforts to make the world right, I have divided it into seven rooms of poetic and embodied appreciation of home and belonging.

### **3.4 The Impact of Durational Experiencing on the Research**

Through the methodology, the performative research exposed me to a multiplicity of understandings and experiences. In the beginning, I was not aware that I needed to create a trilogy, but as the years passed and as I changed, it became necessary to create a blanket of time to throw over these three very different experiences, in order to encapsulate the multiple meanings of belonging. To belong, despite the boundaries of gender, of class, of profession. To belong, despite ageing, illness, and familial crisis. This blanket of time, this durational experiencing, extended for over 60 months, and the result was not only the *Trilogy*, which will be performed again and again, but also this written exploration of what it is to belong.

### **3.5 The Interrelationship of Paradigm, Methodological Strategies, and Methods**

Keeping in mind that methodologies are not fixed, "they can get better with time or turn out to be altogether useless at any moment" (Kooback, 2014, p. 95), the list of methodologies that I employed to construct, interrogate, and appreciate the notions of home and belonging are set out in the diagram below (Figure 2).



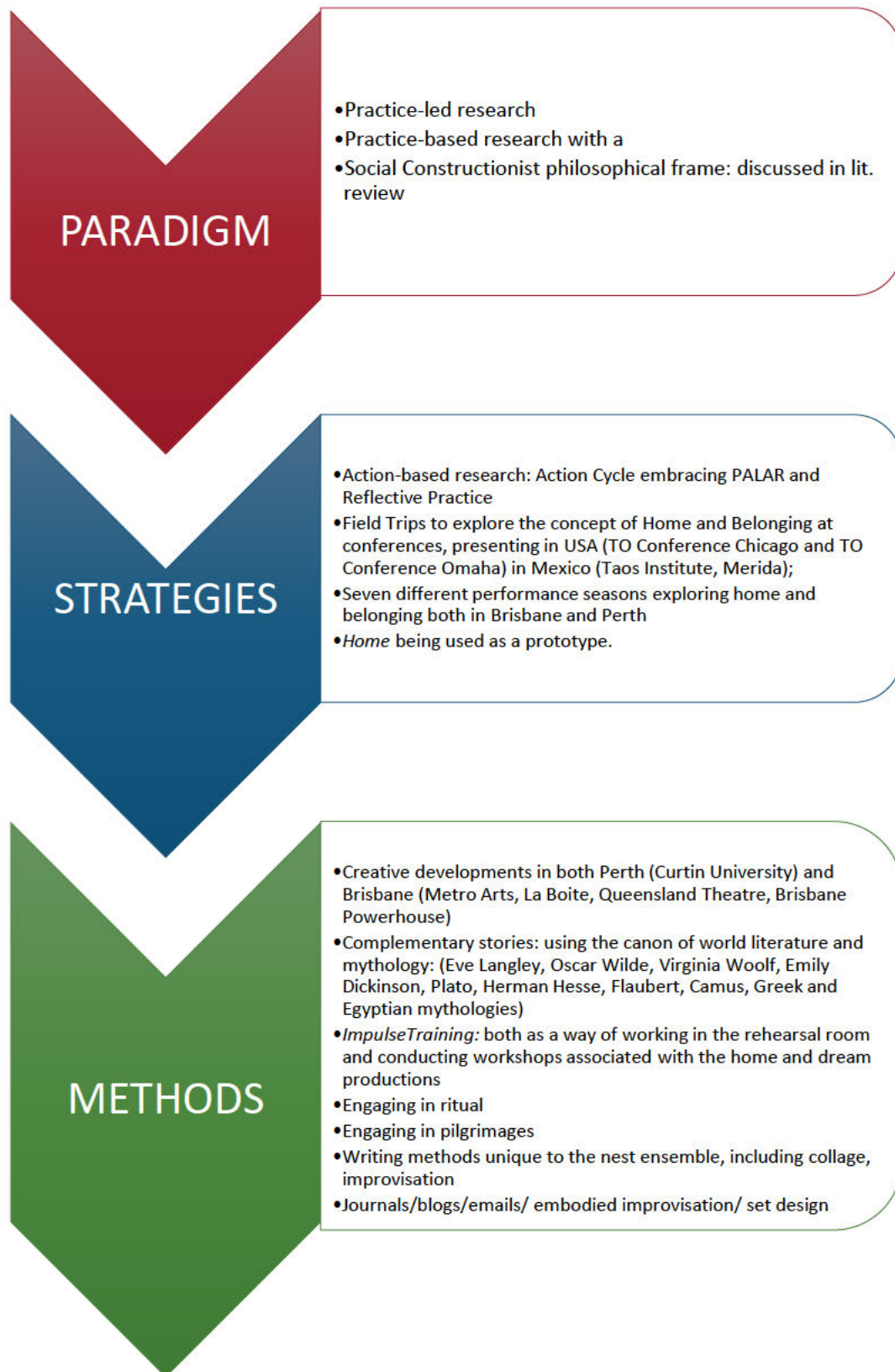


Figure 2. List of Methodologies Employed

### 3.5.1 Chosen Paradigm: Practice-Led & Practice-Based Research

A question that many creative practice researchers have asked themselves is “How do I move from the creative practice to creating a document that explains to an outside audience my processes, discoveries, and outcomes?” My critical arts-based research embraced practice-led and practice-based methodologies, which are ways of deconstructing creative products that are similar in some ways, yet have distinct differences. Linda Candy (2006) argued that practice-led research is an approach that *improves* one’s practice, leading to new knowledge within the practice itself, and that through doing such research, the researcher *enriches their knowledge* both about their practice and within their practice. This was the case with *The Belonging Trilogy*, where I created new sustainable theatrical practices and healthy processes, and in so doing enhanced my professional and private lives.

Carol Gray (1996) described practice-led methodology as a way of improving one’s own practice by interrogating uncertainties, ruptures, and conflicts that every practitioner has to deal with at some time, exploring through action and reflective practice, both in-action (reflecting while in the process of doing) and on-action (reflecting after the practice had finished) (Schon, 2008). Joyce Scaife suggested that “Reflection-on-action can take place minutes, hours, weeks, months or years after the original interaction” (Scaife, 2010, p. 5).

Candy then described practice-based research as: “an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice” (Candy, 2006, p. 1). My aim was to not only improve my practice but also to examine the outcomes of my practice. I began my research with two strongly developed professional selves—the arts practitioner and the therapist—both contributing equally to the unfolding process and both growing exponentially as a result of these experiences. I was professionally motivated by issues of belonging and identity that

arose in the counselling clinic where I worked, and I wanted to embrace the time-honoured, ancient art of storytelling and to “slam it” up against contemporary performance to unpack this basic human need that most people seem to grapple with at some time, including myself. As a narrative therapist, I observed that the re-storying of disempowering stories had a profound impact on the wellbeing of the client. Humans are storied beings, and we sometimes live within stories that do not work for us. My professional interest led me to examine a more cross-disciplinary literature on the questions of belonging and identity (including philosophy, home theory, theatre, ritual, mythology, postmodern therapy, narrative therapy, and collaborative therapy), and I recognised an opportunity to extend this understanding through the processes of writing, playmaking, and exploring the role of the performative.

By engaging with both practice-led and practice-based research, I had the opportunity to challenge my ways of working and to interrogate habits that narrowed and restricted my work by “embracing an enthusiasm of practice” (Haseman, 2006, p. 101). By remaining curious and open to offers from the many creatives and performers<sup>81</sup> who joined me, as well as offers from my audience (particularly in *Home* where the audience members were enrolled as performers), I was able to progress the work in imaginative and life-changing ways. Worthy research needs to take hold of our imaginations as well as our souls. As Susan Finley so passionately expressed:

Good critical arts-based research grasps our imaginations, grabs a hold of our souls, and unabashedly strives to affect our very ways of living, being and co-being . . . [and is] deliberately transformative and inspires us to reflection, rewards our attention with introspection and moves us to ethical, political action necessary to initiate positive change in our social interactions. (Finley, 2014, p. 531)

It was my desire that these research cycles would change our social interactions, enriching not only the rehearsal room but also the lives of everyone involved.

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<sup>81</sup> Even though initially these three shows were to be one-person shows, that did not happen. First, we added a musician, then a storyteller, then we invited other very experienced actors into the rehearsal room to act my roles so that I could witness the shape of *Dream* from the outside. In *Home* and *Eve*, I would often ask my director to step into the shoes of the actor so that I could witness ways of solving complex situations.

### 3.5.2 Strategies Used: Participatory Action Research

I have chosen action research as a “meta-practice” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 463)<sup>82</sup> because it embodies strong professional practice, providing the opportunity to reflect on action and then move the action forward with renewed vigour, consideration, and new knowledge (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003). There are many types of action research,<sup>83</sup> and the one that is most useful to this research is what is known as PALAR, a holistic Participatory Action Learning and Action Research model, which expands the scope of action research to incorporate collaborative inquiry. It also emphasises the importance and influences of communication and participation and has the objective of engendering positive social change, which is an overriding value of this thesis. It is also learner-centred, interdisciplinary, and inclusive (Zuber-Skerrit & Teare, 2013. p. 17), which aligns with our theatre company’s value system.

The first major action cycle (within which there are multiple minor action cycles of creative developments), *Home*, set up a basis for the development of the second and third major action cycles, *Eve* and *Dream*.

#### ***Bird’s Eye View of Action Cycle***

The first cycle of my creative practice began with a collaborative devising process, with each draft of the scripts written by me, with some of the complementary texts<sup>84</sup> written by Travis Ash. I participated in a cycle of planning (inspired by hunches, contributions from literature, both fiction and non-fiction, and pilgrimages to relevant places), followed by devising processes on the floor,

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<sup>82</sup> “Action research is a meta-practice . . . it . . . changes other practices” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 463).

<sup>83</sup> Broadly, action research incorporates an experiential learning cycle, a way of learning (Kolb, 1984) that begins with a new experience which is felt (rehearsal 1); followed by a reflection on the new experiences which incorporates thinking and watching (reflexive process); then a modification of the original new experience, which embraces a “think and do approach” (rehearsal 2) followed by a deeper understanding of practice that can then be applied to other practices (in my case the other two shows) (McLeod, 2013).

<sup>84</sup> I expand on this in Room 4.

where I engaged performative practices such as *ImpulseTraining* (the outcome of my Master of Arts research in 2009), meditation, and creative arts practices that I employed in the therapy room. I observed, journaled, and reflected on this devised material, engaging in generative conversations with my collaborators, and then wrote the scripts. At the same time, a complementary text was emerging, to be called the RIC Process.<sup>85</sup>



*Figure 3. Bird's Eye View of PALAR Research Cycle for All Three Performances. "Learning by Doing" initially based on Zuker-Skermitt and Perry (2002) and then developed to suit my practice.*

<sup>85</sup> I expand on this in Room 7 and Appendix 4.

As shown in the diagram, our PALAR action research cycle was enriched by engaging with an adapted MIECAT Process, an action research method I regularly use in the therapy room as an investigative and exploratory cycle of inquiry using multimodal art forms.

### ***The Research Cycles***

The research process for *Home* included field trips to Palestine and Egypt to learn and be inspired by the original places where the myths had sprung. I visited my daughter in Israel and experienced bulldozed homes in Palestine (the original motivation or “hunch” for *Home*’s first cycle of research, and in the second reiteration, became a complementary story in *Home*); I engaged with a study tour of Ancient Egypt with Dr. Jean Houston and visited the temples Queen Isis built for Osiris along the River Nile. The experience was life-changing, and as a result, in the next action cycle, Queen Isis became an integral part of the experience of *Home*, woven throughout the whole script, and her spirit was present in the characters *Eve* and The Woman.

The outcomes of the creative developments for *Home* were assessed in the field, either at Collaborative Therapy Conferences or Theatre of the Oppressed Conferences in USA or Mexico, as well as in local showings to a limited audience, before returning to the rehearsal room for another creative cycle. Once I had an idea of how the different forms of writing sat together and enriched the physical score of *Home*, I decided to also incorporate a number of complementary texts into *Eve* and *Dream* scripts.

A few years later, for the *Dream Cycles*, I walked Er’s Elysian Fields in Greece, and the ensuing stories were incorporated in *Dream*, which was set in a farmhouse, based on my family’s original farmhouse.

Although I did not visit the “real” Eve Langley’s hut, material and photographs were obtained by our designer from Katoomba Historical Society. I also researched Langley’s original papers in the Mitchell Library in Sydney and sourced videos and interviews of the Langley, who was the inspiration for *Eve*.

These experiences, documents, videos, photographs, and locations contributed to three authentic worlds of the plays. I also read widely in my efforts to select the most appropriate writers to incorporate within the scripts, including Virginia Woolf and Emily Dickinson (*Eve*) and Herman Hesse’s and my brother’s writings, who was the inspiration for the play *Dream*.

Throughout the action cycles, I continually built and refined *ImpulseTraining*: it became both an outcome and part of the implementation of my action research. It became a method of communication, a play-building strategy, and a framework to conduct rehearsals as well as associated workshops. The outcome was the development of the RIC Process, a collaborative process to move the actor towards excellent work and an enriched personal life. This way of working was tested and re-tested in my rehearsal rooms throughout the PALAR cycles, incorporating ritual, unique writing methods, embodied processes, and artmaking practices that could be used both inside and outside of rehearsals.

I also engaged with the set design as a method of exploration, because all three sets had grown out of the rehearsal room, rather than conceptualised from a script, and so they had a profound effect on the outcome of the performances, helping shape the style and energy of the productions. The *Home* set is transparent, just like Mardi’s spirit. It is fluid and has the ability to change depending on the projection and lighting. The *Eve* set is made of rustic wooden panels and corrugated iron, a huge fireplace, and an epic bathtub. The set dictated the physical score, providing multiple levels on which

Eve could climb and disappear. In *Dream*, after several action cycles, my director and I decided that rather than staying with the complexity of the set that was first proposed (in the first cycle, the set was a dream world on one level of scaffolding and the real world on another), it would become as plain as possible, so that the stark bare walls could be projected upon, transforming the external landscape into an internal one.

Using the set as stimuli, I improvised<sup>86</sup> my way into the writing process, moving between an embodiment of provocations on the floor, initiated by the directors and performers, followed by writing down emerging ideas before moving it into a metaphorical and poetic description. I then would return to the floor, enacting the new script with improvised moments. Gradually, the director and I refined both the improvisation and the text to create the final product.

### ***Moving from Action Cycles 1 to Action Cycles 2 and 3***

When I began this research, it was not intended to be a trilogy. It was one show, *Home*. However, after working on the creative developments and preparing for the upcoming season of *Home*, I was drawn to consider the following question: How can I understand belonging if I do not have a deep understanding of what it is not to belong?<sup>87</sup> So, I created Eve, an exploration into a character that I had, in fact, investigated years before, but had put aside for personal reasons.<sup>88</sup> Initially, I believed that Eve never knew belonging, though this perspective changed as the research deepened. It was while I was performing Eve in Brisbane that something profound happened in my personal life that

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<sup>86</sup> Improvisation was a method of inquiry to create text, and it also provided an opportunity for intimate moments between audience and actor.

<sup>87</sup> Even though Mardi felt she did not belong when she moved from Sydney to Brisbane, she still had a close family around her and a strong connection to affirming stories. The character Eve, on the other hand, was isolated on all fronts including family, work, and stories that did not necessarily empower her, they isolated her.

<sup>88</sup> These reasons were varied, but on reflection, it was due to her powerful fictional accounts of what it was like to be a mother, a wife, an artist, and someone extremely aware of the gender biases in our culture. It unsettled me. For a young mother of four children in a strange city-of-not-belonging, there were too many conflicting issues, so I lay the project aside.



drove me to begin writing the third play of the trilogy, *He Dreamed a Train*,<sup>89</sup> named after the title of my brother's novel.<sup>90</sup> Thus, *The Belonging Trilogy* was born. *Home* turned into the prototype for *Eve* and *Dream*.

The plays were written from different perspectives:

1. *Home* moves through time, spanning six decades and encompassing travels over three continents: Mardi plays a teenager, a young mother, an emerging actor, and a wife of 25 years.
2. *Eve* takes place all in the one time frame, with flashbacks of memories to earlier times.
3. *Dream* happens in one day, with memories emerging from the home as The Woman packs up the house.

Strong stylistic components link all three plays:

1. Each engages directly with the audience.
2. All three characters treat the audience as friend, exchanging glances, laughter, jokes, and deep conversation.
3. Each incorporates mythology, woven throughout the scenes in some capacity.
4. Each features a musician/storyteller.
5. Each is episodic, moving from one story to the next, forward and backward in time.
6. Each references a particular line, "What is fact, what is fiction, what is truth, what is fibs, what is life, what is art?", in slightly different ways. Notably, this statement is not "What is home?" or "What is belonging?" Rather it seemed, on a tacit level, a vital and fundamental philosophical conundrum, one we deal with minute by minute, day by day. The significance of this line of inquiry did not reveal itself for some time.

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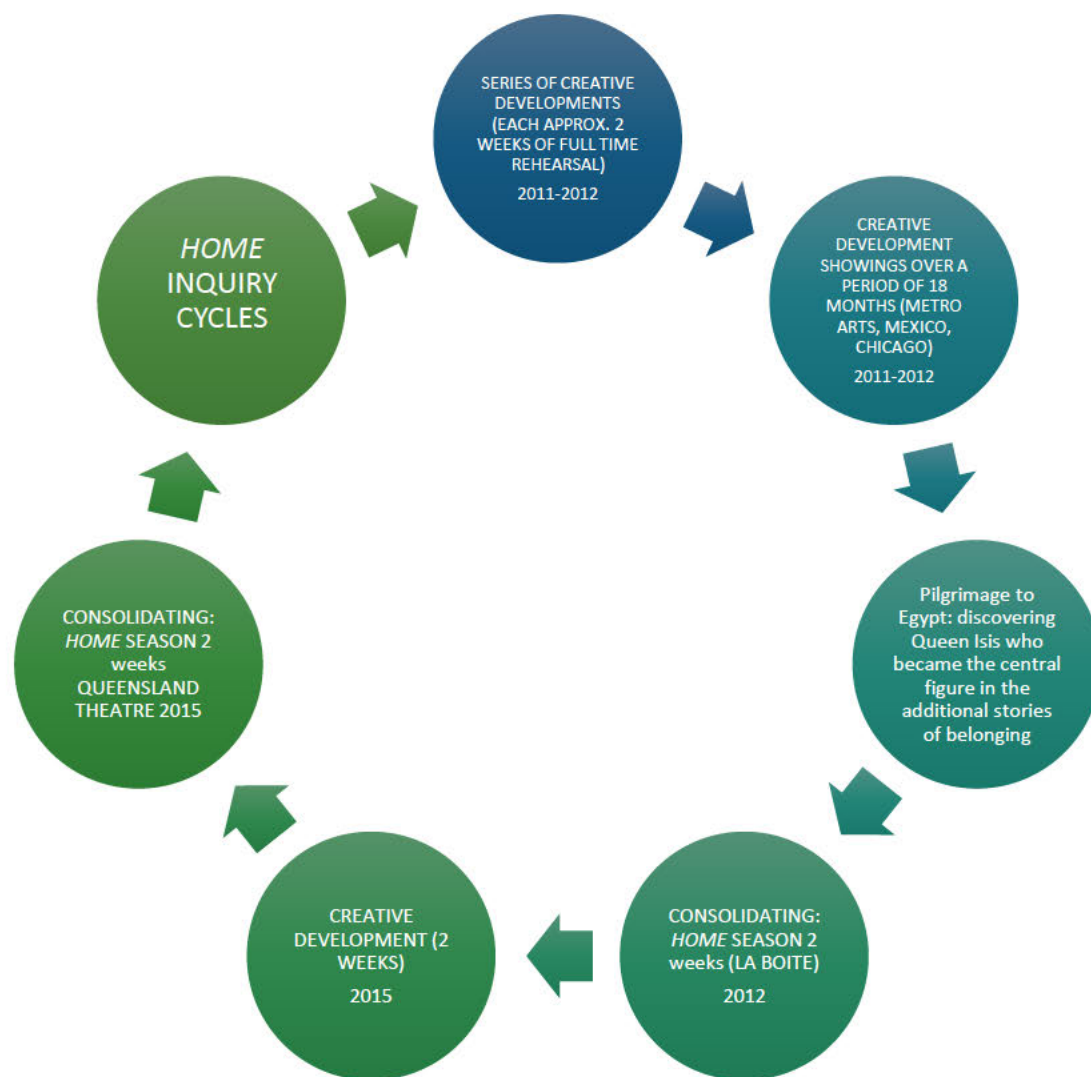
<sup>89</sup> Initially called "Man in Quotation Marks," which on reflection, is most apt considering the outcome of the play where The Woman steps away from her gendered role as "sister" in quotation marks to create a new way of being in her world.

<sup>90</sup> Despite 2012 being a huge performing year for *Home* and *Eve*, much of my energy was being directed towards my brother's then-recent diagnosis, his terminal illness. The question arose "How can I even pretend to understand what it is to belong when it is so easily ruptured/disrupted by illness, death, and dying?"

Below are diagrams that outline the action research cycles for *Home*, *Eve*, and *Dream* (Figures 4, 5, and 6).

### **Home Action Research Cycle**

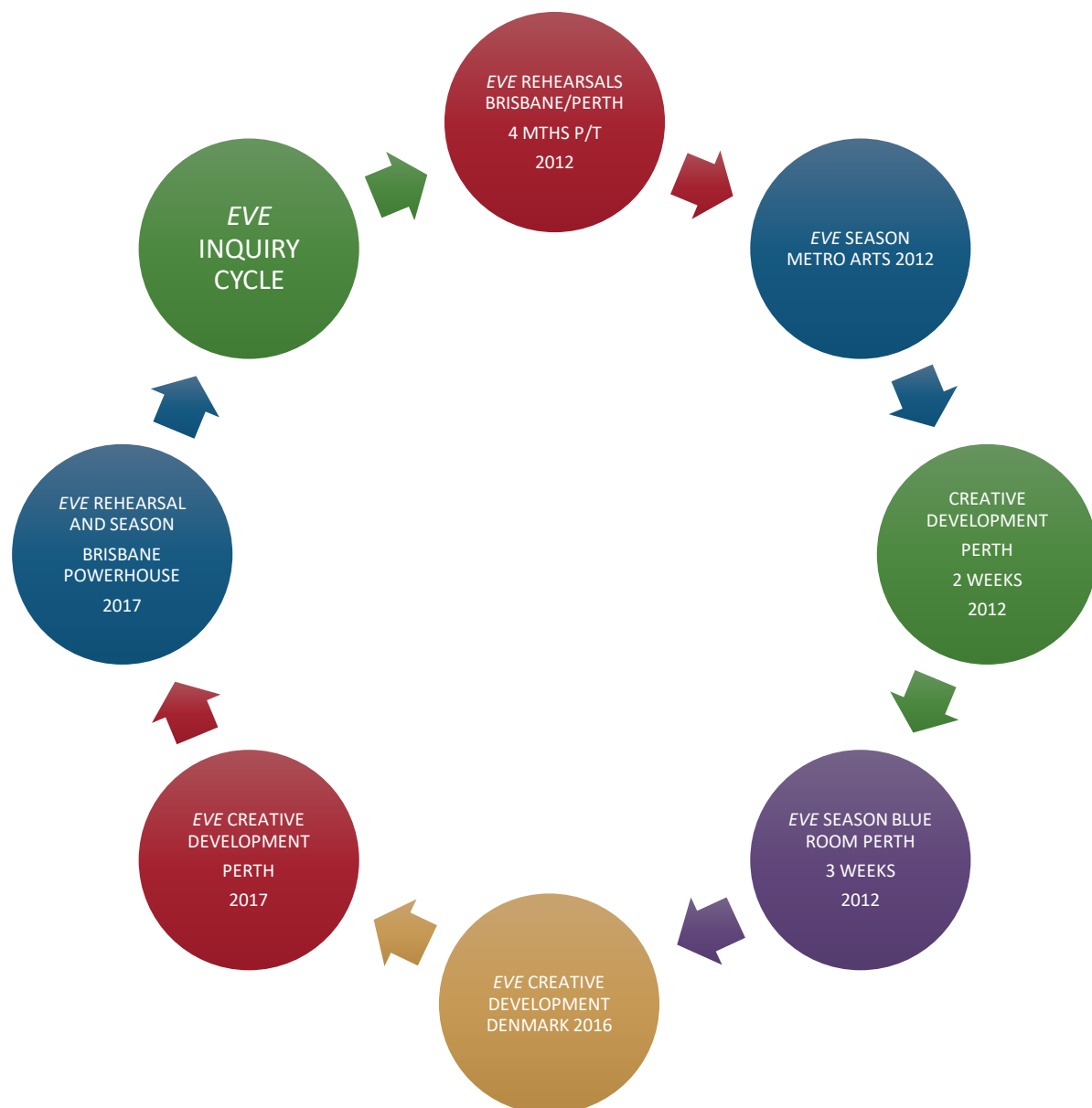
When we started out with *Home*, the process was new; we were participating in a theatre-making practice that we had not engaged with before, experimenting with the concept that theatre is a relational activity and as such requires close collaboration and participation with audience members. This close collaboration needed to embrace the capacity for improvisation, but not to the extent of taking the storyline off track. We also had to work out how to weave world stories and mythology into the storyline in order to broaden and deepen the subject matter, incorporating philosophical, theoretical, practical, embodied, and collaborative ways of working. Two of the outcomes of *Home* were *Eve* and *Dream*, examples of how two different characters chose to represent and change their relationship to home and belonging after personal and cultural ruptures and disappointments.



*Figure 4. Home Action Research Cycle*

### ***Eve Action Research Cycle***

The *Eve* action research cycle included a writing residency early 2012, followed by four sets of creative developments/rehearsals for three seasons: February–May (p/t) 2012, October 2012, March 2016, and May 2017.



*Figure 5. Eve Action Research Cycle*

### ***Dream Action Research Cycle***

Finally, below is the action research cycle for *Dream*, which was also extensive. It began with a creative development at PlayLab (2012), followed by a year of creative development opportunities at Metro Arts (2013), where I was fortunately able to employ a series of creatives and actors to interrogate, develop, and nurture the growth of the play. This was followed by a four-week creative development/rehearsal period in 2014 before a season in October 2014, a return season with one week of creative development in February 2017, and finally a two-week rehearsal in June 2017, with a season July 2017.

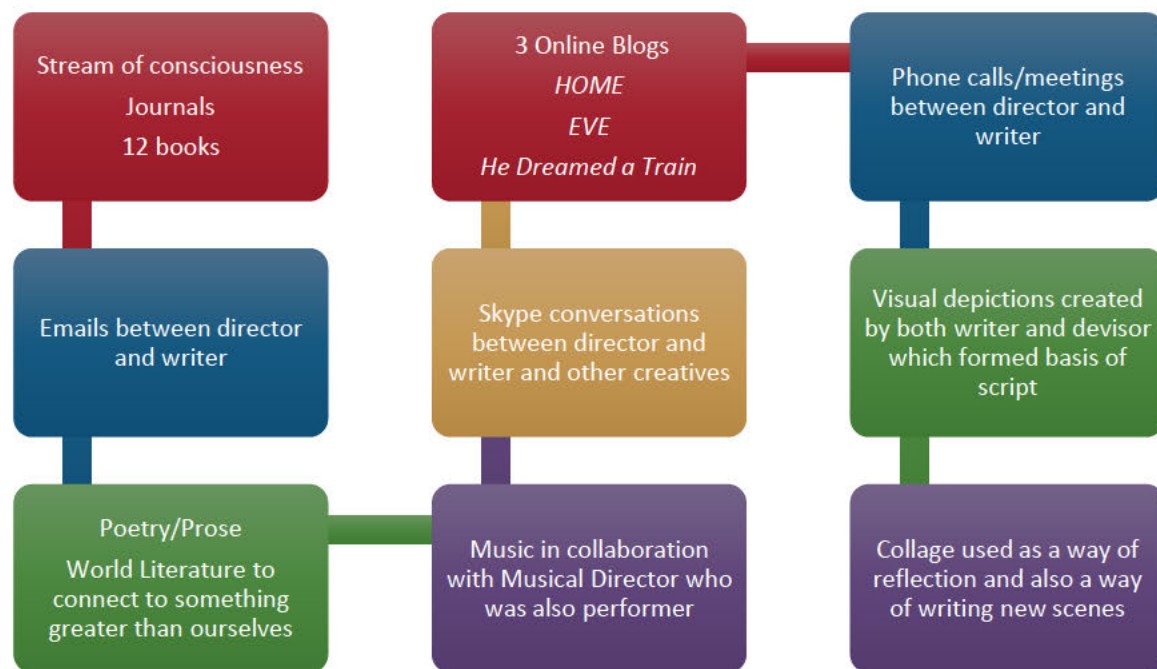


*Figure 6. He Dreamed a Train Action Research Cycle*

## *Reflective Practice*

This action research approach provided the opportunity, time, and space to reflect on what had happened, come to some sort of decision about what action could be taken to move the project forward, and then—alive to these new possibilities and armed with new research—move onto the next cycle.

Below is a map that sets out the elements of my reflective process throughout the creative cycles (Figure 7):



*Figure 7. Elements of My Reflective Practice*

Out of each creative cycle, reflective sessions enriched my understanding of what had happened, as I engaged with the different elements, including journaling, creative conversations, or collage; and as a result, performances improved, many parts of the script were cut,<sup>91</sup> and others were rewritten. Then,

<sup>91</sup> One of the hardest things to do as a playwright is to “kill your darlings,” a rather shocking expression but one that sums up the difficulty of removing lines that you may love but that do not serve the whole of the play. Time and again, I had to

not surprisingly, each play began to spontaneously impact on each other; some lines are used in all three plays. The three distinct plays, thematically linked, triangulate the research problem<sup>92</sup>—deconstructing and re-inventing what home could mean to each of the three characters and what it meant in relation to their mapping of belonging and, in turn, to my own.

All of the characters call on something greater than themselves, a common definition of spirituality, in their journey towards their belonging. This was not a logical and planned manoeuvre on my part; rather, it emerged from the inquiry. Zuber-Skerritt (2015) discussed PALAR action research as being transformative, “PALAR is an inquiry approach seeking transformational learning through making meaning of our experiences” (p. 10), and Finley (2014) wrote about how “deliberatively transformative” (p. 531) creative research can be. This was most certainly the case with *Home*.

### ***The Creative Cycles, Mythology, and World Stories***

*Home*’s Mardi begins her exploration of her home of belonging by engaging with mythology. In so doing, she restories Queen Isis, who teaches her how to live. Mardi is transformed by her.

1. After engaging in reflective practice, I recognised the strength of incorporating myth into the structure of the play, so this became a ritual in all three plays, mythology paralleling the local story. It was because mythology proved so richly transformative in *Home* that we decided to continue the trend in the next two plays.
2. For *Eve*, we continued to restory Oscar Wilde’s *Selfish Giant* story in each creative cycle, refining it to move closer to the story of Eve, finally acting as a mirror, reflecting and

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cut, edit, and remove dearly loved concepts, one example being the “writer’s” contribution to *Dream*: I had written passages that came from The Woman’s writer-self. But it simply did not work.

<sup>92</sup> In creative developments, I would often ask myself “What would Eve think of all this?” or “How would Mardi deal with this?” The three characters journeyed in my head at the same time, so it was not surprising that they had conversations with each other.



sometimes guiding her journey toward belonging, not necessarily in this life but after she died.

3. In *Dream*, The Woman deconstructs stories of her home of origin in front of her audience so that she can understand and come to terms with the psychic rupture that has thwarted her throughout her life. Her brother had re-storied the Myth of Er. Over the two years of development, Travis Ash wrote multiple versions of this myth, and in each reflective cycle, it shifted to accommodate the changing storyline.

In *Home*, Mardi also engages with political and social stories from the era, providing multiple stories to enrich the main storyline:

1. *Home*: Initially, I was dissatisfied with the script and, after months of reflection, I decided to incorporate political and heart-moving stories as a contrast to Mardi's domestic tales (the political story of the homes being bulldozed in Palestine was particularly relevant). This added to the emotional depth of the play.
2. Although I did not weave political stories into the next two plays, I did incorporate creative stories from artistic ancestors into the *Eve* script (Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Oscar Wilde, and Flaubert). These stories kept changing before I found a perfect fit.
3. In *Eve*, the sub-stories helped connect Eve to something greater than herself, placing her in her in what I believe is her rightful place as one of Australia's leading writers;
4. In *Dream*, the sub-stories presented an opportunity to get to know The Brother's character. Some of these stories had to be "killed off" due to the rhythm of the piece, but they were embedded into the songs sung by the musician. I also incorporated stories from my brother's memoir (also called *He Dreamed a Train*). These sub-stories assisted in the unfolding of transformative moments.

Relying on the inquiry cycles or action research, the investigation embraced steady reflective practice utilising methods such as stream-of-consciousness journaling, blog posts, phone calls, emails, Skype conversations, visual depictions, collages, music, poetry, prose, and audience responses. Each reiteration helped clarify the importance of ritual, of believing in something greater than self, and of collaboration and relationship.

Reflective practice helped clarify and cultivate the outcomes of each creative development and suggest future possibilities. The action research cycles provided a powerful map to refine and build the scripts, which we tested and retested not only within our local communities in Brisbane and Perth but also at international conferences.

Early drafts of *Home* (2012) were presented at Taos Institute/Houston Galveston Institute Conference in Merida, Mexico, followed a few months later by a presentation at Theatre of the Oppressed conference in Chicago. Several years later, *Dream* was presented at Theatre of the Oppressed conference in Omaha.

The seasons of the works played out in Australian theatres:

1. *DOUBLE BILL* season of *Eve* and *Dream*, Brisbane Powerhouse, 2017
2. *Home* Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane, 2015  
*Home* invited to be part of QTC's DIVA program
3. *Dream*, Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane, 2014  
*Dream*, SWEET program, 2014
4. *Dream*, Work in Residence throughout 2013
5. *Dream*, Lab Rat, with PlayLab, Brisbane, 2012–2013
6. *Home*, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, 2012  
*Home* Independent season, 2012
7. *Eve*, Metro Arts, Brisbane, 2012  
*Eve* Independent Season, 2012
8. *Eve* at The Blue Room, Perth, 2012  
*Eve* Independent Season, 2012
9. *Home* FreeRange Festival Metro Arts, Brisbane, 2011

### 3.5.3 Methods

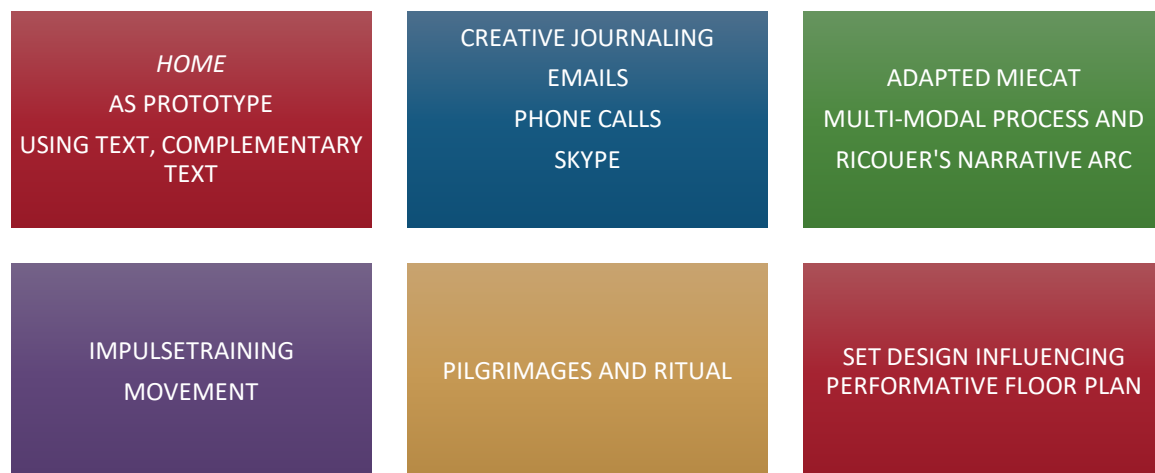
My creative practice embraced multiple cycles of action research followed by reflective practice, employing a variety of methods to advance the research.

#### ***Home as Method: Prototype***

To reiterate, after several action cycles and months of reflective practice, the *Home* script—the first exploration into the belonging landscape—provided a sort of prototype for the next two plays to model themselves on, sharing multiple methods to incorporate, including the following:

1. All three plays re-authored popular myths and stories as a way of comparing and contrasting the themes being explored.
2. All three plays incorporated excerpts of various books belonging to the canon of literature.
3. All three plays embraced ritual; in particular, *Home* embraced the rituals of Queen Isis and *Dream* the rituals of mourning. *Eve* examined the rituals of the writer, which were not, in the end, very successful.

Here is an outline of the other methods used throughout the 60 months of practice:



*Figure 8. Methods Used in Research*

#### ***Creative Journaling***

As Max van Manen poignantly observed, “Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know” (2016, p. 127). Over the course of this creative research, I

wrote in over two dozen journals and several blogs (one for each play) in order to interrogate what I had achieved, where I was going, what I knew, and what I didn't know I knew. I became increasingly aware that writing was the very essence of my research (Barthes, 1986, p. 316), and as I wrote and rewrote, it became a reflective and reflexive process, an opportunity to anticipate, to know and to not know where I was going, preparing ways of preventing new problems arising (Killion & Todnem, 1991), while at the same time affording opportunities for new critical incidents to surface. The last line of Samuel Beckett's unnamed protagonist in *The Unnamable*'s seems pertinent to the writing process: "I must go on; I can't go on; I must go on; I must say words as long as there are words, I must say them until they find me, until they say me" (Beckett, 1955, p. 115).

I needed to write in order to understand, to write enough so the door to new understanding and new knowledge would open. Janesick described such journaling as "a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns, and indeed their own understanding of their work as qualitative researchers" (1999, p. 506). Even as I wrote the scripts, a journal sat alongside me with a list of provocations, such as "How do you signify death?" "How much do you say and how much do you leave to the audience's imagination?" and "Can this scene be done in movement (including gesture), image or sound-score, rather than words?"

### ***Adaption of the MIECAT Research Cycle***

I adapted and employed the MIECAT Process as a writing practice.<sup>93</sup> Originally an experiential and creative arts therapy model, it involves engaging with multimodal art forms and cycles of reflective

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<sup>93</sup> I began my psychotherapy training with MIECAT many years ago, and have used an adaption of their process both in the therapy room as an intervention, and the rehearsal room, as a method to understand character or to write a scene. I have created a working model that suits the rehearsal room; it is an effective creative approach to building theatre scores that are deeply empathic and thought-provoking, sometimes emerging from one's pre-verbal or pre-reflective states. Lett describes his method as "not just another psychological-based theory of counselling, but a form of inquiry that enables experiences which arise from the raw materials of being to be represented, described, explored, reflected upon and understood within the ordinary language of making meaning . . . latent or implicit sensings can be brought into conscious awareness, inquired into, made sense of, reconsidered and reconstructed, and applied into the lives people are living" (Lett, 2011, p. 3). This is why this process is such a valuable method or tool for the rehearsal room, providing an avenue

practice. Warren Lett pioneered the MIECAT Process in the mid-1990s. Believing that our ways of knowing stretch far beyond cognition and verbal language, he examined the power of pre-verbal and pre-reflective ways of knowing (Lett, 2011, p. 283). In the rehearsal room, this way of working acknowledges that knowledge is not just accessed through cognitive means, but embodied, tapping into understandings that are often beneath the surface (Perry & Medina, 2011). As a writer, I am interested in what I don't know I know, so using these processes, I engaged with collage and text, followed by movement and sound. Below, I describe the writing cycles employed when creating *Home*. The adapted MIECAT method was also used in the creation of the other two texts, albeit differently, sometimes with the director in the room and other times alone.

### ***A Collaged Theme***

As a researcher, I approached the enquiry knowing that I wanted to write/perform a story or stories about home and what it means to belong. The complexities of this theme began to emerge when ripping out excerpts from magazines and adhering them to A3 paper. In *Home* rehearsals, my director Leah Mercer and I would sit and listen to music, or chat about the day (what we call in the therapy room “problem-free talk”), while tearing and sticking images or shapes from old journals, magazines and books, allowing our tacit knowing to emerge. We did not think too much about what we were doing with regards to the chosen images and the placement on the page;<sup>94</sup> we wanted to bypass our cognition and allow our bodies to search for meaning.

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to tap into my “latent or implicit sensings” and brought into conscious awareness, ready to be improvised, shaped and performed.

<sup>94</sup> While I wrote *Home*, my director Leah Mercer was usually present in the rehearsal room, and whenever we did collage, she would join in. We would then discuss both my collage and hers; I had the opportunity to “steal” ideas from her collages. This way of working was companionable, relational, and worked well. For the writing stages of the next two plays, I did not have someone consistently in the room as I wrote the first drafts. It was as though *Home* prepared me for writing solo, another example of why I see *Home* as a prototype of the *Trilogy*.

Once the collage was created, stories immediately began to emerge, but we withheld from interpreting them (again, holding back our cognitive selves). Rather, the completed collage was deeply considered and then described in considerable detail. We expressed only what we saw, Mercer often noticing something I might have missed. It was a factual description and therefore full of surprises, because often people are quick to interpret rather than merely observe.

### ***Key Words***

The next step was to indwell the collage and description, until key words, key images, gestures, and/or tones emerged and, together, Mercer and I wrote these key words down, ready for the next step.

### ***Intersubjective Responding***

I then wrote a response (what is called by the MIECAT Process an intra-subjective response; an internal response to the emerging themes), choosing one of the art modalities (visual, writing, movement, sound). In my case, I usually responded with poetic text. This poetic text sometimes awoke a bodily response, and so I would not only read the text but perform the text on the floor with a physical score that may have emerged from various images or shapes from the collage. This was followed by a generative conversation, which, once again, deepened the understandings, drawing attention to what I may not have noticed, amplifying some things, and reducing other things (editing things out). I then created another empathic performative response to the stimuli (Lett, 1996). By the end of the (by now long) rehearsal, we had a draft of a scene, perhaps two, which took into account the description of the initial collage, the key words of the collage, the ensuing script, and my embodied response, always with the potential to change.

### *Collage as a Method of Accessing an Edge of Awareness*

A large proportion of my journaling was visual. I generated material for devising and for writing, using what I called “The Rip and Stick Method”. In one of my first journals, I wrote about how the rip and stick method worked:

I have ripped out images that appeal to me, that awaken a response within me. Not only positive. It could be an image that I really do not like. I include all of the images that create an emotional response. I respond with the colour red. The red response: it is alive, hot and firing. In “academic speak,” I am talking about affect. In practical terms, I am talking about feelings, hot feelings, red feelings. (author’s journal, December 11, 2011)

Collage is not a new way of researching. Teri Holbrook and Nicole Pourchier (2014) wrote about their experiences of using collage as method:

As collagists, we literally fabricate meaning through our texts . . . we sift through materials, making decisions based not only on visual qualities such as colour, line, texture, and balance but also on the question(s) that drive us . . . we don’t know why we select a piece as we work. Our hands dart out and clutch an artefact without voiced reason . . . (p. 758)

This approach required me to indwell, and I would engage with collage either before (as described above) or after a rehearsal. As I unpacked the collage, either alone or in conversation with my devisors, I attended to my felt-sense within my body. Psychologist and researcher Eugene Gendlin suggested that it is through our body senses that we access an edge of awareness, “a special kind of internal bodily awareness” (Gendlin, 2007, p. 11) and that, when recognised, could be acted upon. He described this felt sense as “An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about a given subject at a given time—encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail” (Gendlin, 2007, p. 37).

John O’Donohue (1997), a philosopher of note, talked about this space in another way:

Behind your image, below your words, above your thoughts, the silence of another world waits. A world lives within you. No one else can bring you news of this inner world. Through our voices, we bring out sounds from the mountain beneath the soul. (p. 13)

This behind, below, and above world can be accessed not just through reflective journaling, but also through performance.

## ***Rituals***

I began this room by describing my research as a rite of passage whereby I moved from a known world into an unknown landscape. Several years later, I emerged with new knowledge about home and belonging. Each rehearsal and performance were maintained by rituals of engagement. It was crucial that rituals were adhered to due to the sensitive and emotional landscape that we were exploring. The rituals engaged with, throughout the many cycles of research, were significant and necessary, keeping me grounded, healthy, and open to change. These rituals of practice not only helped me “bridge out” of the performances, but also empowered, enriched, and transformed my practice.

### ***The Ritual of Meditation***

For the last season of the *Double Bill: Dream and Eve*, I engaged in meditation daily, sometimes twice daily. It was while I was an artist in residency in Finland in early 2017 that I discovered the ritual of meditation. I wished then that I had incorporated the practice throughout the PhD timeline. It focused me, gave me breathing space, and kept me grounded. I engaged in either 10- or 20-minute sessions a couple of times a day. In his classic text *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche (2008) summed it up succinctly:

We are fragmented into so many different aspects. We don't know who we really are, or what aspects of ourselves we should identify with or believe in. So many contradictory voices, dictates, and feelings fight for control over our inner lives that we find ourselves scattered everywhere, in all directions, leaving nobody at home. Meditation, then, is bringing the mind home. (Rinpoche, 2008, p. 60)

### ***The Ritual of Walking in Solitude***

For me, walking along the Brisbane River before the performance was a transitional ritual, separating the home space from the work space (Gros, 2015). The importance of walking alone was a way of grounding myself, of honing my observation and listening skills, and of warming up the body. Many



writers believed in the power of walking—Nietzsche, Thoreau, and Rousseau (Gros, 2015) as well as Woolf and Solnit. Solnit walked to discover what she wanted to write about:

My circuit was almost finished, and at the end of it I knew what my subject was and how to address it in a way I had not six miles before. It had come to me not in a sudden epiphany but with a gradual sureness, a sense of meaning, like a sense of place. When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for when you come back. (Solnit, 2000, p. 13)

Walking daily<sup>95</sup> is an achievable and powerful way of both connecting to the environment and accessing what we don't know we know. In rehearsal times, Mercer and I would frequently take time to walk and talk through scene work and philosophical approaches to the work before we returned to the rehearsal floor.

### ***The Ritual of Intentional Collaborative Conversations***

The importance of purposely connecting with other creatives after a rehearsal or performance cannot be overstated. Directors regularly give actors notes after a performance. We decided to do it differently. While notes were given, but it was a collaborative building of knowledge, rather than the usual and often blind acceptance of a director's notes, which is the culture of theatre. Anderson very clearly defined what jointly creating knowledge involves: “connect, collaborate, construct”, joint-action being “the process of generative dialogue and transformation” (Anderson, 2007, p. 8).

For the rehearsal room, I added another quality borrowed from the collaborative therapy room: curiosity. Carmel Flaskas (2005) suggested that, used well, curiosity opens the space between people and so provides space for the “development of new meanings” (Flaskas, 2005, p. 118).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Julia Cameron has created the very successful *The Artist's Way* (2002), a series of how-to books that connect the individual to their creative selves. One of her interventions is a 20-minute walk three times a week, alone. See her website (*Julia Cameron: The Artist's Way*, 2017).

<sup>96</sup> The following is a list of suggestions from Anderson (2007, p. 5) that helped guide me in the rehearsal room. I have replaced the word “client” with “collaborator”; otherwise, these are Anderson's words. 1) Making room for and giving the collaborator the choice to tell their story in their manner and at their pace; 2) Being genuinely interested and curious about the collaborator's story; 3) Listening and responding attentively and carefully; 4) Responding to understand from their [point of view]; 5) Trying to respond in a way that relates to what the collaborator is saying (not what you think they should be saying); 6) Responding is an interactive two-way process; 7) Noticing how the other person responds to your response before continuing; 8) Paying attention to their words and their non-words; 9) Keeping in mind that we are always interpreting/translating another's words and non-words; 10) Checking-out to see if you have heard what the other

While working with Mercer on *Home* and *Eve* and Knapton on *Dream*, I used a dynamic approach with them to jointly create new ways of thinking about the work. We invited each other to discuss the rehearsal or performance, listening deeply with ears, eyes, and heart. We encouraged each other to voice silent thoughts and we respected, invited, and valued the ensuing conversation (Anderson, 2007). Because it was a two-way discussion with both actor and director contributing to the conversation, the context changed, meaning changed, and the relationship could "go home again" (Peters and Armstrong, 1998, p. 76). I loved this expression because it summed up for me the difference between a generative conversation as opposed to a mere exchange of information. A collaborative relationship builds a new way of seeing things so that we cannot go back to the how we were before; rather, we are empowered to create a new map of understanding.

### ***Pilgrimage***

A dissertation is a rite of passage, where the liminal self transitions from (initially) not knowing, or only having a tacit knowing, to a more overt understanding of what has been created.<sup>97</sup> Annie Dillard's (2007), *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* resonated strongly with me as I struggled with the "not knowing,"<sup>98</sup> particularly when she wittily responded to the very popular quote by Thomas Merton about diddling around:

There is always an enormous temptation in all of life to diddle around making itsy-bitsy friends and meals and journeys for itsy-bitsy years on end . . . I won't have it. The world is wilder than that . . . We are making hay when we should be making whoopee; we are raising tomatoes when we should be raising Cain, or Lazarus. (Dillard, 2007, p. 274)

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wants you to hear; 11) Pausing and allowing silences—space for listening and reflecting; 12) Allowing each person to choose what peaks his/her interest and invites them into inner and outer conversation (not what you think they should choose).

<sup>97</sup> Victor Turner (2008, p. 95) created the expression "betwixt and between" when talking about liminality and it is an appropriate expression when talking about the dissertation journey, that space where we are not sure which direction to go.

<sup>98</sup> For the first few years, I was grappling with the focus of the research: was it primarily therapeutic or was it predominantly artistic? Could it be therapeutic art? Questions such as these were worked out through the creative development cycles and it gradually became clearer that the research was both artistic *and* had therapeutic overtones. The outcome of RIC of course was most definitely both, therapeutic and creative.

I knew this: the need to “make whoopee” in my research journey was paramount. As a 60-something artist with decades of creative practice behind me, I could not tolerate four or so years of ruminating only to raise “tomatoes.” I wanted to glimpse what Cousineau (2012) attributes to 17th-century Japanese master poet Basho, an “underglimmer,” being “an experience of the deeply real that lurks everywhere beneath centuries of stereotypes and false images that prevent us from truly seeing other people, other places” (Cousineau, 2012, Introduction, para. 12). This glimpse of the underglimmer would provide me, as pilgrim, with the opportunity to reflect, transform, and generate new relational ways of being at home in the world. When we engaged in the pilgrimages to Palestine, Egypt, and Greece, we were given an opportunity to reflect on what myths could offer us regarding a deeper understanding of belonging and home.<sup>99</sup>

### ***ImpulseTraining Develops into the Relational Impulse Cultural (RIC) Process***

*ImpulseTraining* is a postmodern training for actors that I developed as an outcome of my Master of Arts research (Brown Ash, 2009), and it was one of the primary methods we employed in the rehearsal/performance space. It became the foundation for the Relational Impulse Cultural (RIC) Process, a prominent outcome of this research that also increasingly informed the methodology. Based on social constructionist philosophy and creative arts therapy frameworks, with theatrical theory and dance influences (including Deborah Hay’s Perceptual Practice<sup>100</sup> and Gerrard Sibbritt’s Basic Elements of Movement<sup>101</sup>), this way of working in the rehearsal room provided a container to keep performers safe while risking and transforming within the work.

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<sup>99</sup> I discuss these myths in *Rooms Home, Eve, and Dream*.

<sup>100</sup> In 2005, I journeyed to Denmark to do a week’s intensive residential workshop with Deborah Hay, where we worked with her theories and concepts, including Perceptual Practice.

<sup>101</sup> Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, I worked consistently with Gerrard Sibbritt, who taught me his unpublished work, *The Basic Elements of Movement*.

*ImpulseTraining* was a response to and a dreaming on of the significant changes that had occurred in the world of psychology. What was the self? Whereas in the past the self was seen as singular and bounded—the idea that “If I knew who I was, I would get better, be less sad, be less depressed”—postmodern philosophical frames refer to the self as relational (Gergen, 2009). Embracing this profound shift of thinking about identity, *ImpulseTraining* created a way of working that enriched identity and at the same time provided new ways of creating characters relationally. It was not just a set of techniques, but rather a way of being and becoming in the rehearsal room: a process of empowerment with enormous creative potential. The actor's focus needed to be on the “space between” or the relational space between each other on stage as well as with the audience, rather than the traditional focus of the interior world of the actor.<sup>102</sup> I no longer had to “psychologise” the characters I played. If I took the significant premise that I was socially constructed, then I could concentrate on the socialisation of the character rather than delving into the psyche, and I could demonstrate/inhabit this relationship through the basic elements of theatre, space, time, and relationship. Eve has a significant line that sums up this socialisation: “If I were alive today,” she tells the audience in direct address, “you would not consider me mad. Eccentric, perhaps, but the ‘madness’ as they called it, seemed to me to be a logical solution to my living arrangements” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 183 and p. 201). Her deep understanding of her social construction appeared to resonate loudly in the theatre<sup>103</sup> as she looked directly into her audience’s eyes, and in that one simple action, implicated the medical profession and, as far as she was concerned, moved the audience to deep contemplation.

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<sup>102</sup> I recognise the paradox in the relational focus of *ImpulseTraining*. The attention is outward rather than inward, which suggests a more representational way of acting rather than a deeply felt engagement. Strangely enough, when the actor focuses on their partner, the internal life of the actor comes alive, not forced, but sparkling with intent, as it does in life when we communicate with awareness.

<sup>103</sup> As a performer, I cannot assume anything, least of all that an audience was moved by a particular action on stage; however, I did notice that the air in the theatre changed in that moment—there was nervous laughter and then silence.

*ImpulseTraining* provided processes for our small ensemble to respond to each other, rather than just invent. Ironically, in the devising and performing process, I moved away from trying to be creative on the floor and just responded to whatever stimuli the director, musician, or designer proposed. I use “responded” rather than “reacted to” because to respond is more collaborative; it builds on what has gone before, using a “yes and” approach rather than a “yes but” one. When I concentrated on this potent space between me, my musician/storyteller, my director, my designer, and my audience, the collaborative possibilities were enormous. I built on the offers of others; I noticed the small changes and grew them. A manuscript could have been placed in a different location, for example, which would open up a new physical score that that could be either built on or discarded, but always tested.

For this to occur, the rehearsal room has to be a “container” of trust, and this required addressing implicit and explicit issues such as power, intimacy, social and cultural discourses, employing careful use of language, and understanding the multiplicity of selves and stories; there is no such thing as one truth. Often, these concepts have been disregarded in many rehearsal rooms because they are seen to “take up too much time.”<sup>104</sup> However, when things are made explicit, when the ensemble’s group norms are made transparent, the work on the floor becomes economical and profound. A long “check in” (the half hour or so before rehearsals began, the time to talk about how things were going) invariably meant a succinct and compelling rehearsal period. A long “check out” ensured a reflective process.

When our ensemble became aware of all of these elements, trust developed, and we could then safely embrace the possibility of risk, an essential ingredient of creativity. Please see Room No. 7 and Appendix 4 for a more in-depth discussion of the RIC Process.

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<sup>104</sup> This is an anecdote; however, it is one I have heard over and over again. After a short conversation to gauge the situation, I usually end up nodding, because there is little point in pushing a point unless people are open to change.

### 3.5.4 Conclusion

My commitment was to use postmodern therapeutic scaffolds within a contemporary performance process to perform the topics of home in a way that problematised what it meant to belong in order to create an ontological security in an insecure world of constant change. Therefore, I needed to be fluid in my interpretations of what I thought made up belonging and home, “What is fact? What is fiction? What is truth? What is fibs?” (paraphrased in *Home*, 2015, p.119; *Dream*, 2017, p. 238) and at the same time embrace a stasis, an unease within the process, “What is life? What is art?” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 238). I found this process enormously challenging due to its vast and transformative nature. The overarching motivations and ambitions within the project were to come to my home of belonging, as if for the first time. Throughout much of the research process, I questioned the value of doing so:

The self initially is confronted on its liminal journey by many seemingly unanswerable questions. Why try to make this journey? Why is it so hard? Is the self weak? Lazy? Unintelligent? Is the struggle worth it? . . . Is my writing important? Is it any good? Who will read it? These questions can be answered, only in time, by the journeying self. (Deegan in Deegan & Hill, 1991, p. 327)

PALAR action research cycles led me from my initial naïve life-story presentation to a more profound and complex exploration of myth, world stories, home theory, and transitional zones, including the loneliness and despair of Eve and her Selfish Giant; death and isolation with Mardi and Queen Isis; and dying and rebirth with The Woman and the Myth of Er.

Practice-led research, coupled with a strong collaborative, constructionist philosophical framework, the heart of this research, demanded a surrendering to the needs and wishes of the group rather than my remaining steadfast about where the work would lead. As an exploration of the postmodern self in search of ontological security in our unreliable world, this project encompassed multiple levels of uncertainty, and so a wide selection of methodological strategies helped manage this constantly

changing terrain, all the while firmly placed within the inquiry cycle of reflective practice and relational processes.

I began the research by co-devising and writing *Home*, an exploration of belonging, at a time of personal transition. This developed into an investigation of not-belonging in *Eve*, and finally an analysis of the transitional zone between belonging and not-belonging in *Dream*. Throughout these six years of commitment, I often worked across the country, with one of my co-devisors being based in Perth. Due to the apparent domestic nature of home and belonging, it was important to expand our approach, and we did this, ironically, by moving further away from home with field trips and pilgrimages that took us across the world. We visited Egypt, Palestine, Greece, Mexico and USA in our efforts to create a more diverse, embodied, and universal exploration of our theme, which resulted in incorporating mythology in all three plays and world stories within *Home* and *Eve* as a counterpoint to the domestic story.

Because of the nature and extent of the work in all three plays, we needed to put in place rituals that helped deal with difficulties and emotions that arose. There was a strong emphasis on rituals for well-being, which became a fundamental component of the RIC Process. The material was potent, particularly *Eve* and *Dream*, so it was important that there were wellness processes (including meditation, walking, and collaborative conversations) that were sustainable throughout the multiple seasons. These rituals strengthened over the years after experiencing problematic adjustment periods, particularly after the first couple of renditions of *Eve*, where we experienced ruptures and hotspots<sup>105</sup> that required focused deconstruction in order to move on. These three plays, focusing on one's home of belonging, provided a compelling opportunity to reassess how I wanted to live my life, and delivered an ontological security, aliveness, and understanding of my place in the world.

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<sup>105</sup> In Appendix 4, I expand on the concept of hotspots.

I now invite the reader to watch the video of *Home*, the first play of *The Belonging Trilogy*. The video is of a performance in 2015 at the Queensland Theatre Company.

Click here: <https://vimeo.com/235725610> Password: belong

Over the page is the final version of the *Home* script, followed by a discussion of the *Home* process.

This pattern is repeated for all three plays: the Room of *Eve* is followed by the Room of *Dream*, before the final Room of Coda, which discusses the consequences and outcomes of the research process.



## HOME SCRIPT

Musician's monologues throughout the script written by Travis Ash.

### ACT 1

#### INTRODUCTION – WHO SHALL TELL THE STORY?

*ACTOR enters with suitcase through the Perspex door. Greets audience. Goes behind table, opens suitcase.*

*Sound of chime.*

*She takes out pop-up house, lights candle, raises house.*

*Sound of chime.*

*She opens collage book.*

*Sound of chime.*

*As she moves to the storyteller chair.*

ACTOR

Who shall tell the story?

And what story shall we tell?

I'd like to tell a story (and it could be your story)

that continues even when we walk away from this place

so that we

question,

dance, and

live to the point of tears.

(Camus<sup>106</sup> said that, I think.)

I will perform for you so that the extraordinariness of my ordinary life can be uncovered.

I will perform my past and dream on its potential.

I will invite some of you to join me.

And what I will tell you is fact and it is fiction;

truth and fibs; life and art.

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<sup>106</sup> Camus (1998, p. 51). Camus's anecdotal saying, to live to the point of tears, has been on my kitchen wall for over 15 years.

## SCENE 1 – THE GODS OF EGYPT

To begin,  
I want to tell you a story that is important to me,  
about the gods of Egypt.<sup>107</sup>

There are many versions of this story.

It's as long as a piece of thread,  
but I will tell you one small part just  
to whet your appetite.

*[ACTOR sits as storyteller.]*

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago and only yesterday,  
there were three gods,  
Isis, Osiris, and Seth.

As the story goes,  
Seth is extremely jealous of his brother Osiris,  
because Osiris is king of the most fertile lands, while Seth is banished to the desert.

So, Seth tricks his brother.  
First, he invites him to an extravagant party,  
with round tables, full to the brim.

Everyone's there.

Then, Seth announces a parlour game;  
he calls it "Pass the box."  
He produces a beautiful jewel-encrusted cedar box:

*[Finds the box and shows it.]*

"Whoever fits inside this box gets to keep it."

All the guests want to play.

"Pick me, pick me."

"You're too fat, get out," says Seth to one.

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<sup>107</sup> Houston (1995).

"You're too small, you're wasting space, beat it," he says to another.

"Why don't you try brother? Dare you . . ."

And when Osiris gets in,

Seth slams the box shut. *[Slams box shut.]*

Ignoring the cries of his brother,

he seals the coffin with lead and

throws it into the Nile.

The stars disappear and there is a howling of dogs across Egypt.

Far away Isis, Osiris's queen,

hears her husband's cry.

Her fury rocks the earth.

"Osiris is dead. Brother has murdered brother."

*[ACTOR moves along the river, sprinkling rose petals.]*

Her tears fill the river Nile.

Alone, dressed in the rags of mourning,

her black shape wanders,

barefoot,

up and down the muddy edges of the riverbank,

until she finds his coffin.

*[with box]* As she pries open the coffin's lid,

the great wheel of time rolls backwards

and she begins to spin.

Her arms become great-feathered wings

and she flies above the corpse of Osiris.

*[Choreography of spinning.]*

"The wind of my wings, bring breath to your lungs," she cries,

and, at that moment, the dead awaken.

Osiris and Isis hold each other for nights and nights

until she is with child.

Overjoyed that Osiris lives again,  
Isis wants to share her news,  
so, she leaves him sleeping peacefully,  
hidden away from prying eyes.

*[ACTOR sits as storyteller.]*

As these stories go,  
it so happens that the wicked Seth  
is out hunting in the very hills  
in which Isis has hidden Osiris.

When Seth finds his sleeping brother,  
he cuts his head from his body  
and hacks off his arms and legs.  
He cuts his brother up into 14 parts  
and scatters them all over Egypt.  
The Nile runs red with Osiris's blood.  
Once again,  
Isis searches the country for her dead husband.  
Wherever she finds a piece of him,  
she builds a glorious temple  
so that people remember and honour him.  
She finds:

*[ACTOR moves chairs that are piled stage centre, endowing them as parts of the body.  
As she speaks, she places the chairs throughout the playing space.]*

- 1 the HEAD, *[a cube]*
- 2 his EYES, *[a projection]*
- 3, 4 his EARS, *[2 chairs]*
- 5 his TONGUE, *[a chair]*
- 6, 7 pieces of his BACKBONE, *[2 chairs]*
- 8 his HEART, *[a cube]*
- 9, 10 his HANDS, *[a mannequin]*
- 11, his ARMS, *[a chair]*
- 12, his LEGS, *[a chair]*

13 his FEET, *[a cube]*

But she doesn't find the 14th.

The fleshy PENIS has been eaten up by a fish.

She does not give up.

*[ACTOR finds a little chair under an audience chair.]*

She fashions a phallus from gold and cedar, and

*[assembles head, heart and feet cubes, and little chair]*

re-assembles the body of her husband,

whispering words of remembrance.

And so,

Osiris

becomes

the lord of the dead.

"I am . . . and I am not," he says.

From time to time,

Isis visits her husband

in the land of the dead,

and when she returns to the village,

she tells them:

"The dead go to another place.

There is life there,

I have seen it.

My husband,

Osiris,

lives and your ancestors are with him.

Say their names.

Bring them beer and raisin cake.

Love life,

love the dead,

and

each other.  
As long as we live,  
the dead may live.  
And that's the end of this story."

Now it seems to me  
that Isis has re-dreamed their story.

Out of loneliness, she creates relationship.  
Out of ritual, she finds hope.  
Out of tragedy, she rebuilds her love.  
Again, and again and again.  
*[Circling on the spot, ends looking up at pop-up house.]*  
Fourteen temples.  
Fourteen homes.

## SCENE 2 – INTRODUCING THE SELVES

*ACTOR walks to the collage table.*

ACTOR      I am just 60 years old.  
Six decades of stories past.  
You'd think I know who I am by now . . .

But I no longer believe that there is one true self . . .  
You know, "the real me," "my authentic self,"  
but . . .  
I do find that idea inviting.  
It is full of the comforts of certainty.

But, aren't I a work-in-progress?  
I am all of my past and  
all of my future.  
I am every person I've ever met,  
every place and time I've ever been.

I am huge and so are you.  
*[Resumes spinning choreography.]*  
I am:  
Mexico,  
London,  
Egypt,  
New York,  
Houston,  
Sydney,  
Brisbane . . .  
2008 . . .  
2002 . . .  
1998 . . . Sydney . . . my old hometown.  
*[ACTOR picks up suitcase.]*

### SCENE 3 – SYDNEY AND THE PUFF-BALL DOGS

*ACTOR collects 46-year-old self from the audience.*  
*She improvises whenever she invites an audience member to participate in the play.*

ACTOR      You are my 46-year-old self.

Sydney has turned black—  
black and noisy.

That taxi driver pulled the wool over my eyes quite cleverly.  
I didn't protest.  
Just asked for a receipt and went inside.  
The smell in the hotel is blue,  
as though buckets of fingernail polish have been spilt.  
Fierce,  
sharp  
smell.

*[ACTOR and her 46-year-old self step through door together.]*

I enter the once-green room,  
bags down,

kick off my red shoes,  
look out the window.  
Ah, the water views.  
That's the Sydney where I belong.  
Lean out the window.  
Down below,  
a dog park.  
*[Drops piece of paper.]*  
Knock my bag!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
It tumbles  
over and over,  
my red patchwork bag falling.

There goes phone, money, keys . . .  
my lipstick!!!!  
Leave the room.  
Ah . . .  
Door locks.  
Bare feet!

Stairs,  
two at a time,  
out the door.  
Look up.  
Ahh!  
Resting between branch and trunk,  
patchwork of red.  
With every breath of wind,  
another object falls. *[Picks up piece of dropped paper.]*

A fluffy puff-ball dog just peed on your leg—  
Ewww!!

Women walk quickly,



waving to each other.

If I dress like them, will I belong?

To dress in that way,

tight,

smooth,

no wrinkles.

I wave to the high-heeled women

carrying

white,

fluffy,

puff-balls.

They don't wave back.

"She is not of our tribe," they think.

One of them says in a very loud voice:

"I was supposed to go to Argentina at Easter, but I forgot."

*[ACTOR takes 46-year-old self back to their seat.]*

"Who do they think they are?"

*[46-year-old self reads from the dropped piece of paper.]*

GUEST

"They think you're ridiculous."

ACTOR

They treat their dogs better than most children in the world.

I am a person of especially deep feelings, and they are just superficial.

I feel so different!

I don't belong in this soil.

I have always felt like I wanted to be different:

I wanted to be black.

Or Asian.

Even Jewish.

Not Indigenous.

Mr. Tonkin taught us: *[as Mr. Tonkin]*

“Australian Aboriginals were born with a much smaller brain than the white Australian.”

I still wanted to be anything rather than white.

White people are so common,

so ordinary.

So very white.

In New York City, in 1979,

I lived with an American Indian, a Kashmiri, and a Pakistani. “Australian Aboriginals were born with a much smaller brain than the white Australian . . .”

There was silence . . . *[ashamed]*

It was only when I was away from Australia

that I could see clearly

the bigotry of my inheritance.

And when I performed with the New York Puerto Rican Theatre Company, the playwright responded to a question from the audience:

“Oh, that is so white!”

In that moment, I again feel the waspness,

the puerile,

the ordinariness

of my whiteness.

“I don’t belong here.”

GUEST “Where do you belong?”

ACTOR “Not sure . . . still, Sydney’s changed heaps, eh?”

*[They both go through door.]*

Back in the hotel room, I notice that my red shoes have begun to tap tap tap.

So, my 46-year-old self and I slowly make our way home.

MUSICIAN

That's my mum. She and Leah, the director, asked me to perform five verbatim monologues. Five real life stories to remind us—what is going on out there. But I didn't want to. So, I wrote a story-cum-play-within-this-play about a boy named Travis and popped the monologues in along the way. I am going to perform it for you. It is called "Words That Were Written for the Stage." It begins in Sydney.

Travis lives in a yellow terrace off Glebe Point Road, but was born in Auchenflower, Brisbane, and raised in a red Queenslander. It is the 26th of January 2012. Australia Day, Invasion Day, his father's birthday. At 8am, Travis gets out of his dirty sheets and tap tap taps his way to Bennelong Point, Port Jackson, where he sits at the Opera Bar and waits for his father.

Suddenly, a westerly blows him off his stool. He falls through the cement floor, through time and re-emerges from the earth in 1788. He hears chanting behind him, catches sight of a naked foot, is too scared to breathe. The harbour: a man in Empire Red emerges from the water. He is holding a girl of no more than four in his arms. The land: an old Aboriginal man in nothing but himself emerges from the earth. They meet on the shore. With great gentleness, the old man lays his hand upon the child's hat and feels her clothes, muttering something to himself.<sup>108</sup> There are murmurs of "whurra," "whurra" and a great westerly blows the Empire Red into a grey rock wallaby and the old man into a mud-yellow boobook. The girl is blown back to sand and water. *Smack!* Travis finds himself back in 2012.

His father arrives. They go see Circa's WUNDERKAMMER at The Drama Theatre. After the show, his father takes him home. In the car, Travis turns on the radio.

"In 2001, Shelly Reys noted that, quote, 'What all Australians need to do, by virtue of the facts (as displayed in the *Bringing Them Home Report* and others), is admit that [the Stolen Generation] took place. We need to then understand that these events took place on the basis of race, not on the basis of unfit family members. In many cases, the welfare boards did not assess Indigenous families' abilities to care for the child, but presumed and pre-empted an outcome based on their heritage. . . Part of this . . . is to also acknowledge that the effects of such removal are still being felt today. . . To question whether it may or may not have happened retards this country's ability to deal with the matter, and so retards its progress towards true reconciliation',<sup>109</sup> end quote. Even now, in light of the 2008 apology: 'For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry'<sup>110</sup>. . ."

Travis turns off the radio.

"Bye, dad."

---

<sup>108</sup> Tench (1788/2014).

<sup>109</sup> Reys (2001).

<sup>110</sup> Rudd (2008).

“Bye, son.”

#### SCENE 4 – RED WOODEN HOUSE

*ACTOR refers to collage book.*

ACTOR            Home . . . Brisbane, 2012.  
Some artists have sketchbooks, I don't.  
*[Refers to pop-up house.]*  
I have a red wooden house  
full of books,  
growing like stalagmites  
from floor to ceiling.  
They are my walls.  
*[ACTOR collects home-self from audience.]*  
Hello, let's go in.  
Take off our shoes.  
Tens of pairs of shoes line the wide hallway.  
I pass the fat Buddha,  
holding red roses for my mother.  
Place my red shoes next to Bill's.  
“I am home,” my feet say to me.

Downstairs, my son is playing music.

*[ACTOR turns towards MUSICIAN.]*

I turn east into the kitchen.

*[To home-self]* “Would you like some tea and raisin cake?”

My tapestry chair spins me from the kitchen to the lounge room studio.

My son's music is still playing.

*[ACTOR spins table and storyteller chair in front of home-self, and serves her a miniature cup of tea.]*

This is Bill's round wooden table.

The host of a thousand family meals  
and a thousand family stories.

*[Looking through window]* That's the death mask of my mother watching us from its  
Perspex frame.

"I dream of the sea," says my mother.

*[ACTOR sees mother in audience through window.]*

I took your ashes, Mum.

Did you see me? *[takes ashes out of drawer.]*

I wasn't ready to let you go, so  
I poured only a handful of you  
into a plastic bag.

Perched behind a tree, out of the wind, bits of you escaping.

"Not too much mess or there's a fine from the council,"

I hear you say.

*[ACTOR sprinkles the ash.]*

I hand your doggy bag to your grandchildren,  
who paddle into the water on their surfboards  
with red roses from your garden.

Everyone waves goodbye,  
but you're still here.

*[ACTOR collects mother from audience.]*

We sing: *[ACTOR sings]*

"One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking of you."

I say your name.

Nell.

I bring you tea and raisin cake.

As long as I live,  
you live.

The thread of memory has its own continuity.

Grandmother,  
mother,

son.

*[They walk through door.]*

Listen, your grandson is still playing his music.

My red shoes wait for me.

Holding their rhythm,

waiting patiently for change,

the one thing we can be sure of.

Though I didn't always think like that.

This is one story of motherhood.

#### SCENE 5 – STORY OF MOTHERHOOD: TAXI DRIVER

*ACTOR gives little chair to audience to hold. She collects 41-year-old self.*

ACTOR            You're my 41-year-old self. Brisbane.

Wife,

mother,

actor (on hold),

cook,

taxi driver.

In my taxi, I drive my four children to school.

I drive my two-year-old home at lunchtime.

I drive my four-, six-, and eight-year-olds home at 3.

I drive my two-, four-, six-, and eight-year-olds to swimming lessons.

I drive home at 6.

If I am lucky, I drive in and out of town four times a day.

If I am unlucky, I drive in and out of town 13 times a day.

But not on the weekends; that's when my husband Bill's shift begins.

*[Watching 41-year-old self, music plays.]*

I am watching a French movie.

A woman is driving along a deserted road in a white car.

She drives in and out of shadow.

She is beautiful.

She is alone.

Music plays in a minor key.

A truck approaches.

In slow motion, the woman turns her wheel.

*[ACTOR sits next to 41-year-old self.]*

I am driving my four children to school in my white station wagon.

Pavarotti screams on the CD player,

The children sing along.

"Are you strapped into your seats?"

I watch the lonely country road,

weaving through the shadows.

I am here and this is where I will always be.

*[ACTOR slowly threads her way to the table.]*

At home.

The deserted-house feeling falls over me.

Reach for a brown paper bag and a red crayon.

Draw a tiny image of a brown paper bag.

Write:

"I feel like a brown paper bag" along the bottom.

Hang it in the laundry  
above the washing machine that sometimes floods the house.  
The washing machine sings:

“Now that you are a mother, your job is to compromise.”

“Did you know,” I retort,

“I want to drown my mother-self because SHE IS MAKING MY LIFE A MISERY!”

Time to drive again.

There are other stories of motherhood.

#### MUSICIAN

The alarm. Travis leaps out of his dirty sheets. Bad dreams. There are murmurs of “whurra,” “whurra.” He needs to get home to Brisbane. Out the door, left at Glebe Point, right at Parramatta, over the footbridge, through the Vice Chancellor’s garden, and out into the quadrangle of the University of Sydney. The dying Jacaranda is still in bloom. He jumps through a purple petal and falls through such a purple petal in Kelvin Grove, Brisbane. It’s evening now. There is a theatre nearby: TONIGHT 7.30 SOMETHING TO DECLARE. He buys a ticket, walks in, and sits in a dark room. Music plays. Lights. Actors enter holding pieces of paper. One he recognises as his mother. She begins to speak.

“In the morning, Friday October 19th, the driver come down and he told us ‘In six hours, we will arrive at Christmas Island.’ Everybody happy. In that moment, I feel like I am hungry, and I want to see my son, because he is on the top with the young men. So, I ask somebody, ‘Can you give me some water or some bread?’ He told me, ‘No I cannot give you anything.’ I ask him why and he told me, ‘Maybe something will happen to us in the ocean, so we keep this.’

What I mean is that everybody died thirsty and hungry.

After that they told us the motor stopped. They shout, they shout, and all the men they know. One man shouts; he says, ‘Please pray to God, pray to God to save us.’

I look down and saw the water come in and touch my legs and I didn’t know where is my son. So, I put my hands like this and I didn’t shout, I didn’t do anything, I just put my hands like this and I lose my mind, and the boat go down like this, sunk. Quickly, quickly.



After that, when I opened my eyes, I didn't breathe. This save me because I didn't breathe, because I didn't shout, I stay quiet like this, and I didn't say anything. When I open my eyes, I saw myself down in the ocean, 20 metres, and the children around me, they sink, they drink the water, and they shout and scream."<sup>111</sup>

When the show finishes, Travis finds his mother in the foyer. She drives him home.

ACTOR                      And I remember and I don't remember . . .

The thread of memory has its own continuity.

Mother.

Son.

#### SCENE 7 – GOSFORD HIGH AND USA

*ACTOR collects 48-year-old mother from audience.*

ACTOR                      You're my mother.  
                                  You're 48 years old.  
                                  I'm 16.

1969. Gosford High School,  
New South Wales,  
Australia.

The bell rings.

*[As Mr Tonkin]* "Slow down or you'll sit down," Mr Tonkin snarls.

Ignore him.

Head for the stairs.

Skip over the fifth step.

I fall into slow motion,

my eyes catch on a small piece of paper

---

<sup>111</sup> Gurr (2004).

in the centre of the stairwell:

*[pointing to window]*

American Field Service Scholarship,  
Applications close 20th August 1969.

Everyone hurtles down the stairs  
towards the tuck shop.  
“C’mon Brownie, cream bun.”

I stand on tippy toes.

Turn up my freckled face and  
kiss that piece of paper.

“I’m going to win you.”

Home for lunch.

*[ACTOR runs.]*

Out the far gate,  
through the hospital,  
into the dirt street with the Casuarina trees,  
cross the creek,  
and home.

*[To 48-year-old mother]* “Mum!”

“One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, one day at a time,” she says.

“Look at this.”

And she does.

My Mum always looks when I need her to.

That was the start of nine months of interviews.

Mum collects the mail,  
then to the green grocer. *[ACTOR goes to get lines.]*

MUM

*[Reading]* “Mardi made it through to the next round of the Scholarship; isn’t that great?”

*[ACTOR goes to get lines.]*

ACTOR Then to the butcher,

MUM *[Reading]* "I've just heard Mardi made it through to the next round; can you believe it?"

ACTOR and finally,  
if there was any money left,  
the pastry shop.

*[ACTOR goes to get lines.]*

MUM *[Reading]* "Do you have any cream horns? They're her favourite. Mardi did it again, she's through to the next round!"

ACTOR Mum decides if a letter arrives  
and says yes,  
she will tape a small American flag  
to the porch pole.

*[Runs]* On my way home from school,  
lean to the right,  
past the row of Casuarina trees,  
I can just spy our porch.

I see the flag flutter!

*[Runs]*

I run home,  
hurl myself into the green rocking chair:  
patty cakes with cups of tea and  
cream horns!  
We play our Reader's Digest American Classics:

*[Sings]* "This land is your land, this land is my land, from the redwood forest to the  
gulf-stream waters, this land was made for you and me."<sup>112</sup>

And we believe it.

---

<sup>112</sup> A song that my mother taught me.

We believe we belong in that far away land.  
Not in our own soil.

My dad works as a Sheriff.  
Mum works at the local RSL club washing up  
and she cleans people's homes.  
They save every penny to pay the extra \$1,000 required.  
"Mum, they have financial aid for the public-school girls."

"No, we'll pay it ourselves,  
we're no charity,"  
she says.

They buy me a beautiful set of clothes from Tots 'n' Teens and two brown suitcases.  
*[ACTOR picks up suitcase.]*  
We're at the airport.

*[ACTOR sees Dad in audience.]*  
Dad's forgotten his tooth.  
I try not to smile.  
So, he doesn't smile.

"What's wrong, love?"  
"It's enough to win; I want to go home now."

"Off you go, you will never regret this."

The air hostess takes me by the shoulders, shoves me up the aisle.  
"Sit there."

I sob for an hour.  
Some of the students complain.

I hear Mum's voice:

*[Echo Mum singing]: “. . . from the redwood forest to the gulf stream waters . . .”*

“Look up, little one.”

“These redwoods have thrived for 20 million years, back with the dinosaurs. They’re the largest living thing on earth. See how close they stand to one another?”

“Stay in touch, regardless of where you are,” my mother says. I take each word and gently place them in my mouth and I chew and chew.

“Only connect.” (Forster said that, I think.)

I swallow hard.

We are off. The USA!!!

Getting onto an aeroplane is the best

because you leave behind the

“who you thought you were”

and you become the “who you are not.”

## SCENE 8 – USA

ACTOR                      1970, Spring Branch High School, Houston, Texas.  
Drama Room, 103.

Seventeen years old.

I am asked to compete in a drama tournament.

“What’s that?”

I read the story of Raggedy Ann with her painted-on smile.

She’s an American icon and she loves everybody.

I want one!

*[ACTOR performs using a little book.]*

“Raggedy Ann gave no sign that she heard what the new dolls were saying. She never

stopped smiling, but sometimes the truth hurts.”<sup>113</sup>

*[Chime plays.]*

MUSICIAN

Travis leaps out of clean sheets. This is his parents’ home; they always comfort his body with clean things.

“Oh, love!”

The house is empty, save the dog.

“Old people work while the young change the world.”

Coffee made, he sits on the coach beside his mother’s old Raggedy Ann doll. He opens up Paul Auster’s 1989 novel *Moon Palace*, and at page 218, second paragraph, fifth sentence, reads “I can still remember some of those stories quite well, and whenever I think of them now (the spread of the war to Cambodia, the killings at Kent State), I see myself . . .”<sup>114</sup> Kent State! In 1970, four students were snipered by US National Guardsmen at Kent State University, Ohio. Students protesting the Cambodian Campaign. Students that were changing the world. Lights out, Travis falls into the book, tumbles into the letter K, and tumbles out of a fine ink pen of the 22-year-old, soon to be Pulitzer Prize–winning photographer, John P. Filo:

“May 4th, 1970. I stood frozen, 100 feet in front of the National Guardsmen and in their line of fire. I thought they were firing blanks. But other students fled for cover or dived to the ground. There was a student hit about 40 feet in front of me . . . a student lying face down, a pool of blood forming around his head. Through the viewfinder of my camera, I saw a bullet hit a metal sculpture—a modern art piece . . . I just said ‘Oh my God!’ and dropped my camera—and it was over.”<sup>115</sup>

John stops writing. Travis tumbles back into his fine ink pen, falls back out of the letter K, and rises from the book—lights! He sits on his parents’ upholstered couch with Raggedy Ann for he knows not how long.

ACTOR

Raggedy Ann felt so alone,  
she didn’t know where she belonged,  
but she never stopped smiling.

I belonged in Room 103.

Raggedy Ann and I won tournaments.

I had boys in love with me,

I was given the key to the city of Houston,

*[Takes coins out of her pocket.]*

and I got fat.

---

<sup>113</sup> Gruelle (n.d.).

<sup>114</sup> Auster (1989, p.218).

<sup>115</sup> John P. Filo was a senior photography student at the time. One of his photos of the shootings earnt him the Pultzer Prize (Filo, 1970).

My friend Gary Morrison wrote me a poem called

“And you know you belong here” . . .

I had found my tribe!

*[Shaking coins in her hand.]*

## SCENE 9 – COMING TO BRISBANE

*ACTOR throws I Ching.*

ACTOR

It’s late.

1989.

I am 36 years old.

The children are asleep at last, and Bill and I huddle over the *I Ching*.

He has been headhunted for two positions, one in Melbourne, one in Brisbane.

We throw three coins six times and slowly build the hexagram . . .

“Success north of the water,” says the *I Ching*.

We look at each other:

“Not banana bender country . . . that can’t be right.”

*[Throws the coins again.]*

Again, the *I Ching* talks about success up north . . .

“Well, we could try it for two years.”

So, we pack up our children (three so far—1, 3, and 5), pile into our white station wagon, and head north.

As we leave the congestion of the Sydney streets, I promise myself I will return, soon.

“This is not a permanent exodus . . . Two years. That is all.”

And I tell myself a story of another actress I knew from another time. *[ACTOR goes to actress-self in audience.]*

As your story goes, when your youngest son turned 18, you went to your husband and said: *[ACTOR whispers to her.]*

“I have raised our children and nurtured our home. I have done what I promised. Now it is time for me to return to my home,” and with that,

you leave

permanently, with just one chair tucked under your arm,

*[ACTOR picks up chair.]*

leaving the rest to him *[ACTOR steps through doorway],*

to reclaim your home in the theatre without your corporate husband.

Bill and I love your story. We giggle and threaten each other with your story: the actress who left her husband.

I wonder if I will do that? No, we’ll only be away two years . . .

After two days of travelling, we come over the hill on the Pacific Highway just out of town and see the Brisbane skyline afar:

“It’s so small compared to Sydney, but pretty, yes, undoubtedly pretty.”

*[ACTOR moves towards pop-up house.]*

The house we have bought is large, feels like ghosts live here

. . . cold seeps through the VJs . . .

. . . I thought that Brisbane was supposed to be hot,

Brisbane, the place we love to hate and hate to leave.

That was 23 years ago and

I am still here living in the same place,

AFTER KICKING AND SCREAMING FOR THE FIRST 10 YEARS . . . I FEEL STRANGELY  
CONTENT

in this red house . . .

it holds all of my history now, and

*[ACTOR spins storyteller chair.]*

from my tapestry chair, I can spin back in time and home again . . . spinning the old  
stories into new . . .

Home. 2012.



*[ACTOR collects Bill-self from audience.]*

I love to cook;  
it makes me feel connected.

Bill's not fussy;  
he'll eat anything really.

*[ACTOR brings table and storyteller chair opposite him, ripping pictures as she "cooks."]*

But I love the ritual  
of sharing a meal  
at the end of a day.

"When are we going to eat?" he asks me.  
I reach into my mouth and remove a small book.  
Recipes from my mother.

"Ah, here we are . . ."  
I begin to chop, waiting for our kids to come home.  
Our children who are not our children,  
who are with us but do not belong to us.  
(Gibran said that, I think.)  
Some artists have sketchbooks;  
we don't, we have children.

"Ow." Cut my finger.  
*[Sprinkling rose petals to audience.]*  
Drops of bright red fall  
and the Nile runs red  
with Osiris's blood.

I remember every moment,  
And I don't remember.  
Remember the Brisbane River . . . when we first saw it?  
"Who would ever want to live on that?"  
Now it's a glorious landmark that we wander along.

Every time we see the lights on the Story Bridge, we try to be the first to say “Isn’t that beautiful?” and we laugh at each other.

But it’s true. The Brisbane River now, to us, is blue! Just like the Sydney Harbour!

## SCENE 10 – TIME TO GO HOME

*ACTOR runs to chair, stands on it.*

ACTOR      I fly over Sydney Harbour . . .

                I am nearly 18

                . . . the red roofs sparkling below.

                Sydney’s known for its red roofs.

                After 360 days in Houston, Texas, it’s time to return to Australia on a Qantas 707.

                I don’t want to.

                Off the plane . . .

                Customs . . .

                Arrival lounge . . . *[She picks up suitcase.]*

*See Dad in audience CSL.*

                Dad’s forgotten his tooth again!

                “I hardly recognise you, darling.”

*[Speaking in American accent]* “I know.

                I got fat.

                I love their bread.

                Not brown there.”

                The V dub only just fits my two brown suitcases.

                Home!

*[ACTOR goes through door and over to pop-up house.]*

                Mum has cleaned and polished every inch.

It smells like Mr. Sheen.

Fire burns.

My little sister is waiting:

"I've cooked some patty cakes. The icing's a bit runny though."

We sit around the shiny round table,

looking at each other, not sure what to say.

*[ACTOR sees American mom in the audience, speaks to her.]*

"My American mother is so tall and glamorous, you know," as Mum pulls on her hand-me-down cardigan.

"My American mother is such a great cook.

We always have Doritos

and cream cheese and

soup out of a can on Sunday nights.

I love it,"

as Mum serves up a leg of lamb and roast potatoes.

"Mum, why are you doing that?

My American mother has a cleaning lady to do that."

It's late.

*[Turns on television.]*

*Bonanza* is on.

Mum comes in,

turns off the TV, and sits down.

"Little one," you say,

"We were so close, you and I; now I feel like I can't do anything right anymore.

I'm not as glamorous as your American mother.

I don't have a cleaning lady,

I am a cleaning lady.

I don't know what I can do.

You don't seem to belong here anymore.

You don't even sound the same."

I hear a choking sound in my throat.

I reach over to my precious,

most selfless,

most loving mother.

I hold her for a long time.

*[Chime plays.]*

MUSICIAN

You get up from the couch and jump out the window.

“I’m sorry mother! I’m sorry father! Me young, don’t change the world, just bruise my bum!”

You land in a Boeing 777-200ER, it takes you all the way to Spain. For 36 days, you drink wine and think about sex and live with a one-handed painter named Jose-Maria in Calle de Reina, Chueca, Madrid. Queen Street. One night, while drinking wine and thinking about sex you are beaten red, black, and brown by a sinister Swiss man named John. Next day, you decide to return home. But the ticket is a shit ticket and the 777-200ER is for some reason flying over South Vietnam.

“Jesus Christ.”

*Crack!* and the people start to pray. The plane goes down, like this, down, down, down with 287 souls you drown in mud and shit somewhere outside of Vinh Cuu, about 100 kilometres north of Ho Chi Minh City. You dig yourselves out and find yourselves in a logging plantation. You rest on a dead eucalyptus stump and stare at a young *hopea odorata*, “black star” tree, in the distant forest. A grey rock wallaby comes hopping and mumbles “you’ll be right” and tells you his story:

“After 360 days in South Vietnam, I returned to Australia on board a Qantas 707. I was 23 years old. The plane was crewed by male stewards, which, as was explained to us, was because we hadn’t seen a ‘round-eyed’ female for so long that they felt it would be safer for the crew. We felt insulted that we were considered to be such a risk; we had only been involved in an unpopular war and were not the rapists we were sometimes portrayed as.

Returning to Australia was a surreal experience; as the plane landed in Sydney, a loud cheer went up. We disembarked and were taken to some sleazy hotel in Kings Cross for an overnight stay before being sent on to our homes. My first experience was to be propositioned by a prostitute. I was on my way home to meet with my fiancée

and we were due to be married in a few weeks. There was no one to welcome us home, no cheers, no flags, no emotional embraces.

I had to attend Enoggera Base to be discharged. I was asked if I wanted to re-enlist and when I refused, I was told that I had five minutes to get of the base!

I got a job as a bridge carpenter after the honeymoon, but found it difficult to adjust and no one asked about my experiences; it seemed that it all never happened. At Christmas, I lined up with all the other workers for the pay, the 'gorilla' guarding the door said to the paymaster 'watch this bloke.' I seemed to be considered some sort of risk. I never went back to that job even though I was still owed money. I felt humiliated and hurt.

I had no desire to join the RSL as the attitude of the older diggers was that we hadn't fought in a 'real war.' I was very lucky to have the support of my new bride who has had to endure some difficult times due to my anger and isolation.

My own mother even suggested that I came back with a 'chip on my shoulder' and my siblings never spoke of or asked about my time in the military."<sup>116</sup>

Without further explanation—why was he back in South Vietnam? —the wallaby hops away and you wait to be saved. In 32 hours, you are back in Brisbane.

"Me young, don't change the world, just bruise my bum?"

You promise to live each day like it is your last.

You return to Sydney. You audition for *Hamlet*. Get Hamlet.

Yes, why not? You will be an actor.

ACTOR

I've travelled thousands of miles and finally I'm home.

With my own mother.

Under the Casuarina trees beside the creek.

Finally, home.

---

<sup>116</sup> Written account by Richard Jenson, Vietnam Vet, husband of *Home*'s designer/visual artist, Beverly Jensen. Written in rehearsal (Jenson, 2012).

## SCENE 11 – MY LIFE AS A YOUNG ACTOR

*Spotlight on ‘actor’ chair.*

ACTOR       HOME,  
Sydney, 1977. *[ACTOR sees the “actor” chair.]*

My first solo show happens on the Sydney Harbour.  
I have enrolled in a course called “Aesthetics.”  
“Can I produce a one-woman show as my assignment?”  
To my surprise, the answer is yes.

I find a script, *Alison Mary Fagan*, about an actor who has no children. “Of course, she doesn’t. She is an actor!”

Hayes lends us his Ensemble Theatre for a single Sunday night right on the bluest harbour you have ever seen . . . and my director gives me a single pink carnation.  
*[MUSICIAN chimes.]*

I have never forgotten the sound of thunder.  
I share the story of the iconic actor Alison Mary Fagan.  
She is my future, I think. I will be just like her. Ambitious and sensational.  
“I love you all, I love you in song, in word and in everlasting soliloquy absurd.”

I leave the stage and the thunder begins . . .

*[ACTOR goes and sits at piano, MUSICIAN crosses to ‘actor’ chair.]*

Sitting in my dressing room, I suddenly realise that the thunder is not thunder at all; it’s a hundred pairs of feet pounding the theatre floor . . .

I sit with my face towards the intercom.  
A shocking thing happens.  
The space between me and my audience carves itself right here *[gestures to her heart]*.

MUSICIAN       When I was three years old, my father and mother took me to see a promenade

theatre work. I remember nothing but pitch-black rooms and a foot. The foot was naked and belonged to one of the actors. It slammed down six inches from my right eye upon a platform I didn't know was there. The foot had materialised out of the darkness: a wizard's foot, a demon's foot covered in ochre. When it slammed down, I seized up. Too scared to look up. Too scared to breathe. It still haunts me. The problem of the other naked foot.

Twenty years later with naked feet, I stepped onto a black stage and spoke some words with a bunch of people sitting in front of me.

ACTOR            Good Hamlet, cast thy nightly colour off,  
                      Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die,  
                      Passing through nature to eternity.

MUSICIAN        Ay, madam, it is common.

ACTOR            If it be,  
                      Why seems it so particular to thee?

MUSICIAN        Seems, madam? Nay it is, I know not seems.  
                      'Tis not alone my inky cloak good mother,  
                      nor customary suits of solemn black,  
                      nor windy suspiration of forced breath,  
                      no, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
                      nor the dejected 'haviour of the visage.  
                      Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
                      that can denote me truly: these indeed seem,  
                      for they are actions that a man might play,  
                      but I have that within which passeth show;  
                      these but the trappings and suits of woe.<sup>117</sup>

ACTOR            I will demand this of myself for the next 40 years. Living my life to the point of tears.

MUSICIAN        Men—

ACTOR            Women!

MUSICIAN        —must live, must create.

ACTOR            Camus said that. This will make for some vulnerable times.

MUSICIAN        I guess.

*[ACTOR and MUSICIAN cross: she to 'actor' chair, he to piano.]*

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<sup>117</sup> Shakespeare (n.d.).

ACTOR

“Excruciating vulnerability”<sup>118</sup>

No artifice here, in this world of art,  
in this theatre home.

After that Sunday evening, I am offered a main house season.

I perform *Alison Mary Fagan* over 100 times.

An actor’s instrument is her body, so I start to run.

*[Warming up and running on the spot.]*

Because I am Alison Mary Fagan, I am offered a leading role in Australia’s number 1 soapie: *Number 96*.

18-hour days. Whoopee!!

*[Runs through doorway.]*

Every morning, I am picked up at 5am by a driver and taken to Channel 10 to play Shanie, a madam extraordinaire.

She is as down to earth as I am not.

I live inside Shanie for 14 episodes.

Her final episode finishes with her death scene, where she slowly eats 100 pills.

I have seven hours to wait between scenes.

I sit in the costume room . . .

*[ACTOR sits on ‘actor’ chair with her little book.]*

. . . and rehearse the scene.

One of the actors walks in:

“Mardi, I have brought you a goodbye gift.”

She hands me two chocolate brownies and winks.

“Don’t eat them all at once.”

“Mmm. They smell good.” I return to my death scene . . . *[with little book]*

Shanie reaches over and takes a pill . . . then another . . . *[action of eating]*

and another

and another

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<sup>118</sup> Brown (2012, p.6).



and another.

The actor returns to the dressing room:

“Mardi, are you alright?”

“What?”

“Well you haven’t moved for two hours”

What?

You are in exactly the same spot as when I left you.”

Shanie has eaten two whole brownies . . . and I am stoned as a mullet.

“What time is your scene?”

What?

“Go and get yourself straight.”

*[ACTOR circles the stage,]*

I run to the cafeteria, eat everything I can lay my hands on, drink five cups of coffee, one orange juice. Walk every single corridor in the Channel 10 building and I pray.

One-and-a-half hours later, I do my scene.

The camera lingers as Shanie eats her 100 pills.

I don’t miss a beat, but I embrace what could only be labelled excruciating vulnerability. *[Run through door.]*

And then I vomit. I vomit a lot.

When I was Shanie and Alison Mary Fagan, everyone was kind and generous, but no one to go home to.

Except when a certain “famous” actor watches Alison play, then takes me out for dinner to his favourite French restaurant.

*[ACTOR reclines on the floor.]*

After, he drops me home. Comes inside. Stays. Says goodnight. Leaves me with nothing, oh, no, that’s not it, he leaves me with . . . *[stands and waves and scratches]*

*[Stepping on ‘actor’ chair]* Alison Mary Fagan says:

“My loins are filled with a loathsome disease,

I am a woman of the world:

Purge me,

wash me,

and I shall be whiter than snow.”<sup>119</sup>

*[Reclining on the floor]* After I was Shanie and Alison Mary Fagan, I meet up with a well-known writer. He tells me how it works.

“You sleep with me. I’ll write you a new play.”

*[Onto “actor” chair]* Alison Mary Fagan says:

“I am sickened with this brute city you smile at.

Give me eyes so that I can see.

I keep running.”

I have to leave Sydney at once.

*[She runs to pick up suitcase.]*

Getting onto an aeroplane is therapy because you can reinvent yourself as you fly away.

I am no longer Shanie and Alison Mary Fagan.

I am the adventurer holding the map.

“The map is not the territory.”

The territory is New York, New York.

Theatre capital of the world!

*[ACTOR sees 2nd Bill in audience, waves.]*

It is 1978 and my friend Bill picks me up from JFK.

I had met him several years before in Sydney, now he works on Wall Street.

*[She picks up 2nd Bill and takes him to storyteller chair. ACTOR sits on ‘actor’ chair]*

We drive up Central Park West and Bill points out the Dakota, where John and Yoko live.

We stop at 82nd Street on the Upper West Side, make our way to the seventh floor.

*[Takes 2nd Bill through door.]*

Put down my bag, kick off my red shoes, and lean out the window.

“I can’t wait to wander in that park.”

---

<sup>119</sup> Selbourne (1971. Extract from author’s personal script)

"Why not now?"

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"So?"

*[She sits on storyteller and 'actor' chairs.]*

In five minutes, we are in the park.

We see a rowboat tied up to the shore and we row out to the centre of the lake . . .

I pinch myself.

It is midnight and we are lying in a boat in Central Park. We leave the earth in a bubble of us: he and me.

I didn't know then, but I know now that this is what we choose to do over and over: our "he and me" bubble . . .

A siren blares: "This is the New York City police. Come out of the water."

We madly row to the opposite shore, race back to the apartment, scared . . . yet strangely alive.

Its 3 am. New York, New York, the city that never sleeps.

*[MUSICIAN chimes.]*

## SCENE 12 – EGYPT

*ACTOR collects 3rd Bill from audience.*

ACTOR           It is time to awaken.  
Egypt. 2010. 3 am.

Outlined against the night sky,  
luminous,  
the Great Pyramid.

Bill and I walk down the hundred white marble stairs,

past the jasmine incense,  
into the sticky night to join the rest of the group.

The howling of wild dogs.  
We do not speak,  
but feel each other's breath.

We reach a small entrance:  
"Insignificant almost! Far too small to be the entrance of the greatest pyramid."

We enter  
slowly. *[ACTOR and four other participants file through the door.]*  
We are a conga line,  
as if bowing to  
Isis and Osiris.

We are going to the king's chamber,  
the deep centre.  
Tens of pairs of shoes line the ancient walls.  
I place my red shoes next to Bill's.

The silence is ear-aching.  
The king's chamber!

"You are here," your feet say to you. *[She seats 1st person.]*  
"You are here," your feet say to you. *[She seats 2nd person.]*  
"You are here," your feet say to you. *[She seats 3rd person.]*  
"You are here," your feet say to you. *[She seats 3rd Bill on storyteller chair.]*

There is a crack in time and I am dreaming.

I remember  
and I don't remember.

Waking up through the long nights,  
cuddling a warm baby (my youngest daughter),  
feeding her in the light of the red globe.

I didn't know then  
that this globe of the world,  
which lights the room,  
is seeping into her mind  
while she sleeps in my arms, and  
will spin her away  
across to the ancient worlds  
where she sees more compassion,  
more aliveness, than she experiences here  
at home in Brisbane.

MUSICIAN

Within there is a little girl of no more than four playing with a model aeroplane. She sits in the living room. She sits in the dark. She sits alone. Her father is out. Her father is here. Her father is telling you a story.

"My whole life I have dreamed of having my own house. I grew up in a refugee camp. I worked hard, saved money, and bought a piece of land in Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem. We have a big family; we need a big house. At around 8.30 am on the morning of 13th July 2009, nine years after the house was built, I was surprised by bulldozers surrounding the house. Israeli soldiers, police and municipality officials were with them. When I saw the house destroyed, I just stood there for an hour. I couldn't move. If anyone spoke to me, I wouldn't answer them. I was in shock. I couldn't believe that all the effort and work of 10 years was destroyed in five minutes. My daughter asks me, why did the police ruin our house and take our trees? I don't have an answer to that question. I don't know if there is someone who has that answer for a four-year-old girl . . . ".<sup>120</sup>

I hear his story and reply in words that were written for the stage. Words that were written for you. Words that weren't written for him.

"Tell her it's a story."

ACTOR

Over there, in Palestine, she feels that people are awake,  
while here,

---

<sup>120</sup> Extract from UNRWA (2010). Translated by Micaela Ash.

at home,  
we are fast asleep  
dreaming of something yet to form.

“You’re joking,” I say.  
“No, no I’m not.

I think that is one of Brisbane’s criteria:  
to be asleep.  
To not peek too often into the brightness—  
the light is too harsh here—  
so, we hide within.”

I re-awaken in the king’s chamber.

I lower my body into the sarcophagus.

Lie on silk and red rose petals,  
where centuries ago the king lay,  
in all his regal-ness.

I hear Isis say:

“Rise and uncover thyself.  
My story is your story.  
Love as I have loved,  
naked and with  
excruciating vulnerability.

Love life,  
love the dead and each other.  
As long as we live,  
the dead may live . . .”

And we exit into the light of a brand new day.

*[MUSICIAN plays and sings song of home. ACTOR moves all the guests into a circle.]*

## EPILOGUE – WHO SHALL TELL THE STORIES?

ACTOR                Some artists have sketchbooks; we don't.

We have children, who surprise, challenge, and outrage  
their mother and father,  
year after year,  
who school us in the comforts of uncertainty.

*[ACTOR circles around the audience.]*

Children who stuff letters and red rose petals into their grandmother's coffin before  
they farewell her into the furnace.

My daughters and my sons:

She who sews 400 hours into a patchwork quilt;  
who cycles across the Middle East for peace;  
who cries when she loses her grandmother's ring in the Austrian snow.

My daughter who goes to Palestine to learn Arabic;  
my son who goes to Jerusalem to learn Hebrew.

He who crashes his car in a war zone on the Syrian border.  
He who doesn't answer his phone.  
She who rings daily just to say hello.

My son who plays the piano instead of talking;  
and my daughter who cooks the world.

*[ACTOR crosses to sit in spare audience chair.]*

I am in love with this moment.  
Here we are, searching for floating treasures.  
Our comfort zones are larger now, and swim around us.

And here we are,  
ready to hear your stories of Home.  
“Every story ever dreamed can spring,  
robust and smiling,  
from this very air.  
And dance  
in the crack  
between the remembered and the not remembered . . .”<sup>121</sup>  
(P. L. Travers said that, I think.)

Who shall tell the stories and what stories shall we tell?

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<sup>121</sup> Travers (1989/2010). I played the character of Pamela Travers in *The Knowing of Mary Poppins*, Brisbane Powerhouse, 2006.



## ROOM 4

### THE POETICS OF *HOME*

Poetics has become the means by which writers formulate and discuss an attitude to their work that recognises influences, the traditions they write within and develop, the literary, social and political context in which they write, and the processes of composition and revision they undertake.  
(Lasky, 2013, p. 17)

How long the road is. But, for all the time the journey has already taken, how you have needed every second of it in order to learn what the road passes by.  
(Hammarskjöld, 1982, p. 68)

The art of pilgrimage is the art of reimagining how we walk, talk, listen, see, hear, write, and draw as we ready for the journey of our soul's deepest desire.  
(Cousineau, 2012, Chapter 1, para. 9)

#### 4.1 Introduction

The video of the final *Home* performance in 2015 at Queensland Theatre is included with this document, despite the fact that theatre-on-video does not replicate what was intended, directed, or acted, for “Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations” (Phelan, 2004, p. 146). What can be saved, however, are the re-imaginings of the script, not only through the spoken and written words, but also in the poetics of these reflections.

The script *Home* (2015) is relatively succinct, set out in poetic form: “so much can be said in so few words and in such compelling ways . . . Poetry allows the heart to lead the mind, rather than the reverse” (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 3). The script is laid out on the page to emphasise the musicality and poetics of the score. The writing embraced a process-oriented method, where both director Leah Mercer and I regarded the writing as a way of provoking, of thinking, and of prioritising the importance of collaboration throughout the process (Lie, 2014, p. 126). This way of creating a script was laborious, but it allowed the work to find its own direction using visual arts

practices, embodied processes and poetic frameworks. Mercer was usually present in the room during the writing phase, provoking, suggesting, and then guiding the embodiment of the work on the floor before I returned to the page. The whole *Home* process took years to complete, but, as confirmed by Dag Hammarskjöld, I “have needed every second of it in order to learn what the road passes by” (1982, p. 68).

#### **4.2 Therapist as Performer, Performer as Researcher**

It was in June 2010 that I created and performed my first academic performative response at the Summer Institute, a conference held in Mexico hosted by the Houston Galveston Institute. I was asked to create a short closing performance as a response to the conference at the end of the final session. I decided that it was important the response also be in Spanish, as the conference was bilingual. A Mexican colleague, Dr. Sylvia London, agreed to perform alongside me, improvising and translating the performance. We quickly warmed to the task of telling stories that had emerged from the conference. The response was overwhelmingly positive, so much so that for the next few years at collaborative conferences, we presented a performative closing session together. The experience of responding to therapeutic ideas within a performative and collaborative frame established the process of mapping the *Home* stories. That first conference talked about mapping conversations, story balls, the relational self, and the importance of hosting our clients. My excitement grew as I reflected on how I could use these ideas to create a map of home and belonging:

A map? Well we all know that the map is not the territory.

A map is a series of points

That has the potential of directing me to the intersection . . . and beyond . . .

My map for my immediate future

Will incorporate Mexico, Brazil, Czech Republic etc. [the participants at the conference]

Yet despite this anticipation, my philosophical stance remains in the bounded self department, as I walk the paths to our hotel room.

(Brown Ash, performative presentation with Sylvia London, International Summer Institute Conference, Mexico, June 2010)

The very act of an academic performative presentation alerted me to how my future research could be performed. I could see that writing about domestic ideas and linking them with relevant academic literature could provide not only entertainment but also an environment where people could, perhaps, feel compelled to talk about their own experiences. This awareness that emerged from the conference was pivotal to my future work. My area of research was to become thematically domestic, but it was in that domesticity, the ordinariness of the moment, that the extraordinary lay. I would map new lands, the internal landscapes of my mind. It would be a pilgrimage of sorts, a series of monologues that moved into dialogues of re-imaginings. The audience and I would walk, talk, listen, see, and hear each other in our journeys towards home: “The art of pilgrimage is the art of reimagining how we walk, talk, listen, see, hear, write, and draw as we ready for the journey of our soul’s deepest desire (Cousineau, 2012, Chapter 1, para. 9). In so doing, my pilgrimage of home was to restore a “sense of aliveness, possibility and magic” (Gablik, 1991, p. 60): “I begin by telling you a story, I will tell you many stories, And I ask that you listen” (first creative development script of *Home*, 2011).

#### **4.3 Poetics of *Home***

This room will explore the poetics of home, the formulation and examination of the work, and its influences (Lasky, 2013, p. 17). I will focus primarily on how the writing expanded by way of performative acts<sup>122</sup> and generative collaboration, not only within the creative team but also with the audiences throughout the creative developments.

As described in the last chapter, I was loyal to a social constructionist frame, taking into account at various times throughout the years of development “relational practices that are generative, socially

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<sup>122</sup> I was influenced and encouraged by social psychologist and social constructionist researcher Dr. Mary Gergen, who embraced performance as a means of communicating psychological investigations to her readers, using evocative poetic performance that was markedly different from the majority of psychological writings (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 305).

just and collaborative” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 305). It kept me curious, non- judgemental (as much as possible), accepting, and inclusive as I embodied the emerging ideas, co-constructing (engaging in co-action<sup>123</sup>) with my director/devisor Mercer. It provided not only a discipline of practice but also a provocation, remaining alert to Gergen’s (2009) declaration: “What if we ceased to view our bounded being as the centre of our social universe?” (p. 22).

Kenneth Gergen (2009) proposed that our traditional view of the individual self can create difficulties for us. It most certainly did for Mardi, the protagonist in *Home*. Gergen purported that our longstanding belief in the individual or bounded self “invites a sense of fundamental separation and loneliness; encourages narcissism at the expense of relationships; generates unending threats to one’s person and transforms the self into a marketable commodity” (p. 27).

I wanted to interrogate the bounded relationships of Mardi, and bring to the fore the potential of co-action between herself and other characters (both real and imaginary), as well as her audience members. The intention was to scrutinise Mardi’s separation and loneliness and by so doing, create new pathways to new connections, what Joanna Macy (2007) identified as the interconnection of us all, the “jewelled net of Indra”:

In the cosmic canopy of Indra’s Net, each of us is a multifaceted jewel at each node of the net, every jewel reflects all the others and sees the others reflecting back . . . We find we are interwoven threads in the intricate tapestry of life, its deep ecology. (Macy, 2007, Chapter 9, para. 2)

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<sup>123</sup> “Co-action” is a term we use in constructionist therapy; we exist in a world of co-construction. We build meaning together; we are the relationships that we engage in, and it is “Through co-action we come into being as individual identities, but the process remains forever incomplete. At any moment there are multiple options, and self-identity remains in motion” (Gergen, 2009, p. 44).

The adapted MIECAT process, which borrows from the hermeneutic<sup>124</sup> cycle, was a discerning guide to examine this relational field, keeping in mind that MIECAT initially focuses on the exploration of one's internal world of meaning (further into the process, it takes on a relational turn), whereas a social constructionist approach examines the influences of one's social world. Sheila McNamee (2004) proposed that the constructionist practitioner endeavours to seek out ways of communicating (writing and talking) that can awaken future possibilities and surprises, and provide various alternatives to consider (p. 258). Constructionists primarily attend to language as meaning making. MIECAT, on the other hand, provides the opportunity, through art making, to access the pre-verbal and embodied "what we don't know we know." It is still a collaborative conversation, but begins with a concentration on the artwork, and it is only later on in the process that co-action and co-construction occur among participants. My adaption of the MIECAT process, coupled with a social constructionist awareness, provided tools to enrich my writing process and, in turn, my analysis of each cycle. Each creative development was a cycle of creative inquiry, creating text, performing text, interrogating text, re-writing text, reflecting on text, and leaving that particular cycle with a compelling goal for the next round. I have laid out below the *Home* action research cycles used when writing and developing the script (Figure 9).

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<sup>124</sup> During the creation of these works, over a period of a couple of years, I came to understand the importance of the work of Paul Ricoeur (1990) and in particular his emphasis on hermeneutics— "the theory of achieving an understanding of texts, utterances, and so on" (Forster, 2007, p.30). Ricoeur's account of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration (his triple mimesis theory) provided a means of understanding how the process of performance making—including creative developments, devising and writing, reflexive practice, engaged performance and the writing of this exegesis— contributed to making new meaning (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 52).

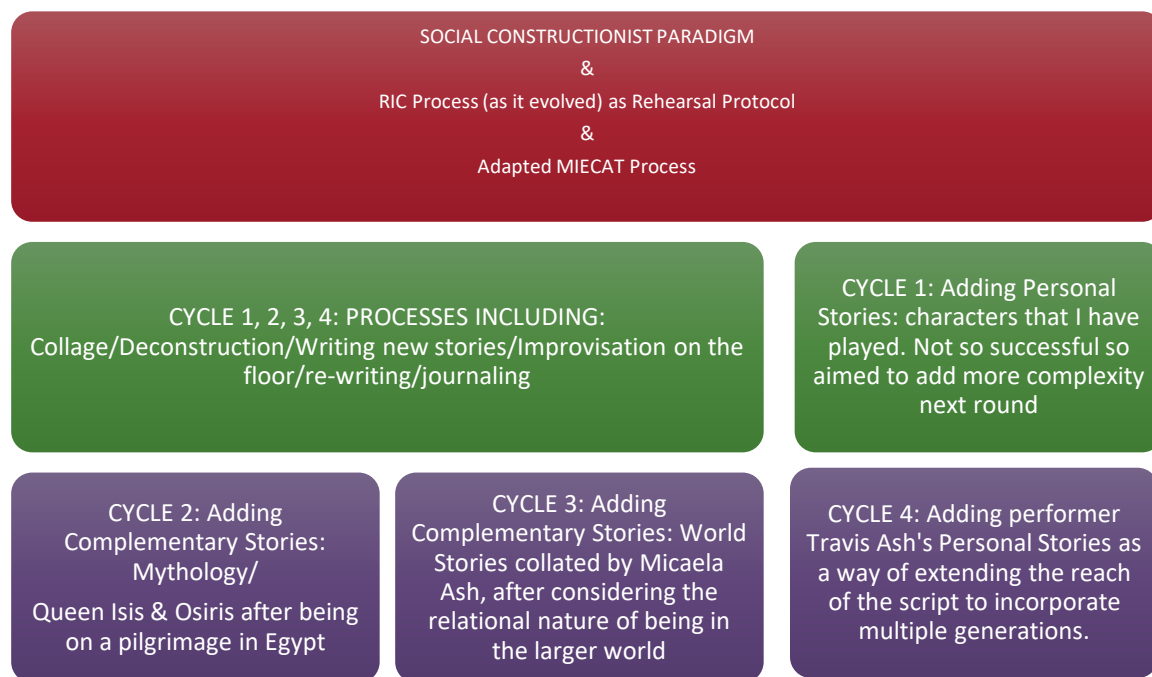


Figure 9. Action Research Cycle for the Creative Developments of *Home*

#### 4.4 Building *Home*

Our rehearsal process began as a heuristic<sup>125</sup> journey, an exploration of “the interiority of experience” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 54), followed by an examination of how that experience related to the external world.<sup>126</sup> Clark Moustakas (1995, p. 39) deduced that the only way we can deeply understand something is by returning to it again and again as a way of immersing ourselves in the experience from all angles, including looking, searching, listening, and touching, each time with a fresh attitude. Following Moustakas’s lead, I completely immersed myself into the inquiry; everything became inter-related—my friendships, my work, my family, my home. Certainly, the topic helped; the very themes I was investigating were those that would enrich home, hosting, connectedness, and generative conversations.

<sup>125</sup> Heuristics is from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to find or discover (Heuristic, 2017).

<sup>126</sup> The adapted MIECAT process is very much aligned with heuristics, which is “a process that begins with a question or problem [in my case, a hunch] which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15).

We began our first creative development one sunny October day in Brisbane. Mercer flew over from Curtin University in Western Australia for a two-week rehearsal period. Brisbane was an oasis of green and we chose to start our journey at my red home where there was space to engage performatively. We worked both inside and out, in “The Play Pen”, an old tennis court on the property, and in the lounge studio. Our first creative development consisted of looking at my life stories, but primarily through the eyes of three characters that I had played on the stage for extended seasons, the roles having had a profound impact on my life. We preferred to work on the floor as much as possible, moving the ideas with a soundtrack or assemblages. Sometimes, if I was struggling with integrating a movement with text, Mercer would step into the actor’s shoes, which allowed me some distance, and see with new eyes. This was a process we engaged with whenever we felt “stuck.” As the months and years progressed and we moved through *Home*’s action cycles 2, 3, and 4, there were many adaptations of the script, beginning with the more academic version used for the Taos Institute Seminar in the Gulf of Mexico that Mercer and I attended. With Mercer’s encouragement, I included more therapeutic and academic references in the script for this conference than for later renditions, having an acute awareness of my academic and postmodern audience. In particular, in the first version, I overtly discussed principles of social constructionism, including the argument around the “bounded” or “essential” self. Here is an example:

I want so badly to say that I no longer follow the illusion of  
the stuttering soul, the bounded and integrated self.  
Or do you sit at the door somewhere, waiting patiently?  
I know you are still there.  
You sneak in, like Eliot’s licking fog,  
under the door, around the gaps in the window.  
“I am seductive,” you say.  
“I know you like me more than you would like to admit”.  
I turn my back,  
not wanting to admit that I do find you [my bounded self] inviting.  
Your world is full of the comforts of certainty.  
Your map supersedes your territory, but aloneness sits closely with you.  
My relational map seems larger than yours.  
There are many more pathways to dream.  
(first draft of *Home*, initially called “My Shoes Are Too Big”)

In this seminar performance, I also used “therap-ese”: terms such as “dialogue of the past” and “dialogue of the future”, “internal dialogue” and “between dialogue”, “multiple voices” and “multiple selves”:

I will engage with dialogue of the past and dialogue of the future  
Internal dialogue and between dialogue.  
I shall introduce you to the many voices that have influenced my emotional-  
physical-spiritual-intellectual-being . . .  
I will . . . talk to you in the many voices of my own life:  
as daughter, wife, mother, researcher, artist and therapist. (*Home*, draft 1)

I also introduced literary, historical references and art references:

I invite myth, traditional stories, dreams, jokes, children’s games,  
hostess-ing, rituals, carnival and scripted pieces stolen from everywhere.  
I invite the farcical and the serious, the high-toned and the vulgar  
[Castagno 10].  
I steal sophisticated literary forms, and slam them up against storytelling  
style and I invite you to eat with me,  
this mixed and varied meal of words and art and ideas (*Home*, draft 1).

As we participated in more writing developments (see below), these emphatic and philosophically based paragraphs were removed, as they were not needed. I was *performing* a multiplicity of stories and multiplicity of selves; I did not have to *discuss* them. Part of me resisted cutting the theoretical components and another part of me thought it was far more accessible to embody the concepts rather than to intellectualise them.

#### **4.5 The Bounded Self and the Relational Self**

One of the most liberating concepts I learned throughout my therapeutic training was the concept of the bounded and relational self. Kenneth Gergen differentiated between these two ways of being.

First of all, he described our traditional bounded being:

The sense of self as fundamentally independent is tissue to our daily lives; it pervades our private moments; it is insinuated into our daily relationships; it is inscribed in the objects about us; it is secreted within our institutions. We have no difficulty in speaking of “my thoughts,” “my decision,” “my love,” “my experience,” “my needs”. (Gergen, 2009, p. 4)



Then he offered an alternative to the tradition of bounded being: the “relational being, seeks to recognise a world that is not within persons but within their relationships, and that ultimately erases the traditional boundaries of separation” (Gergen, 2009, p. 5). This way of thinking changed the way I inhabited my world. Gergen (2009) had proposed that “[T]hrough co-action we emerge with visions of a satisfying life; we achieve harmony, trust and direction” (p. 363). However, it took some time. Having been raised in a modernist world where the individual self was highly revered and all powerful, the switch to a relational understanding of being in the world was gradual. It wasn’t until nine months after the first creative development showing at the conference in the Gulf of Mexico that I became clearer about *how* the different stories that I was writing revolved around my bounded self, my essential antagonist, the “I am me” and “I exist independently of you” self. My multiple selves, my relational or multi-being, were most certainly a work in progress, incorporating past, present, and future, crossing time and space. My bounded self became less dominant as I worked and re-worked the stories that emerged. The script began to divide itself into different locations, different countries, different times.

These stories needed to be connected somehow, but I was no longer interested in exploring overt therapeutic constructs: my desire to link these stories with therapeutic meaning was eclipsed as I wrote about *life*. I began to write less about the characters that I played and more about my own stories. But doubt and lack of conviction flirted with me. Who would be interested? Why should my stories be placed on stage? It was that challenge that began the thickening of what was now becoming known as *Home* rather than *My Shoes Are Too Big*. I awoke to everything around me as I refined what resulted in a sort-of-prototype for the other shows.

## 4.6 An Interactive Architecture

I composed the script as an interactive architecture (Holbrook, 2010), blurring boundaries between poetry, fiction, non-fiction, truth and fibs, life and art, all the while playing across time and space.

Interactive architecture is a way of writing that

blurs the boundaries between prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction, image and word with the purpose of challenging notions of traditional academic presentations of knowledge and opening the field to other possible forms. (Holbrook, 2010, p. 173)

This way of pulling a script together was not a polite building of ideas (Holbrook, 2010), but rather a moving away from a linear, logical way of writing towards a more organic, soulful approach that was flexible, vibrant, and could accommodate change. I saw my role as a bricoleur, quilting together all of these different voices and texts. The bricoleur has “many different things . . . going on at the same time—different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 9). We engaged with several approaches in generating new ideas:

## 4.7 Sensitising Questions

After reading a collection of texts that I had written at various writing intensives, including workshops with author Kate Grenville,<sup>127</sup> performance maker Margaret Cameron, and playwright Jenny Kemp, we decided to begin one of our early rehearsals with some of their provocations rather than using collage:

Have you ever insulted or offended someone and regretted it?  
What makes you get out of bed?  
What is the most powerful you have ever felt?

Questions are not unusual creative methods for awakening reminiscence, and the most useful are referred to as sensitising questions, questions that guide rather than structure one’s thinking (Birren

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<sup>127</sup> Kate Grenville is a multi-award-winning novelist, shortlisted for Man Booker Prize and Miles Franklin Award; Jenny Kemp and the late Margaret Cameron are two of Australia’s most influential contemporary performance makers.

& Deutchman, 1991). Sensitising questions, or open questioning, are what we use in the collaborative therapy room, so it seemed appropriate to use them in our collaborative rehearsal room.<sup>128</sup>

Equipped with the provocative questions, I sat and wrote for 25 to 45 minutes. If I became stuck, I would use the technique that many writers use. It was taught to Mercer when she worked with Split Britches Theatre Company' in LA and was taught to me in New York City by Natalie Goldberg (1990, p. 73), a well-known writer's coach. It encompasses writing the statement "What I really want to say is" each time the writer gets stuck. This keeps the writing moving forward, aided by the rule of not removing the pen from the page. This way of writing accesses stream-of-consciousness thoughts and dreams. In answer to the first question, I wrote:

I felt like a mixed boiled lolly bag.  
Wondered who was I this time.  
Actor, teacher, tutor, therapist mother, wife, coach, student . . .  
Who was I yesterday?  
What I really want to say is  
I felt humble, so small  
Perhaps I am a Lilliputian . . .  
I don't want to be small, but the terrain dictates it (*Home*, draft 1)

The above did not end up in the script, but as with many writers, everything I wrote led somewhere. It led me to embracing multiplicity, an overarching theme of *Home*, and a critical construct within the constructionist paradigm, as well as the importance of space/place ("perhaps I am a Lilliputian") and how the space/place can dictate behaviour.

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<sup>128</sup> We brought these sensitising questions into the RIC Process: they not only helped create relationship between the participants but also provided strong material to grow their stories of belonging. At RIC, we developed these sensitising questions by incorporating generative questions from Mary Pipher's (2006) book, *Writing to Change the World*, including "What makes you laugh, cry and open your heart?" "What points do you repeatedly make to those you love and trust?" "What topics keep you up at night or help you fall asleep?" We will also take these questions on board when we begin our new project on Leadership and Women in 2018.

## 4.8 Rip and Stick Collage

When I studied at MIECAT, I learned ways of working that were so generative and transformative that I incorporated them into my playwriting and theatre-making processes. As discussed in the last chapter, the MIECAT Process is a multimodal, experiential, and relational inquiry whereby images, movement, and creative writing are unpacked by amplifying, reducing, and attending to the art work.

## 4.9 Co-Construction of Meaning through Artmaking

Mercer and I gathered supplies ready to collage—dozens of magazines with strong artistic images, glue sticks, A3 paper, music, coffee—and undertook the following process:

1. We ripped images from the magazines; ripping was very fast, bypassing judgement;
2. We responded to both her collage and mine; we engaged in a robust version of Anderson's story-ball metaphor (Anderson, 2007)<sup>129</sup> growing each other's comments;
3. Through conversation and/or movement, we changed our perspective, coming closer to the images, moving away, and noticing new ways of seeing;
4. We used a small cardboard frame<sup>130</sup> to reframe different parts of the collages, noting the colours, shapes, textures, position on the page etc. all providing new information;
5. Patterns of meaning emerged, multiple themes emerged;
6. We created four essence statements that summed up what we saw;
7. I wrote from these essence statements, brief emerging themes;
8. The collages acted as stimuli or maps for monologues; these monologues were then moved on the floor;
9. We returned to the original collage; did we miss anything?
10. We moved through the new text, word by word. Mercer's process was rigorous, asking sensitising questions and questioning my choices of words.

As well as using collages and sensitising questions, we utilised soundscape, poetry, historical texts, and assemblage to enrich the emerging text. Mercer and I would build impromptu assemblages out of books, chairs, ladders, or dolls. We then improvised, often together on the floor, using the various objects. For the *Home* performance, we were initially going to have our audience sitting around a huge table; however, after a day of rehearsing with a table in the centre of the stage, we realised just

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<sup>129</sup> This came from Anderson's collaborative therapy processes, discussed in Room 7 (2007).

<sup>130</sup> The smaller frame is made out of cardboard and is placed over the collage, so that our attention is concentrated on one particular part. This is one of my favourite ways of finding what I may not normally notice.

how limiting it was. We removed the table but kept the chairs, piling them in the middle of the stage, to be used later in the story, as seen in the video.

#### 4.10 Researcher as Playwright

For me, telling stories has never been a linear process, but one that is fluid and ever changing.

Graeme Harper (2008) developed this idea, believing that writing is usually connected to other work one may have done, as well as other people's work;<sup>131</sup> it does not exist alone. As such, to write about what one has written can be challenging. Harper offered a way of dealing with this challenge:

Creative writing is contained neither in the linear progression of an initial thought to final work or in a singular production or process, or in work that does not have connections with other work, other thoughts, other actions. With this in mind, the results of the creative process can, broadly be considered in terms of pretexts, complementary texts, text, post-texts. (Harper, 2008, p. 168)

I utilised these text divisions of Harpers, and applied them to my research cycles as a way of understanding the progression of the texts. It was a clean way of interrogating the progressions of the script writing:

1. Cycle 1 of *Home* could be seen as pre-text because not much of it was used; however, it set up a process that was engaged with over and over again.<sup>132</sup>
2. Cycles 2, 3, 4 could be seen as complementary texts and texts, where we paralleled three different types of texts next to the main *Home* story.
3. Finally, this room could be regarded as a post-text, where analysis and critical thinking pulls the themes together and defines what new ideas need to be examined for the future.

#### 4.11 Pre-Text, Complementary Texts, Text, Post-Texts

To begin at the beginning, here is my initial outline, an excerpt from my first PhD blog, what Harper (2008) referred to as “pre-texts,” what Janesick (2010) referred to as “stretching exercises”:

I begin my journey with an exploration about how therapists etc. can embrace the constructs of performance to be more effective; the idea that performance heals, and when we step into our performer, we can help facilitate change; I am collaborating with Leah Mercer, who is an academic in Perth (Curtin University). We have been thinking that we could devise

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<sup>131</sup> Playwriting is heavily collaborative, inviting significant input from a director, multiple designers and dramaturgs as well as actors and musicians.

<sup>132</sup> This is explained over the page.

performances (or two . . . ???)<sup>133</sup> that are then able to be performed at workshops, conferences, gatherings, theatres, festivals etc. Throughout the devising, social constructionist principles will be applied as the overarching epistemology. (author's journal, March 2010)

And so, the project was born. I was not sure what I was actually creating beyond this theoretical proposal, but I clearly knew that the creative product would function in multiple ways and that it would help therapists step into their performing selves.<sup>134</sup> This aim, of course, changed throughout the years of development, but it was an apt way to launch the project, and my collaborators and I are still very clear that the final production belongs not just in a theatre space, but could be a strong contribution to conferences and workshops that focus on identity, grief and loss, constructionism, collaborative practices, and therapeutic conversations.

My chosen paradigm, my basic belief system, was a social constructionist philosophy, which guided me (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 38) as I engaged in four cycles of inquiry. Throughout these cycles, the central text kept growing, refining stories from my own life over a period of six decades and across three continents. Here is a brief outline of the writing process I engaged with, expanded later in the chapter:

1. PRE-TEXT: Cycle 1(early 2011): I wrote fictional stories of characters that I had embodied for an extended amount of time. The idea seemed strong at first, but it became clear that the stories of fictional characters from fictional worlds were not serving my objective to represent the complexities of the human spirit. Most of this writing was put aside; however, I did keep one of the stories about Alison Mary Fagan (the character in my first one-person show) because it became a turning point of Mardi's journey.<sup>135</sup> Mercer and I did not present a showing at the end of this cycle because we were not satisfied with the outcome; rather, we gave ourselves time to let the ideas settle and investigate further areas of study that could enrich the script. We decided to engage in a pilgrimage.
2. TEXT 1: I incorporated stories from different decades of Mardi's life. Mercer and I used sensitising questions, collage, movement, music, text from our favourite writers and philosophers to activate the writing process.

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<sup>133</sup> I smile as I read this. Little did we know we would create three shows.

<sup>134</sup> At this stage, I had little interest in expanding *ImpulseTraining* because I felt it was reasonably complete in its approach to keeping actors healthy. However, over the next several years, my understandings of self and development, leadership, and collaborative practice grew, so that I could not help but thicken and strengthen the process.

<sup>135</sup> Harper suggested that the pre-texts can be valuable contributors to the final text. He writes "The earlier failed poem often informs the later successful one" (Harper, 2008, p. 169).

3. COMPLEMENTARY TEXT: Cycle 2 (mid-2011): I added the myth of Queen Isis and Osiris, the greatest love story ever told, after going on a pilgrimage to Egypt to visit the 14 temples that Queen Isis built for Osiris along the Nile. This story seemed to encapsulate the essence of love and relationship and as a parallel myth it shone light onto Mardi's story. After a private reading at the end of the development, Mercer and I knew that there were still more opportunities to unearth.
4. TEXT 2: The complementary text of Queen Isis and Osiris was woven throughout the main text as a way of highlighting the core value of love as were some of my favourite writers, e.g. Brene Brown's (2010)<sup>136</sup> concept of "excruciating vulnerability" I attributed to Queen Isis.
5. COMPLEMENTARY TEXT: Cycle 3 (early 2012): It was in the third cycle that I was ready to incorporate a multiplicity of storylines. I added half a dozen world stories, significant events that took place around the world at the same time as Mardi's story was unfolding. This anchored the script, opening up the horizon to a multiplicity of stories and a diversity of peoples, which reflected well the social constructionist philosophy that Mercer and I were endeavouring to model.
6. TEXT 3: the world stories impacted on how the storyline unfolded. For example, I chose the naïveté of the Raggedy Anne story set in high school in Texas, to be in sharp contrast with the Kent State University killings that happened at a similar time, over 1,000 miles north of Texas.
7. COMPLEMENTARY TEXT: Cycle 4 (mid-2015): I was still not satisfied with the marriage of the world stories and Mardi's stories. It seemed too formulaic. So, in this final cycle, I invited Travis Ash, the musician and storyteller, from a different generation than myself and Mercer, to add his own stories. This addition acknowledged the multi-generational philosophy that I was keen to demonstrate. Ash wrote stories that jumped through time and space, and in so doing he managed to weave his personal stories with the world stories, in a similar way to how Mardi and the myth of Queen Isis were woven throughout the script.

It took four cycles of inquiry to create a script that I was satisfied with, embracing my values of collaboration (story balling), hosting, and my desire to impart what I would eventually call a constructionist philosophy of belonging.

### ***Pre-Texts between Palestine and Brisbane***

Around this time, one of our children participated in the Peace Cycle, a cycle ride across Europe, beginning in London and finishing in the Middle East. It was a peaceful protest to alert the world of

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<sup>136</sup> Brene Brown wrote a book on vulnerability titled *Daring Greatly* (2012), and has also presented a TED Talk on excruciating vulnerability that has been viewed 31 million times (Brown, 2010).

the conditions in Palestine/Israel. She was 17 at the time, and my husband and I were concerned for her safety, yet at the same time we wanted her to follow her passion. This resulted in her cycling across Europe and the following year cycling through the Middle East, through Syria, and finally arriving in Palestine for a university exchange year. We kept in touch using daily SMSs and emails. What resulted were “Tweet-like” responses to the life of the Palestinians, and in particular the issue of house bulldozing occurring close to her university.

World news at the time included statements from Palestine (PIWP, n.d.), statements such as:

1. 27 October 2009: Israeli bulldozers demolish six Palestinian houses in Jerusalem; large military presence.
2. Since 1967 there have been 28,000 Palestinian homes bulldozed by Israeli forces.
3. No Israeli homes have been bulldozed by Palestinian forces. (*If Americans Knew*, n.d.)

While I sat in the comfort of my own home, these statements from my daughter filtered in, disturbing and troubling me.<sup>137</sup> I was forced to consider the question “What is home to me?” and “What happens when a home is bulldozed or one’s safety is put in jeopardy?” As a result of these reflections, I engaged in a pilgrimage to Palestine and Jerusalem to visit my daughter and to seek understanding.

### ***Action Research Cycles and Complementary Texts***

Each time we engaged in a new research cycle, another complementary text emerged to enrich the central story. Our objective was to connect to our audience on multiple levels using stories that were powerful and real, but it took time and substantial reflection before the right stories revealed themselves: “The telling of stories may function as providing a way of connecting people, a way of knowing about the world, a way of creating reality, a way of remembering and a way of envisioning the future” (Sunwolf & Frey, 2001, p. 121). We kept in mind that the more inclusive these stories

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<sup>137</sup> At the time, I was unaware of the deeper and very personal story that happened centuries ago when my own people, the Gaels, had this done to them during the Clearances in the Highlands of Scotland.



were, the richer our connection and the more we learned about the world, opening up “a way of envisioning the future.”

### ***Complementary Story of Queen Isis and Osiris***

P. L. Travers (the author of *Mary Poppins*, and a character I created and played over a period of four years in *The Knowing of Mary Poppins*) understood our need for myth:

we go to the myths not so much for what they mean as for our own meaning. Who am I? Why am I here? How can I live in accordance with reality? . . . the myths never have a single meaning, once, for all and finished. They have something greater; they have meaning itself. (Travers, 2010, p. 13)

In late autumn 2010, I went in search of my myth, encouraged by Travers’s belief in the power of myth to inform our own personal meaning. I embarked on a study tour of Ancient Egypt, an Initiation Along the Nile,<sup>138</sup> led by Dr. Jean Houston, who is anecdotally described by architect and author Buckminster Fuller as an American Living Treasure. Houston was known to be one of the most inspirational teachers in the USA, and Egypt was the source of the mythic universe (McLaughlin, 2013). The intention of the study tour was to step outside of “chronos” time and experience a soulful initiation, a deep awareness, what Houston called second destiny (Houston, 2010, author’s workshop notes).<sup>139</sup> As an initiate, I followed three of the traditional guidelines of Joseph Campbell’s (1990/2003) Hero’s Journey<sup>140</sup> while “acting out” the story of Queen Isis and Osiris:

1. First, I separated from the ordinary experienced world.
2. Second, I took time for profound training, remembering, meeting obstacles and clarifying the desire to live fully a life of service.

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<sup>138</sup> My husband Bill Ash accompanied me on my research trips to Palestine, Egypt and Greece. My director Mercer also accompanied me on the trip to Palestine, but for the sake of clarity, I am speaking only about my personal experience.

<sup>139</sup> Romanyshyn (2007) in his book *The Wounded Researcher* wanted to “make a place for the soul of the work to speak beyond the calculus of a researcher’s subjective prejudices (p. 44). He wanted research to be what Elsner (2009) referred to as a journey of the soul (p. 27). This pilgrimage was a journey of the soul and brought with it the richness of myth, which guided the whole show.

<sup>140</sup> All the while, I was very aware that The Hero’s Journey and The Heroine’s Journey have different paths. Campbell didn’t think women needed the Hero’s Journey. According to him, women were already “there.” See Maureen Murdock’s *The Heroine’s Journey* (1990).

3. Finally, I was welcomed back into the world with a more mature and wise approach to living a rich and deep life. (Houston, 2010, workshop notes)

Houston believed that the story of Queen Isis and Osiris provided a profound perspective for the initiate to transform into their higher destiny. Houston was a close colleague and friend of Campbell, who proposed that “the myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (Campbell, 2008, p. 1). Houston built on this. In *The Passion of Isis and Osiris*, Houston proposed that

. . . when a society is in a state of breakdown and breakthrough—what I have called whole system transition—it often requires a new alignment that only myth can bring. It is the mythologically wise community that find ways to mediate and so refocus the shadow sides of self and society. (Houston, 1995, p. 2)

What interested me here was the suggestion that myth could help both the individual and the community to realign. If my objective was to realign what home meant to me and in turn my audience, it seemed pragmatic to engage with myth. I chose Queen Isis and Osiris to balance the shadows within the stories of my own home. Some of the readings that were recommended before our pilgrimage included Normandi Ellis’s (1995) *Dreams of Isis: A Woman’s Spiritual Sojourn*, in which she assessed that “We gain our knowledge of the world not by intellect alone, but through the secret doorway of the heart, the connection of ourselves with ancestors and the dim memories of the past” (1995, p. 261). I was interested in having an intellectual connection with my audience as well as engaging with them on an emotional and physical level. The most effective theatre satisfies not only our intellect, but also our emotional self (Cohen-Cruz, 2010).<sup>141</sup> As a company, we wanted to give voice to the ordinary woman and re-connect her to her world of stories; her own narratives of survival and creativity as well as the myths of her ancestors. Once I heard the great love story of Queen Isis and Osiris, I was captivated by their dedication to each other despite tragic circumstances, and I saw that to parallel these stories would connect the *Home* story to a much more universal

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<sup>141</sup> Jan Cohen-Cruz (2010) believes it is crucial for artists to be engaged in the world around them if they are to connect with their art beyond the aesthetic sphere. That was certainly our intent; hence, our pilgrimages and our attending conferences across the Pacific.

theme. For me, this myth spoke “of the wondrous depth of human experience” (Ellis, 1995, p. 261), revealing itself through Queen Isis’s dreams and her daily rituals. Her story would become the scaffolding on which to construct my map of belonging.

### *Complementary Stories from the World at Large*

I remember a definitive moment in the early development of the script. I performed a play reading of *Home* for my family at the end of our second creative development. When I asked them what they thought, the look on their faces indicated that the script was not resonating as intended. After a thoughtful and intense discussion reflecting on what they saw, I realised that what was missing were other people’s stories, stories that were very different to mine, yet happening at the same time. In retrospect, it seems so obvious an omission, but at the time I could not see it. It was then I decided to juxtapose real world events with the domestic stories happening in my life in the script. My intention was to create more conversations between the suffering around the world and the simple act of eating or opening a window at home:

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters: how well they understood  
It’s human position: how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window  
Or just walking dully along . . .  
(Auden, 2004)

I approached my youngest daughter, who had just returned from the Middle East, to source some relevant stories of world events. Below is one example, with Travis Ash delivering the news items steadily and simply. It was, however, in the final performance season of *Home* that Ash added the first paragraph, framing the piece with “Within there is a little girl.” The little girl could have been anyone’s little girl. Her father was telling a story, though of a different kind:

Within there is a little girl of no more than four playing with a model aeroplane. She sits in the living room. She sits in the dark. She sits alone. Her father is out. Her father is here. Her father is telling you a story.

“My whole life I have dreamed of having my own house. I grew up in a refugee camp. I worked

hard, saved money, and bought a piece of land in Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem. We have a big family; we need a big house. At around 8.30 am on the morning of 13th July 2009, nine years after the house was built, I was surprised by bulldozers surrounding the house. Israeli soldiers, police and municipality officials were with them. When I saw the house destroyed, I just stood there for an hour. I couldn't move. If anyone spoke to me, I wouldn't answer them. I was in shock. I couldn't believe that all the effort and work of 10 years was destroyed in five minutes. My daughter asks me, why did the police ruin our house and take our trees? I don't have an answer to that question. I don't know if there is someone who has that answer for a four-year-old girl . . . ”.<sup>142</sup>

I hear his story and reply in words that were written for the stage. Words that were written for you. Words that weren't written for him.

“Tell her it's a story.”  
(*Home*, 2015, p.155)

Ash finishes the monologue by bringing us back to the here and now, with “words that were written for the stage.” The potency was in the last line: “Tell her it's a story.” During each performance, when I heard that line, I felt my heart drop. I paused. Ash's monologue suddenly became dialogic, “a dynamic and reciprocal relationship . . . set up between text and context” (Egan, 1999, p. 23). He had exposed our tension and anxiety. Our ontological insecurity. But do not worry, he implies, with an inescapable irony. Do not worry, it's *only* a story. It was delivered quietly, but it was an exclamation mark, a resounding interabang.

### ***Strategic Complementary Stories***

*Home* incorporated multiple complementary narratives, some improvised and others intentionally incorporated within the text. Some of these scenes caused shame for the bounded self of Mardi as she realised how ignorant her past actions had been; this was particularly clear in the Stolen Generation excerpt that Ash performed, juxtaposed with Mardi's complacency regarding the teachings of her bigoted teacher Mr. Tonkin on Australian Aboriginality. It was the dance between Mardi's bounded self and her relational self, as well as the distinct world stories placed in juxtaposition, that generated

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<sup>142</sup> Extract taken from UNRWA (2010).

opportunities for change, both for Mardi and for her audience. And it was also the dance between Mardi, the Musician, and their audience that provided for a transformative experience.<sup>143</sup>

### *Improvised Complementary Stories*

Each evening, novel things emerged from the performance. Because the show incorporated a significant amount of audience participation, it was constantly changing. For example, on one occasion when I was playing Mardi scattering the “ashes” of her mother through the window just in front of the audience (*Home*, 2015, p.131), I looked through the Perspex window and saw a woman’s face, tears running down freely. As Mardi, I walked around the window, and invited the audience member to join me. We embraced for an extended time, and then I whispered an invitation for her to join me in the next scene.<sup>144</sup> This relational experiencing was what our theatre company was endeavouring to create; we wanted the scenes to be pliable, with the ability to modify them, depending on the audience’s response.

Another potent story occurred in the second-last performance, when, near the end of the play, a baby cried. I beckoned to the parent (who I knew) to come on stage with the baby. The parent placed her, now quiet, in my arms, and I performed the scene to the little one. This was a moment in theatre that was transformative for me. The baby slept, the audience wept, the parent grinned from ear to ear, and we then went on to finish the play.

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<sup>143</sup> Many of the audience members’ responses support this, including “You welcomed us into your home and embraced us with your heart. Transforming and transfixing” (see Appendix 7).

<sup>144</sup> An audience member responded to this experience with “Margi, I am a closed soul. My emotions remain my own. Tears don’t come often for me. I cried. The tears were full and free. You made me free. My heart and soul will never forget you. Thank you” (Appendix 7).

#### 4.12 We Are the Stories We Tell Ourselves

According to Deirdre Heddon (2008), most of the artists who engage with autobiography are marginalised and are most likely to address issues such as equality, justice, citizenship, and human rights (p. 2). Not only was *Home* an opportunity to engage with multiple stories relating to human rights, but it was also an opportunity to reveal my “otherwise invisible” middle-aged woman self, and become a “speaking subject . . . with self-agency” (Heddon, 2008, p. 3). In my effort to become a “speaking subject,” I wrote personal transitional stories, times in my life of significant change, as well as narratives about other people’s crises, and in so doing, widened the horizon of exploration. Mardi’s crisis was wanting to belong. She interrogated belonging by incorporating complementary texts throughout *Home*, which began as auto-biography, but culminated in multiple narratives of crisis. Egan (1999) provided a satisfying means of understanding and justifying the weaving of complementary texts throughout the play. She talked about the potential of multiple stories within the autobiography, where one story is not privileged over another, but instead it

. . . transform[s] the narcissistic by means of the corrective lens of the other, developing linguistic strategies that enable plural voices and that contain the oral and written within each other, these autobiographers begin from positions that are politically weak and from those that are privileged, and are transformed in the process. (Egan, 1999, p. 25)

I found this exceedingly useful as I reflected on the composition of *Home*. I do accept that I began the exploration of belonging from a politically weak position. There were more important stories to be told. I had not been overtly victimised, nor had an illness, suffered poverty or experienced domestic abuse. But it was in the ordinariness of my life that I wanted to seek the extraordinary. It was by using the corrective lens of other people’s stories, of developing and engaging with linguistic strategies, that a multiplicity of voices was invited onto the floor. The potential for narcissism within

the body of work was foiled. Instead, according to the responses from my audiences and from the reviewers, the work succeeded in connecting deeply on multiple levels with our audience.<sup>145</sup>

#### **4.13 *Home*, A Journey of Change**

*Home* was a journey that allowed for change. Mardi moved from her bounded self to her relational self, with the potential to imagine what might be, could be, or should be in a relational society. With the aid of mythology, world stories, and the participation and cooperation of the audience members, we had a potential to map belonging. Audience responses seemed to attest to this:

From the first moment, I was swept away. Such a rich mix of emotion and experience, love, laughter and everything in between I found myself relating to parts and simply appreciating other parts. I will take this with me for a long while, digesting it slowly and savouring it dearly. Thankyou.

Thank you for a wonderful experience. You have given me much to ponder. I'm going home to ring my mum and share her stories.

Home is a breath. Ohm. I ran away from home. It chased me. With you I turned around. Glad it caught me. (Appendix 7)

*Home* was a fertile opportunity to rewrite my own personal myth, and in doing so, awaken this potential in my audience.<sup>146</sup> However, even though this was satisfying, I still felt at the end of our creative process that something was missing, despite accolades, multiple awards, and acknowledgements. It was all very well to come to a neat conclusion. That if we focus on our relational selves, embrace the great stories of old and dream them on to empower our lives with our own personal mythologies, we could map our home of belonging. But I was still not sure what belonging actually meant. I felt that I needed to explore what it was to not belong, to explore the shadow of belonging. And that's why I wrote *Eve*.

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<sup>145</sup> An audience member's response: "The process of watching is as involved as performing. Thank you for showing me the beauty and brilliance of excruciating vulnerability. I dream one day my stories will be as enticing and playful as yours are" (Appendix 7).

<sup>146</sup> We offered three workshops each season in the theatre, where we investigated our own personal myths, utilising the soundscape, lighting rig and stage set so that participants could act their own stories of belonging, their own revised personal myth, on stage, with witnesses. Afterwards we all shared conversations and Devonshire tea.

I now invite the reader to watch the video of *Eve*, the second play of *The Belonging Trilogy*, before moving on to the script in the next chapter. We were granted permission to use some of Eve Langley's words within the script. We are grateful to the estate of Eve Langley, N.S.W. State Library and Harper Collins for this permission. This video is of our final season, July 2017, at Brisbane Powerhouse. Click: <https://vimeo.com/235725659> Password: belong



*Where there is an oeuvre there is no madness.*

(Foucault, 1961/2006, p. 577)

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## EVE SCRIPT

Inspired and influenced by writings of the real Eve Langley; in particular, *The White Topee* (1954/1989), *The Pea Pickers* (1942/2013), and unpublished writings accessed through Joy Thwaite's *The Importance of Being Eve Langley* (1989).

### SCENE 1 – THE HAUNTING

*There is a bathtub stage right. The soundscape gets louder and louder and louder.*

EVE

Who is it? *[Sound goes quiet.]*

*[EVE peeps through the shower curtain*

*She sees the audience and she speaks to them.]*

Oh. It's you.

If I were alive today, would you consider me mad?

Eccentric perhaps, but my "madness", as they call it, seems to me to be a logical solution to my living arrangements.

Fiction or fact?

I live in squalor.

My husband lives a second life away from me.

My children are gone.

My friends are few.

I have no space to write, which is my blood.

I spent seven years as a defective person at the mental institution, so is it any wonder that I appear different?

Who is it here who would dare to classify me?

Do not confuse my fiction with my facts.

*[The TRICKSTER plays a phrase of music.]*

Who is it?

*[Eve goes to the door.]*

It's you!

- TRICKSTER      Once upon a time, a long time ago and only yesterday . . .<sup>147</sup>
- High above the city is a Giant's castle. Every afternoon, as they come home from school, the children go and play in the Giant's garden.
- [TRICKSTER begins to play.]*
- It is a large lovely garden with soft green grass and beautiful flowers like stars. The birds sit on the trees and sing so sweetly that the children stop their games to listen. "How happy we are here," they cry to each other. *[Music changes]* Meanwhile, the Giant, who had been caught in an Ogre's den for seven years, found a doorway and escaped to his own castle. When he arrived and saw the children playing in his garden, he cried out in a very gruff voice: "What are you doing here?" *[Music finishes.]*
- [EVE puts on her golden cape.]*
- [The TRICKSTER plays a phrase of music.]*
- EVE              "I was the golden girl;  
I made, they said,  
an exquisitely beautiful woman."<sup>148</sup>
- The soundscape resumes as EVE assumes her Golden Girl pose. EVE and the TRICKSTER look at each other; as he begins to play, she begins to run.*
- [Running]* Faster, faster, faster . . . fact or fiction?

## SCENE 2 – MY OTHER SELVES: FACT OR FICTION?

*EVE runs, circling the stage three or four times. When she stops, she steps up onto the podium behind the bath tub. Music stops.*

- EVE              I am the golden girl *[The TRICKSTER plays a phrase of music]*, just like Betty Cuthbert . . . and I am quite a looker . . .
- The TRICKSTER punctuates EVE's following factual description of her body:*
- This is the body.
- This is what I am.
- A symbol only.
- Short and stocky.

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<sup>147</sup> Here and throughout, The Trickster tells Oscar Wilde's story *The Selfish Giant*.

<sup>148</sup> This is from an unpublished manuscript of Langley's called *Oscar Wilde* (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 96). Copyright: 13 words.

Little white arms.

Huge head

(full of fantastical stories).

Small freckled face.

Little green eyes.

And a very large

MOUTH.

*EVE's mouth opens as if singing. She extracts a little girl and dances with her to the music played by the TRICKSTER. Eve moves DSR.*

I am the little girl, sitting by the fire, reading every book in the shire library, who loves to dance on air with wings of gold.

*[The TRICKSTER plays chords that throw EVE against the wall. EVE moves DSR to USR, then she saunters DCS tying her cape into a belt.]*

I am the woman who yearns to be a man, so she is free to work and live the life of the adventurer, the artist, the serious poet.

*[EVE moves to DSR. The TRICKSTER plays chords that force EVE down into the corner USR.]*

I am the woman who is visited on a regular basis by artists who sit a hemisphere away, writing perfection: Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Oscar Wilde, even Flaubert. I am them, and they are me, Siamese twins, if you like.

*[The TRICKSTER changes places with EVE from USC to USR corner. He keeps playing. The TRICKSTER sprinkles leaves onto the stage and EVE moves DSL to pick one up.]*

I am the artist who writes 10 pages about a leaf—so detailed, so intoxicated with the language of Australia, this wide brown land I adore. I drive my editors barmy.

*[EVE looks at open door, looks at the TRICKSTER, and tells him to “sshhh.” He stops playing and waits].*

I am the old woman who dies alone, her face eaten by rats.

*[She points at the bath tub.]*

I am the body not found for a month, unknown and bloated, unloved, and covered with parcels, hundreds of tiny parcels that I have wrapped *[to the TRICKSTER]* for you.

### SCENE 3 – THE WORLD WITHIN ME

*EVE watches the stars come out. The TRICKSTER accompanies the planet soundscape.*

EVE                      Standing here,

I look at the planets and the stars

*[She sings to the tune of "Twinkle, twinkle, little star."]*

Dear god of the planet Mars,

how we wonder

how you are. *[The TRICKSTER repeats the phrase of music.]*

And I am transported to the world of fairy tale, of adventure, of fantastical fiend things, where I write the lines of shape and shadow.

"I will give you my thoughts as they come to me"<sup>149</sup> . . . Virginia Woolf also said that.

*[The TRICKSTER walks along the wall to DSR. EVE puts on LED finger lights to show us the universe. EVE climbs the ladder, pointing.]*

There, the Milky Way,

Beta Centauri,

Alpha Centauri,

The Pointers.

See . . . they point towards the Southern Cross.

See how I twinkle?

Can you hear that?

Can you see?

*[EVE focuses the bulb on her wide-opened mouth.]*

Through . . . my . . . mouth . . .

*[EVE opens her mouth wider, expecting the audience to see inside.]*

A mouthful of planets and stars . . .

So much to write about . . .

Within me stand the gods: can you see?

*[The music and EVE begin to swirl.]*

And all around me darkness swirls.

*[The music and EVE scream.]*

Hear the heaven's scream!

*[The music and EVE scream.]*

Edward Munch painted this scream.<sup>150</sup>

*[The music/EVE scream for an extended time. The MUSICIAN moves DS towards the tree house.]*

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<sup>149</sup> Woolf (2001, p. 8).

<sup>150</sup> Galeano (2009, p. 257).

"Cover your ears. The new century is born screaming",<sup>151</sup> and so am I.

SHUT UP!

My husband says to me, "It does not become a woman to scream so loudly and dress in men's clothes."

My husband says to me, "You need to embrace more domestic things like making me a cup of tea."

MAY THE PLANETS COLLIDE BEFORE I EMBRACE THE ORDINARINESS OF DOMESTICITY.

"Your purpose", he repeats, "is to make your man a cup of tea."

"Go and put the kettle on."

"That's what women do."<sup>152</sup>

I refuse.

"This is not my real shape." "It is a symbol only. I write. I write for myself by myself. I write . . ."<sup>153</sup> Alright, I will make a cup of tea.

*[EVE puts on the kettle and makes a cup of tea.]*

*[To TRICKSTER]:* Would you like a cup of tea?

TRICKSTER      Why, thank you.

EVE              Did you know that when Emily Dickinson died, her family discovered 1,800 tiny little parcels, hidden under her bed, 1,800 poems?

"On tiptoe Emily lived, and on tiptoe she wrote. She published only 11 poems in her entire lifetime . . . either as Anon or a pseudonym".<sup>154</sup>

I refuse to live on tiptoes.

But Angus & Robertson published only two of my books in 74 years. That is all.

Plato exiled the poets from the city. We have fled.

*[EVE picks up her writing book. She leaves hut, crossing in front of the stage.]*

A door slams behind me and I embark on writing odysseys to places I have never been before . . . outback Queensland, far western New South Wales, even Perth.

Wherever I am, the gods follow in their wonder and watch.

I do not bore the gods. Flaubert.

They come on clouds, drifting across the vastness of western skies.

I wait for stories to reveal themselves,

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<sup>151</sup> Galeano (2009, p. 257).

<sup>152</sup> Thwaite (1989, p. 155) quotes Eve Langley's *Bancroft House*, where Langley writes about making men a cup of tea: "go to the tap with their kettle and fill it...and make tea for their menfolk."

<sup>153</sup> In Thwaite (1989, p. 150), Langley is quoted as having written "This horrid shape you see is not really my shape . . . I am a symbol that sought out in its agony this fire" in *The Victorians*.

<sup>154</sup> Galeano (2009, p. 230).

like a child,  
playing cloud games . . .

*[EVE squares up the cloud with her hands and brings it in to focus on the typewriter set in the bath tub. She gets in the bath and begins to type as the TRICKSTER resumes.]*

TRICKSTER      When the children heard the Giant's gruff voice, they ran away. "My own garden is my own garden," cried the Giant; "anyone can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So, he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board:

TRESPASSERS

WILL BE

PROSECUTED.

He was a very selfish Giant.

#### SCENE 4 – OSCAR WILDE

*[a dozen manuscripts drop from the sky].*

EVE              Another returned manuscript! And another! And another!  
  
                 . . . Sometimes, my mind behind my mind becomes so heavy. Thoughts sit inside the brain behind my brain, like the yoke of an egg: snug, essential, hard. Sometimes, I want to take it out and give it a scratch.

TRICKSTER/

OSCAR           YOU HAVE BEEN BORN BEFORE.<sup>155</sup>

EVE              I HAVE NEVER BEEN BORN BEFORE.

TRICKSTER/

OSCAR           YOU WILL BE BORN AGAIN.

EVE              I WILL NEVER BE BORN AGAIN.

TRICKSTER/

OSCAR           YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BORN. YOU ARE OSCAR WILDE.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 241).

<sup>156</sup> Langley (1954/1989, pp. 241–242). Copyright: 31 words.

*[EVE takes hat from Trickster and places it on her head. The OSCAR hat.]*

EVE Shall I become the always brilliant Oscar Wilde?<sup>157</sup> Known for the astonishing genius of his swift recoveries from the most outrageous attacks of Fate or Man? *(she contemplates idea)*.

"And Eve's warm little parcel of flesh disappears into me.

She flies like Nijinsky right into my body."

"I turn my head, incline it to the right, and stare into the awful loneliness of the painted looking Australian bush, the coarse blue gums, the yellow dry earth. All these, looking like a vast savage picture. At the same time the thought forms in my mind: What a magnificent country . . . to colonize."<sup>158</sup>

SO, THIS DAY, EVE DIES, I SLAY HER, NOT WITH A SWORD, NOR WITH A KISS, BUT WITH A PIECE OF PAPER.<sup>159</sup>

*[Sustained chord ends. Baby cries. EVE/OSCAR pulls a piece of paper out of the typewriter, gets out of the bath, and begins to exit through the door.]*

EVE *[To the TRICKSTER]* I am going to the grocery store.

I forgot the babies! *(she gets baby)*. Baby girl *(exits through door to front of stage)*.

## SCENE 5 – I AM DIFFERENT

*Sustained chord returns. EVE stops DSL in front of the audience. She moves from DSL to DSR; there is a transition in time and space. Looking at the audience.*

EVE I search in all the windows. I see my own reflection, I do not know who I am becoming. *[Moves from DSL to DSR.]*

Am I the Giant or the Child?

A genius or a madman?

Oscar or Eve?

Do I appear "different" to you? *[Sustained chord ends/Running music starts.]*

*EVE runs back the way she came, spiralling in towards the tub, calling "Oscar, Oscar."*

Oscar says: *[Sustained chord.]*

EVE AS OSCAR "It's better not to be different. The dumb and the ugly are better off. If they know nothing of victory, then they are spared defeat."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 77).

<sup>158</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 242). Copyright: 59 words.

<sup>159</sup> Thwaite (1989, p. 93).

<sup>160</sup> Paraphrased from Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/n.d.), Chapter 1, para 9.

EVE                   Oscar and I have grown to love our hours in the bath: our place of mysterious blackouts in space and in time, dreaming fantastical fiend things.

*[A book drops, EVE picks it up and reads.]*

"Be regular and ordinary in your life," says Flaubert, "like a bourgeois, so that you can be violent and original in your art."<sup>161</sup> *[EVE stands.]*

We refuse to inherit domestic boredom . . . *[Music flourishes]*

We will be violent and original both on and off the page! *[Music flourishes]*

The planets shift and the Moon howls! *[The music and the TRICKSTER howl]*

Fuck you, Flaubert!

*[EVE throws the book. The TRICKSTER starts playing, he and EVE spin in the middle. She leaps into a creative frenzy; the sound of jazz and the violin play as EVE finds manuscripts hidden in the mulch. She names the books and writes the names in chalk on the back wall. When she is finished, in slow motion, she dives into the bath and begins to type. Eventually, she pulls her hat over her head and goes to sleep. The TRICKSTER stops playing and moves to the tree house.]*

## SCENE 6 – LETTER TO NAN MCDONALD

*A rejected manuscript drops out of the sky. EVE is awakened.*

EVE                   Oscar. They've returned our manuscript!

*[EVE begins to read/type a letter in the typewriter.]*

Nan McDonald, Editor, Angus & Robertson

Dear Nan McDonald,

I feel very ill. You are sending my book back to me. I can scarcely believe it.

Nan McDonald. Dear Nan McDonald. I AM OSCAR WILDE and you're killing me, KILLING ME. Nan McDonald. Dear Nan, please believe with your entire heart that it is I, Oscar Wilde, still labouring and swinging about in the agony of my death pangs of 50 years ago who is imploring and praying you to believe that the whole story is true. TRUE. I'm ill tonight. God, if you only knew the whole story . . . And, look Nan, it's no use talking about the Mental Hospital, because I told Dr. Stevens straight out that I was OSCAR WILDE, and they kicked me straight out. And Dr. even asked me how long I was in Australia from England, and believed me. And I hate being OSCAR WILDE because NO ONE WANTS OSCAR WILDE, EVER. Oh God, I feel ill tonight. My brain is whirling in horrid chaos.

██

██

██

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Bird (2007, Part One, The Beginning of the Beginning. Para beginning Discipline, p. 56).



[REDACTED]

(redacted paragraph to comply with copyright)

HELP HELP HELP

PS: The DEED POLL was made out today and signed and sealed. And I am no longer Eve Langley, but Oscar Wilde. I slew Eve Langley with a piece of paper. I am so sorry, Miss McDonald, to be troubling you with this, but I can't take it from you—the return of my book *Wild Australia*, I mean. As Oscar Wilde, I can take anything and the rottenest rebuff and disappointment this world holds and remain myself inviolate, free, white, and 21 without a care in the world. But as Eve, I just collapse at the first blow into a vomiting fainting mass of death. I'll be glad if you will understand finally that I just want to write my books at your wish under the name of Eve and get my knockbacks and rejects as Oscar Wilde. Oscar can take it, always remember that, Eve . . . can't. Can't take anything. Write soon, O.W.<sup>162</sup>

#### SCENE 7 – OSCAR IS A VERY SELFISH GIANT

*EVE is still in the bathtub.*

TRICKSTER      The poor children had nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones and they did not like it. They wandered round the high wall remembering the twittering of the birds and the beautiful garden inside. “How happy we were there,” they said to each other.

EVE              Oscar and I feel disordered tonight. Unflavoured. Heavy. *[EVE takes off her hat.]*

My first illness was one common to most of you here, a bad education, and like the bite of a wombat it is incurable and runs for years.<sup>163</sup>

Remember in school they taught us that man discovered fire by rubbing two sticks together? I've been trying ever since . . . I never got even a tiny spark.<sup>164</sup>

Despite this setback, I set fire to everything I touch, and I drag behind me Oscar, Woolf, Flaubert: Siamese quads, if you like.

Oscar! A Golden man. My favourite! *[EVE puts on OSCAR's hat.]*

A genius. *[She stands as OSCAR.]*

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<sup>162</sup> Letter from Eve Langley to Nan McDonald on 12 April 1954. Mitchell Library Manuscripts Collection. Angus and Robertson Correspondence file (1941-68). MSS 3269. Quoted Thwaite (1989, pp. 1–2). Copyright: 450 words.

<sup>163</sup> Langley (1942/2013, p.3). Copyright: 26 words.

<sup>164</sup> Galeano (2009, p. 3) wrote “In school they taught me that way back in caveman times we discovered fire by rubbing stones or sticks together. I’ve been trying ever since. I never got even a tiny spark.”

OSCAR            "I wear a white flower in my lapel and a knife blade on my tongue. I have the endearing habit of making fun of everyone, including myself. I am accused of shocking activities (naughty me) and spend two years in Reading Gaol. However, my real punishment is the banishment of my books. They are no longer worthy of attention, it seems."<sup>165</sup>

First a genius, then an outsider.

After my jail term, I choose to live alone, and drink the royal drink alone and talk to myself.

They've all gone, you see. I have sent them away. *[OSCAR tells the TRICKSTER.]*

"My garden is my garden. 'Trespassers will be prosecuted'. I have been prosecuted. I am a very selfish Giant."

*[EVE gets out of the bathtub SL. She takes the pram and moves slowly across stage to SR.]*

EVE                I'm going to the grocery store. I look in all the windows. Do I appear different to you?

*[There is a transition in time and space as in Scene 5.]*

## SCENE 8 – MY DAUGHTER

*The TRICKSTER makes birdcalls. He is standing in the tree house.*

EVE                Oscar and I tiptoe into the garden . . . just like Emily.

It is midnight and we are muddle-headed wombats. *[EVE moves towards the tree house.]*

I can hear the hoot hoot of the white owl across the paddock . . . *[The TRICKSTER bangs on the wall]* . . . the bump bump bump of the possum on the roof.

Sssshhhh!! You'll wake the baby. *[The music and the TRICKSTER scream as the baby cries.]*

My daughter screams. *[Baby cries.]* It's like the opening notes of battle. "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms?"<sup>166</sup> *[Baby cries.]*

*[EVE covers the pram with a blanket and addresses the audience.]*

My husband and I have created intricate rituals to keep the children contained so we can work<sup>167</sup>. *[Baby continues crying. EVE climbs under house and out the front, covering her ears.]*

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<sup>165</sup> Galeano (2009, p. 239). This passage is partly paraphrased.

<sup>166</sup> Keats (1890/n.d.).

<sup>167</sup> Langley writes in her unpublished manuscript *Last, Loveliest, Loneliest (L.L.L)*, "we have elaborate methods of keeping [her] out of sight . . . We both have to struggle against the hypnotism of marriage and children in order to work" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 319).

Her screeching carves me up every time. Emily would call it a pain of blank. I just call it a pain. *[Music screams and makes dissonant chords. EVE enters the tree house, dragging the pram behind her.]*

All right, all right, all right! I've boiled an egg for you.

Come on, eat it, eat it, eat it!

She overturns her egg cup, burns her little arm, her screams get louder and louder and louder and my inner poet begins his move . . .

*[EVE faces the audience and dangles the pram over the edge.]*

My poet wants to throw her out the window and hear the thin crack of her skull. Would water gush out or would blood? *[She pulls the pram back.]*

I stand here, and my *Complete Oxford Dictionary* hurls itself across the room and knocks her unconscious with shock.<sup>168</sup>

Louder and louder grows the weeping and I enjoy it all.

It is a severe test of sanity to hold a child in my arms.

I want to run needles through its eyes. As a contemporary, I should hate to see her hurt. As a fantastical fiend thing, I should be satisfying a scratching desire.<sup>169</sup>

"My only social crime is that I have two children and that I am pregnant with another . . . and that I haven't any warm clothes to wear out to the theatre with fur-coated people".<sup>170</sup>

*[To The TRICKSTER]* Go! Go! Shut the fuck up!

*[To the Husband]* Go and get a job!

*The TRICKSTER exits the tree house and resumes his opening position under the planets. EVE sits. The TRICKSTER resumes.*

TRICKSTER "I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Giant. "Spring has come all over the country, only in my garden it is still winter." The North Wind comes wrapped in furs and roars all day about the garden; she rattles on the roof and she runs around and around as fast as she can. She is dressed in silver and her breath is like ice. "I hope there will be a change in the weather," said the Selfish Giant. But the Spring never came.

EVE Hey! Baby girl! Shhh.

I am not sure of parenting, baby girl.

I am unsure of romance.

I do not believe in my own talent,<sup>171</sup>

But to write, that is something that I understand.

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<sup>168</sup> This is influenced from a paragraph in Langley's unpublished *Portrait of an Artist* (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 345).

<sup>169</sup> This is paraphrased from Langley's unpublished *Land of the Long White Cloud* (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 185).

<sup>170</sup> Langley's words from her unpublished *Portrait of an Artist* (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 368).

<sup>171</sup> Langley wrote in her unpublished manuscript *Demeter of Dublin Street*: "I am not sure of love . . . of my own talent . . . but, the day to day work is the one thing that never fails me" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 228).

To write the lies of living.  
Fact or fiction.  
The great Australian loneliness.  
That old disease of mine.

*[She sings "I was not in the garden."]*

Look, baby girl, it's morning. *[She lifts the pram out of the tree house and perches it on the steps, so the sun catches the baby's face.]*

## SCENE 9 – FREE TO WRITE

EVE                      Good morning, world. I know my task is to preserve these days in prose. So I will.  
*[EVE moves the Husband/stick to a convenient spot. She moves to the bath tub and begins to type.]*  
My husband is tired of me<sup>172</sup>. "I told you that you offend me," he says. "I would rather be with a whore than be with you, you great fat guts."  
His hateful words enter my ears and blow up my head. He leaves with the milk money jar under his arm.  
Stop! Stop!  
My daughter is eating a blossom from some weed or other. Stop! Her baby brother screams. It's like the opening notes of battle<sup>173</sup>.  
My poet stirs, and wants to leave him and Baby Girl on top of the stairs, so I can write.  
My poet stands them on their tiny heads. THEY ARE ON TOP OF THE STAIRS AND THEY ARE STANDING ON THEIR TINY HEADS . . . impossible to fall if you are standing on your head.  
And so I am free to write without interruption.  
  
The day dies and so does my dream of living with him forever in our hut, the children filed away, so he can paint himself to fame and I can write Australia.

## SCENE 10 – MY HUSBAND LEAVES ME

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<sup>172</sup> Thwaite (1989 p. 268) quotes from Langley's unpublished manuscript *The Old Mill* (p. 162) where Langley writes "Hilary had grown tired of me..."

<sup>173</sup> In her unpublished *Last, Loveliest, Loneliest*, Langley wrote "The baby cries from the verandah, and it is like the opening note of battle" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 313), an echo of Keats.

*EVE sits beside her husband on the edge of the bathtub.*

EVE

I do still love my husband. *[EVE and the Husband kiss softly.]*

I draw his shadow on the wall. *[EVE moves over to the tree house.]*

He will always leave me, but his shadow will stay. We managed for quite some time; even with the pressures of marriage and children, we still managed, sometimes, to work.

Yet, every day, peevish and sullen words would fling themselves across the hut:

“You’re bloody grumpy when you can’t paint, husband.”

“So are you when you can’t write, wife.”

“Am I the obstacle to your most precious work?”

Knowing full well that he and the children were mine.

Poetry is not welcome in this house full of peevish men.

And so I write. *[EVE takes the stick and the TRICKSTER punctuates the following.]*

I am the Golden Man with a huge phallus made of jewels and cedar. I swear like a trooper. I blaspheme like the devil. I am the devil. I hold my gun in my hand. I kill every living thing that comes close. *[She kills with her “gun.” The TRICKSTER stops playing.]*

I’m not done yet!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

*[She turns on the TRICKSTER, forcing him DSC in front of the aisle. EVE begins to march across from DSL to DSR.]*

This is the British housewife on the rampage, my dear.

The British housewife on the rampage.

But why the gun?

Because it goes with the hat, my dear.<sup>174</sup>

*[EVE stands DCS and shoots the TRICKSTER one last time. The music stops and the TRICKSTER retreats through the audience. He stops, turns around, and in slow motion begins to resume the stance of playing his instrument, casting a shadow that covers EVE.]*

You are ashamed of our marriage when we are out together. I know it, I feel it.<sup>175</sup>  
POW.

And why shouldn’t you? . . . POW . . .

I’ve always been ashamed of myself . . . POW.

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<sup>174</sup> Langley said in an interview “This is the British housewife on the rampage” (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 429).

<sup>175</sup> Langley writes in her unpublished *Last Loveliest Loneliest*, “you are ashamed of our marriage when we are out together. I know it I feel it . . . and why shouldn’t you? . . . I’ve always been ashamed of myself” (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 323).

Have I gone too far?

I am writing to my semi-detached husband . . . He is living alone in town with another.

Dear Husband,

All right.

Truce.

Love me as a friend.<sup>176</sup>

Just write to me.

I can live alone in my hut with your shadow,

but I cannot live alone inside my head.

*[EVE sits on the stairs near the pram.]*

He replies: "You do not need love. You only need a room in which to write. When you are working, your family doesn't exist. You are the devil incarnate when it comes to looking after our house and children<sup>177</sup>. PS I've taken the milk money. Oh Christ, Eve, you are a jumbled mess of a woman."

And I watch him leave, again, my poet, my god.

I always thought that the man I marry would be the poet of poets, greater than Keats and Shakespeare. As fierce as Saturn. There's the reason for my madness and confusion, you see. My husband is leaving with my milk money under his arm—no food today, baby girl, no food at all—and the poets have fled.

*[She slowly moves under the tree house and into a foetal position, singing to the tune of "Twinkle, twinkle, little star."]*

Dear god of the planet Mars,

how we wonder how you are.

Your dear girl weeps and weeps,

but I feel sleepy and soon will sleep.<sup>178</sup>

*[The TRICKSTER repeats the phrase of music and finishes.]*

Baby girl?

*Eve falls asleep. The soundscape of EVE's nervous breakdown begins. It gets more and more intense. EVE disappears through the hole.*

## SCENE 11 – THE DEAD CHILD

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<sup>176</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 163).

<sup>177</sup> Langley writes in her unpublished *Remote Apart*, "I was Lucifer incarnate when it came to looking after a house and children" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 339).

<sup>178</sup> Thwaite (1989) published a short note written by Langley (dated March 4, 1974, stored at Mitchell Library, MSS. 4188, Box 1 of 5) that is as follows: "Dear god of the planet Mars, how we wonder how you are! Your dear girl weeps but I feel sleepy and soon will sleep. Steve Langley, Igh, Ifelia Dido, of thought" (Thwaite, 1989, p. 491).

*EVE extracts a little girl from her mouth and pulls herself out from under the tree house. She picks up the pram and looks inside it.*

EVE            I see a little child, "Saturn," wheeling my toy yellow pram full of mulch . . . see . . .  
"She has dug up my dead baby . . . and she is sprinkling her all around the garden."  
STOP  
STOP  
STOP  
STOP [*The soundscape and EVE are screaming.*] STOP  
[*EVE shovels mulch and manuscripts into the pram. Then, she pulls the pram and herself through the fireplace and disappears.*]

## SCENE 12 – HOW EASY TO COMMIT MY WIFE

TRICKSTER        It is alarmingly easy to commit your wife.  
  
One simply requires the collusion of a relative or two and a couple of medical professionals.  
  
Perhaps she was just someone who loves the planets and the gods.  
  
Someone who wears clothes that don't quite fit; someone who dreams so loud they find the world an awkward fit.  
  
My father says: "She's acting odd. She's always talking about Saturn and she thinks she's Oscar Wilde." Then the doctor interviewed her, and she was committed.<sup>179</sup>  
  
[*She slams up against the back wall.*]

## SCENE 13 – IN THE ASYLUM

*EVE is in a rectangle of light. She puts up her hands as if strapped to a bed, receiving "treatment."*

EVE            I can feel it,  
if I stand like this,  
a strange feeling.  
I can feel,  
if I stand like this,

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<sup>179</sup> Thwaite (1989, p. 415).

great wings of gold and purple.<sup>180</sup>

I can feel,

if I stand like this,

purple and gold wings moving me upward.

I leave the Earth.

*[The TRICKSTER begins to play party music in the distance.]*

As I fly through time, the thunderous planets wage a war of their own.

Party music plays.

The goddess Thea floats through me. "Saturn" (that's me), "open wide" (*EVE opens her mouth*) and she lays one of her little parcels upon my tongue.

*[EVE is medicated. She sides down the wall, her arms go up; she is floating, hallucinating.]*

My feet leave the ground and they don't miss the earth, not one bit. Higher and higher, I fly.

*[EVE begins to move forward in a shaft of light with her arms crossed above her head.]*

I can see the madness of the Moon and the madness of the war playing out in Europe right this minute. And the war before that, the war to end all wars . . . *[EVE is CS, her hands in the "Om" position, like Nijinsky.]*

1919: St Moritz, Switzerland.

Vaslav Nijinsky dances for the last time.

He announces to his audience: "I will dance the war." *[EVE moves into side pose like Nijinsky]* and by the light of a hundred candelabras *[EVE moves into open arm position and axial]*, he dances. Spinning on golden wings.

He leaves the earth. His soul opens, he breaks apart and he flies through the paper wall and out into the planets.<sup>181</sup> *[EVE faces front, arms go from high to low.]*

Higher I go.

And higher still.

I can read the words written on the hills of Australia.

The secrets of the great Australian loneliness.<sup>182</sup>

*[Arms/wings open, EVE starts moving back towards the wall. She dances with the little girl on her palm.]*

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<sup>180</sup> In Thwaite (1989, p. 146) is a quote by Eve Langley from her unpublished book *The Victorians* where she talks about growing great wings "rising on tiptoe, beat and lift the same wings powerfully so that at last I rise . . . I fly over the earth. Strange feeling of wings."

<sup>181</sup> Galeano (2009, p. 264). This passage was inspired and partly paraphrased.

<sup>182</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 157) writes, "Here in Australia there are words on the hills for those who can read."



Higher and higher, I move through comets and stars, gods and monsters, until I can hold the whole glorious mess right here in my palm. *[She hits the back wall, the rectangle of light returns, and the music stops sharply.]*

The goddess Thea taps me on the shoulder. Actually, of course, it is one of the nurses with an outstretched hand, offering me a lamington.

Only planets matter in Australia.<sup>183</sup>

People don't always remember that.

*[EVE is released from her restraints. She slides down the wall and sits on the ground.]*

I "sit as meekly as possible in my cell and paint it with little fancies and live the life of one sealed within a coin".<sup>184</sup>

The deserted-house feeling comes over me.<sup>185</sup>

## SCENE 14 – HOME ALONE

*EVE crawls forward to CS.*

EVE      Baby girl, come on, hold on. *[EVE "picks up" her baby.]*

I hold Baby Girl.

I can smell her: unique, pungent, musty.

And when my breath matches hers, I know almost everything.

This warm little parcel of "us" floats up and we disappear.

We fly like Nijinsky right through the paper walls 'til nothing is left.

We are gone.

It doesn't hurt anymore.

*[EVE sings a lullaby, unaccompanied.]*

"I was not in the garden when He knelt to God and prayed,  
I did not kiss Him on the cheek when Jesus was betrayed;  
I could not do a single thing  
to hurt God's only Son,  
But every time I sin on earth  
  
I feel that I'm the one.  
I'm the one who shouted 'crucify,'  
I'm the one who made His cross so high,

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<sup>183</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 170). Copyright: 5 words.

<sup>184</sup> Langley wrote in her unpublished work *Demeter of Dublin Street*, "So I must sit as meekly as possible in my cell and paint it with little fancies and live the life of one sealed in a coin" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 228).

<sup>185</sup> Langley writes in her unpublished manuscript *Last, Loveliest, Loneliest*, "The deserted-house feeling came over me; the sense of being locked up" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 309).

I'm the one who stood and watched Him die;  
What have I done? I'm the one."<sup>186</sup>

*[As the TRICKSTER plays the chorus of the lullaby in the distance, EVE wanders into the USR corner.]*

TRICKSTER      One morning, the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It was only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out. What did he see? He saw a most wonderful sight. The children had crept in and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they covered themselves in blossoms. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, but in the farthest corner of the garden, it was still winter. *[EVE is in the corner.]* And in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was crying bitterly.

*[The TRICKSTER finishes playing.]*

## SCENE 15 – LETTER TO MUM

*EVE moves through the shadows on the SR wall.*

EVE      Dear Mum,  
Sis came today.  
She said I looked bad.  
She said it won't get any better.  
She walked round and round, digging into everything.  
Mum, I asked Sis to talk to the doctors about me going home.  
"You will not be released," they said.  
"You're schizophrenic."  
Just like Nijinsky, I thought.  
Mum,  
please,  
I need my freedom.  
Without it, I will die.

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<sup>186</sup> Christian hymn titled *I'm the One* (Overholt, 1963).

Signed Eve

*[EVE moves along the SR wall to the USC back wall, writing "Fuck you Flaubert!" in chalk as she goes. She picks up her suitcase and goes back the way she came from USC to DSR.]*

TRICKSTER "How selfish I have been!" said the Giant; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy who stands in the farthest corner of the garden on top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done. "It's your garden now, little child," said the Giant *[to EVE]*, and you took a great axe and knocked down the wall.

*[EVE arrives at the DSR wall, draws a chalk door on the wall, and exits the institution. She circles the stage three or four times, picking up things she recognises as she gets closer to home. At the foot of the stairs of the tree house, she turns to the audience.]*

EVE If I were alive today, you would not consider me mad. Eccentric, perhaps, but the "madness," as they called it, seems to me to be a logical solution to my living arrangements.

## SCENE 16 – COMING HOME

*As EVE approaches the tree house, the TRICKSTER calls "Cooee." EVE responds with a "Cooee," then crawls under the house and reappears through the hole. She re-enters the house. She finds her vest.]*

EVE/OSCAR "I struggle to be once more the always brilliant Oscar Wilde, known for the astonishing genius of his swift recoveries from the most severe attacks of Fate or man. But I cannot."<sup>187</sup>

*[She puts on the tea cosy and strikes her Golden Girl pose.]*

"I struggle to be once more the always brilliant Oscar Wilde, known for the astonishing genius of his swift recoveries from the most severe attacks of Fate or man. But I cannot."<sup>188</sup>

*[She steps inside the bath tub and grabs a piece of paper from the typewriter.]*

"I struggle to be once more the always brilliant Oscar Wilde, known for the astonishing genius of his swift recoveries from the most severe attacks of Fate or man. But I cannot."<sup>189</sup>

EVE So, this day Oscar dies, I slay him. I'm the one. Not with a sword. Not with a sword . . .

*[EVE sits in the bath tub and the TRICKSTER resumes.]*

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<sup>187</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 243). Copyright: 34 words.

<sup>188</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 243). Copyright: 34 words.

<sup>189</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 243). Copyright: 34 words.

TRICKSTER      “Who hath dared to wound thee?” cried the Giant, “tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him.”

                     “Nay! But these are the wounds of love,” said the little Child.

EVE                Who is it who would dare to classify me?

TRICKSTER      Asked the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little Child. The Child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, “You let me play once in your garden; today, you shall come with me to my garden.” The Giant, who had grown old and feeble, followed the Child. *[EVE lies back in the bath tub, her mouth open.]* “Many months passed. When the Child returned to the garden, the Giant’s eyes were wide open, but the rest of her face had been nibbled away by rats. And though the smell made the Child heave, the Child knelt down and slowly opened the Giant’s mouth. Oh so gently, the Child pulled out planet after planet after planet until the whole universe lit up”<sup>190</sup>.

*[The lights slowly black out on the figure of EVE lying back in the bath tub with her mouth open.] Blackout.*

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<sup>190</sup> Written by Daniel Evans in one of our rehearsals, 2012.

## ROOM 5

### THE CONFIGURATION OF *EVE*

. . . for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh (Woolf, 2011, p. 126)

. . . *for them to belong.*

. . . the task of a woman writer today is not to stop at the pleasures of the pregnant body, of bringing up children, but to delve truthfully into the darkest depth . . . writing requires maximum ambition, maximum audacity and programmatic disobedience. (Ferrante, 2016, p. 340)

. . . *and so, we belong.*

. . . the newborn woman, transcending the heresies of history and the history of hysteria, must fly/flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own inventions. (Gilbert, 2011, p.82)

. . . *in order to belong.*

#### 5.1 Introduction

This room examines the second play of the trilogy, *Eve*, and its contribution to my configuration of home and belonging. *Eve* stands out as the only play of the trilogy that is not autobiographical; rather, it is inspired by Eve Langley, an award-winning Australian author from the mid-20th century. Hearing other people's stories, albeit a fictional version, is another valuable method of understanding our own map of belonging:

Stories attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1)

My journey with the character Eve was undoubtedly resonant and provided me an opportunity to explore another life, resulting in a deeper appreciation of what home could become. Eve was troubled. She wanted to “fly/flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own inventions” (Gilbert, 2011, p. 82), but could not. No, that is not correct. She did exactly that. For a while. And then she

was punished. She was, however, not afraid to delve into her darkest depth (Ferrante, 2016, p. 340) in search of a unified self, for that was what was expected of her in the mid-1950s. Her husband demanded it; her children anticipated it; her mother required it; her sister gave up.

The late Michael White,<sup>191</sup> co-founder and leading practitioner of narrative therapy, talked about the traditional need we have to hold onto a unified idea of “who we are.” But what if there is no fixed “who”? What if the “who” depends on who we are “with” (Burr, 2006, p. 7; McNamee, 2004b, p. 6; Lowe, 2004) and the conversations we engage in? What if we were a multiplicity of selves? In *Home*, Mardi thought so:

But I no longer believe that there is one true self . . .  
You know, “the real me,” “my authentic self,”  
but . . .  
I do find that idea inviting.  
It is full of the comforts of certainty.

But, aren’t I a work-in-progress?  
I am all of my past and  
all of my future.  
I am every person I’ve ever met,  
every place and time I’ve ever been.  
I am huge and so are you.  
(*Home*, 2015, p.124)

Virginia Woolf also explored the idea of multiple beings on numerous occasions, including in her novel *Orlando*: “For she [Orlando] had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand” (Woolf, 2007, p. 548).

This was one of the themes that I wanted to investigate. Was there a relationship between not-belonging and having a fixed idea of self? If one holds this fixed idea, is it then too difficult to

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<sup>191</sup> I was fortunate to train with the late Michael White, participating in a series of intensives at his institution, Dulwich Centre, Adelaide in the mid-2000s.

reconcile the tensions between mother and artist? What about Mardi's and Woolf's thousand selves? And what does "not-belonging" look like anyway? Finally, what did Eve teach me about home and belonging?

## 5.2 Difference between My Character Eve and the Real Eve Langley

Throughout this chapter, I refer to "Eve Langley" or "Langley" as the real writer who was my inspiration and my muse while writing and performing this work. Langley, in my opinion, is one of Australia's most underrated authors and was never given the opportunity to "walk among us in the flesh" (Woolf, 2011, p. 126).<sup>192</sup> Throughout this chapter, the character in my play *Eve* is referred to simply as Eve. It is problematic and impossible separating Langley the real writer from Eve the character, because much of what Eve speaks was developed from and was inspired by Eve Langley's fiction, both published and unpublished. However, I am obliged to distinguish between the real person's fiction, which had enormous influence on the shape and texture of the *Eve* production, and the fictional Eve character that was crafted as a result of indwelling and dreaming on Eve Langley's novels and life.

## 5.3 Myth Country as Our Mental Map

When Doris Lessing wrote "Every writer has a myth-country. This does not have to be childhood . . . myth does not mean something untrue, but a concentration of truth" (Lessing, 2012, Then 1982, Do You Remember, para. 6), she was referring to her country of origin, but, after six years of research, I came to see myth country as a huge mental atlas, an interlocking of familiar maps of experience all

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<sup>192</sup> However, there have been novels written about Eve, including Joy Thwaite's informative biography, *The Importance of Eve Langley* (1989), and Lucy Frost's (1990) edited versions of Eve's texts, in *Wilde Eve*. Mark O'Flynn (2016) wrote a novel inspired by Eve Langley called *The Last Years of Ava Langdon* and also wrote a play about author Eleanor Dark meeting Eve Langley in *Eleanor and Eve* (2002). Several people have written dissertations about Langley, and Thwaite even performed a play, written by herself, about Langley. But my play is not intended to be a loyal reflection of Eve Langley; rather, it is a fictionalised version and as such, quite possibly moves us closer to her story, keeping in mind the recurring line in the trilogy: "what is fact, what is fiction, what is truth, what is fibs, what is life, what is art" (paraphrased in *Home*, 2015, p.119; *Dream*, 2017, p. 238). The production met with a standing ovation from the custodians of Eve Langley Estate.

held in satisfying tension. The Woman in *Dream* described the maps we create in order to locate ourselves:

. . . we all etch a mental map of memory;  
we make lists, write letters, invent stories,  
and then we wait . . . and hope it all works out.  
These mental maps get us through the day.  
(*Dream*, 2017, p.237)

Both Eve and Mardi etch their mental map, their myth country, with two different terrains in mind: the home front and the art studio (in Eve's case, her bathtub as her home for writing, and Mardi her performative practice). As a mother and artist myself, I recognised the struggle between these two roles, and so held firm to Heidegger's (2003) suggestion of persistent courageous thinking (p. 95) in order to re-invent and unite these landscapes in some way, or at least find some sort of harmony between the two, both for my characters' sakes and for my own.

#### **5.4 Central Tensions**

There are many myths and stories around homemaking and belonging, and I began to grow my map with energy and commitment. However, performative practice steadily pulled at me, especially early on when I had just moved to Brisbane, a city described by Sydney-siders as a country town. Back then, I needed to understand how to exist in this strange new place, to live my "best-self" while growing my family. Quinn and Quinn (2002) wrote about one's best-self, calling it the extraordinary self, in a beautiful book composed of letters written between father and son: "Being extraordinary does not necessarily mean obtaining a position of honor or glory or even of becoming successful in other people's eyes. It means being true to self. It means pursuing our full potential" (Quinn & Quinn, 2002, p. 35). I was focused on the question "How do I remain my best-self and at the same time create art, as well as attending to the pressing needs of nurturing and supporting my family?" This question led me to Eve. I aspired to stand in her shoes and embody, just for a while, her different register. I also wanted to understand more consciously the choices I had made in my life



regarding home and family. What better way than to step outside of myself and into the chaotic and brilliant world of fictional Eve, where I could create a woman who defied conventional rules and regulations in order to write, but embraced the belief of the bounded self in direct contrast to Mardi's conclusion in the previous play.

## 5.5 The Personal Is Political

My journey into the stories of Eve Langley began the year I moved to Queensland, when director Douglas Leonard handed me Langley's novel, *The White Topee* (1989). It was a marvellous work of fiction based on many truths, including being a mother who was also a writer. Despite being destitute with three young children and an unemployed visual artist for a husband, living in a dilapidated hut in a strange land, Langley wrote "prolifically . . . [i]n assorted bush huts she composed endless letters, kept a diary-journal, wrote poetry on scraps of paper, leaves, wattle bark and whatever magical materials came to hand" (Thwaite, 1989, p. 101). Langley's first novel, *The Pea Pickers*, won the Bulletin Award, which was not surprising. Editor of *The Bulletin*, Douglas Stewart,<sup>193</sup> a major 20th-century Australian poet and a friend of Langley, believed *The Pea Pickers* (2013) explored a most pressing issue: the conflict women faced between balancing their role as artist with their role of mother (Thwaite, 1989).

Eve Langley coped with this conflict in a most extraordinary way. In trying to transcend stereotypes and expectations, Langley reacted violently against the accepted feminine stereotype dictated by the patriarchy. Rather than just dreaming the dreams of men in order to internalise and condone patriarchal control (De Beauvoir, 2014) Langley, in *The White Topee* (1989), and consequently, my character Eve, protested by transforming into the man. She demonstrated and performed a fluidity of

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<sup>193</sup> Douglas Stewart was a firm supporter of Langley's work. When Stewart reviewed *The Pea Pickers*, he saw it as "the most original contribution to Australian literature . . . simple, genuine, irresistible, humorousness . . . the magnificent tragi-comedy of man upon earth" (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 47).

gender roles decades before Judith Butler's ground-breaking premise of gender being performative, fluid, and multiple (Butler, 2010). This eccentric performance of Eve Langley, her way of coping in her conservative world, was inspirational. Her resilient story was my impetus to create the play *Eve*, focusing on the tension between expectations of mother/wife, personal creative yearnings, and the implications of living and working outside of society's expectations.

My research inquiry sought to answer two questions:

- What did Eve's tension between mother/wife and artist/writer mean with regards to creating a map of belonging?
- What can I learn from this exploration of Eve's bounded self and the relationship to one's map of belonging?

## **5.6 First Encounter with Eve**

Doug Leonard (director), Anna Fairley (producer), and I were awarded funding by the Australia Council for the first configuration of the work in 1994, called *Ionlympus* (the name of Eve Langley's final home, the place where she died: "I-own-Olympus"), a work-in-progress for the first Brisbane Festival Fringe. The earlier script consisted of a series of direct quotes from Langley's fiction, including *The White Topee*, excerpts from her unpublished novels sourced in Joy Thwaite's detailed account of Langley's life *The Importance of Being Eve Langley* (1989), as well as from my personal research at the Mitchell Library. We employed rudimentary visual images of relevant Australian landscapes, back-projected onto three screens shaped like houses; we invited a cellist to join Eve centre-stage; and we suspended a dilapidated boat high up in the warehouse's roof, where another actor and a little child sat, pretending to row, occasionally commenting throughout the performance. The space was filled with eucalyptus mulch (the smell of the Australian bush), and a rough wooden fence divided the performance area from the audience. The work was enthusiastically

received both critically and personally, and we were enthusiastically encouraged to continue with the project.

When I first worked on this development all those years ago, I was fascinated, hypnotised even, by Eve Langley's struggle to reconcile her creativity with family life. It was a tension I immediately recognised though did not fully understand. Langley's journey seemed a difficult one: she was isolated in a country where she did not belong (New Zealand), married to an artist who appeared to refuse any sense of responsibility, and lived in squalor.

This first creative adventure with *Ionalympus* disturbed me, the material challenging and confronting. Eve Langley pulled no punches when it came to her writing:

It is a severe test of sanity to hold a child in my arms.  
I want to run needles through its eyes. As a contemporary, I should hate to see her hurt. As a fantastical fiend thing, I should be satisfying a scratching desire.  
My only social crime is that I have two children and that I am pregnant with another . . . and that I haven't any warm clothes to wear out to the theatre with fur-coated people (*Eve*, 2017, p. 193).

It was the only play that I had ever performed where I did not invite my children to attend.

Unsurprisingly, I chose not to continue working on *Ionalympus* while I had the responsibility of young children in a foreign place with little support. Eve's imaginative responding to her children in the script was essential for her fiction but crippled me, so I let the performance alone, not knowing whether or not I would return to it. The material depressed me, contributing to my own despondency—not a good start to my life in a new city. Instead, I decided to train as a psychotherapist and work with artists to help them (and myself) with similar difficulties that Eve Langley had faced. This was the time that I learned about a new way of being in the world, my relational being, as opposed to Eve's bounded self.

## **5.7 Reconnecting with Eve through a Researcher's Eye**

Many years later, after I had commenced my research journey into belonging, I could not help but think of Eve, and how her story was a perfect vehicle to explore my expanding understanding of belonging and not-belonging. At the time, I was still conflicted about place, family responsibilities, and art-making. In my therapeutic practice, artists were presenting stories about the challenges of balancing home life with art making, as well as conflicts around belonging in a town that did not seem to overtly value their art form. Eighteen years had passed since my last encounter with Eve, and I was ready and motivated to pursue the concept of actively understanding one's sense of belonging and not-belonging. My hunch was that now I had a unique postmodern perspective on identity—that of being a constructed, relational self—I could reconnect with Eve's bounded self differently. Before my director and I even had the opportunity to meet about our new development, he died suddenly, and in a strange way, our project trajectory seemed to reflect the subject matter: one of mystery, regret, and sadness.

## **5.8 Unpacking This Fragile Inquiry**

Again, I called upon Heidegger's courageous thinking to overcome this setback, "releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking" (Heidegger, 2003, p. 95). I doubted my ability to flourish on this project without Leonard at the helm. I also knew that I needed to understand the pressing concerns of mother-as-artist, and the consequent influence on home and belonging. I needed to remain persistent, to embrace courage and gather a team of creatives to devise a new rendering of Eve. And I wanted to let the subject matter unfold organically, rather than trying to impose meaning upon it. This meant an extended rehearsal period. I was fearful of the process and knew that what I needed to pursue actively was my reflexive approach to creating the work, to move through the action cycles starting where I was at and going from there. As a therapist, I was trained

extensively in reflexivity, watching myself and my own reactions at the same time as hearing and supporting my clients' stories. Kim Etherington, a researcher and counsellor, wrote about reflexive practice as:

... an ability to notice our responses ... and to use that knowledge to inform our actions ... We also need to be aware of the ... contexts with which we live and to understand how these impact ... the ways we interpret [our] world. (Etherington, 2004, p. 19)

I needed to notice, listen, and bracket out my prejudices and allow the world of the play to evolve<sup>194</sup> through multiple writing sessions, researching the real Eve Langley and the world she lived in, thinking about the difference between my Eve and the real Eve Langley, and writing again, using “narrative, metaphor and description” (Bolton, 2010, p. xxi) in my research approach. Even though I was influenced enormously by Langley’s fiction, my writing was never intended as a reflection of the real novelist, but an authentic responding to an archetypal female artist struggling to belong. Eve was ethereal, elusive, and even more difficult to understand in her journey towards belonging.

## 5.9 Rituals

An essential and often overlooked part of the creative process is the consideration of the impact the work has on the creators personally and how the work affects their sense of belonging. I wanted to ensure that I had rituals<sup>195</sup> in place to stay safe, particularly because of my history with the material. Questions I needed to ask myself regularly were: How have I changed because of Eve? What is she teaching me regarding what it means to belong? However, these questions were not enough. The first two seasons of *Eve* were hard emotionally and physically (I expand upon this later). I needed to reassess my approach. It was therefore important to have the final research cycle, the final season of *Eve*, to apply my new knowledge. Thankfully, by the final season, I created a strong bridging out

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<sup>194</sup> I used the technique of through-the-mirror writing offered by Gillie Bolton (2010) in my reflective and reflexive processes: “Through the mirror writing is creative, a way of gaining access to each practitioner’s deep well of experience not always accessible to everyday channels” (p. 104). Bolton believes through the mirror writing is “the heart of reflection and reflexivity” (p. 105). It required me to write, pen on paper; to write for myself in order to access “what I don’t know I know.”

<sup>195</sup> See Appendix 4 for an extended discussion about the importance of rituals in the RIC Process.

process, including meditation, walking, and creative collaborative conversations (expanded in Room 3), resulting in a healthy exit from the season.

### 5.10 Action Research Cycle 1: Performative Writing Methods

Similar to *Home*, our rehearsal process was a heuristic journey, which I returned to again and again in order to create an authentic portrayal of the artist/mother. The first few months were spent in the writing studio. I needed a working script before I moved the work on the floor with my director.

#### *Source Materials*

I wanted to write a fictional version of Eve's story to highlight the difficulties and obstacles she had to face and how these challenges could relate to the concept of the bounded self. I began by reading the source material, including her published works *The Pea Pickers* (2013) and *The White Topee* (1989), as well as her biography *The Importance of Being Eve Langley* (Thwaite, 1989), and an edited collection of her work titled *Wilde Eve* (Frost, 1999).<sup>196</sup> Initially, I worked alone, using some of the techniques that Mercer and I had used in *Home*, including creating a space in which to work that was conducive to the subject matter; collaging themes located in the source material; and reading stories of great writers that the real Eve Langley would have been inspired by (as were we), including poet Emily Dickinson, philosopher Simone De Beauvoir, and novelist Virginia Woolf. One of my primary inspirations was a kaleidoscopic book *Mirrors*, by Eduardo Galeano<sup>197</sup> (2009), where I sourced powerful vignettes of human stories, including a poignant tale about Nijinsky (p. 264).<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> I also read dissertations that had been written about the real Eve Langley and her extensive unpublished works and letters held at Mitchell Library in Sydney, where her body of work is stored. Finally, I read the collated writings of Eve Langley from my 1994 research.

<sup>197</sup> Eduardo Galeano is a multi-award-winning distinguished Latin American writer, who has been an inspiration for many around the world: "Heroes rub shoulders with villains and apes in Eduardo Galeano's magical history of mankind," wrote Alberto Manguel (2009).

<sup>198</sup> Galeano's (2009) excerpt about Nijinsky: "In Switzerland in 1919, a ballroom at the Hotel Suvretta in Saint Moritz, Vaslav Nijinsky danced for the last time. Before an audience of millionaires, the most famous dancer in the world announced that he would dance the war. And by the light of candelabras, he danced it. Nijinsky spun in furious whirlwinds and left the ground and broke apart in the air and fell back, thunderstruck, and he rolled about as if the marble floor were mud, and then he began to spin again and rising, once more, again he broke apart, and again, and again, until

Galeano's prose could not be more different from Eve Langley's. Whereas Langley writes "ten pages about a leaf, so detailed . . . and drives my editors barmy" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 185), Galeano uses "elegant, pared-down prose . . . with never an unnecessary word, nor one out of place—and he never misses a chance to tell a good joke" (Gott, 2009). In Galeano's prose, Nijinsky's howl crashed through the window and was lost in the snow. In my script, Eve's Nijinsky went one step further:

1919: St Moritz, Switzerland.

Vaslav Nijinsky dances for the last time.

He announces to his audience: "I will dance the war." [*EVE moves into side pose like Nijinsky*] and by the light of a hundred candelabras [*EVE moves into open arm position and axial*], he dances. Spinning on golden wings.

He leaves the earth. His soul opens, he breaks apart and he flies through the paper wall and out into the planets. [*EVE faces front, arms go from high to low.*] (*Eve*, 2017, p. 198)

Eve also needed to fly, "transcending the heresies of history and the history of hysteria, [Eve] must fly/flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own inventions" (Gilbert, 2011, p. 82). And so, Eve did fly, just like Nijinsky's howl, through the window and out into the stars, "where it doesn't hurt anymore" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 199). Galeano's visionary prose gave me the courage to move towards magical realism,<sup>199</sup> which suited the ambiance of the play and matched Eve's mischievous nature (as well as my own).

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finally the remains of him, a mute howl, crashed through the window and was lost in the snow. Nijinsky had entered the realm of madness, his land of exile. He never returned" (p. 264).

<sup>199</sup> Magical realism is a genre of fiction where magical elements sit alongside the realistic storyline as a mirror to understanding. Within the story, the fantastical ideas are treated as normal. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines it as "chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction" (Magical Realism, n.d.).

## ***Writing Techniques Cycle 1***

The writing process of *Eve* was very different to the *Home* process, where we focused either on visual collage or movement. To begin the process of deconstruction for the *Eve* script, I used a method many writers use by creating little cards, and colour-coded them with potential subheadings, such as “imagination,” “motherhood,” “home,” as well as possible scene headings such as “The Haunting” and “Free to Write.” My home theory research found its way onto the hundreds of little cards, which were placed around the room. Ideas for Eve’s choreography, her physical score, also emerged and I would draw the physical mapping on the wall with chalk.<sup>200</sup> As I studied the cards, it became clear that Eve’s choices were not necessarily good ones, though they were oft times generous, when it came to her insubstantial attempts at mapping her belonging. The cards guided the writing with excerpts from home theory, direct quotes from Eve Langley’s books, other writing from relevant authors, and suppositions. Below is an example:

### **Imagination**

- a) Her fatal flaw . . . she stayed too long in the world of her imagination, her temporal and spatial imaginings (Dowling and Blunt, 2006, p. 2).
- b) She needed to heed the warning:  
. . . in remembering we can be thrust back . . . into the place we recall . . . moved back into this place as much as, and sometimes more than in the time in which the remembered event occurred” (Casey, 2001, pp. 201–202).
- c) Eve is thrust back into Doris Lessing’s myth country; overwhelmed by it; eventually marginalized or written out of the world.  
Eve would have LOVED Cixous’ broadcast in *Laugh of the Medusa*:  
“Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that

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<sup>200</sup> Eve’s choreography was sourced from the collected images placed around the room. For the Nijinsky scene, we gathered five or so famous poses of Nijinsky in various positions. I was taught choreography for theatre by Gerald Sibbritt, my mentor throughout the 1970s. Predating Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s *Viewpoints*, Sibbritt’s *Basic Elements of Movement* framework offered me strong tools to create a physical score. The basic movements included locomotive movement (moving from point A to point B in a straight line), axial movement (rotating the body 360 degrees on various levels), isolation (an isolated repetitive movement such as a tapping foot), and pose (a still position that summed up the metaphorical language of the phrase of motion). We incorporated and adapted authentic Nijinsky’s gestures within the choreographic score to create a boutique moment of reminiscence, a slow unfolding of Eve’s surrender to the Mental Hospital, the climax of the play. This choreography was not needed in the third season of *Eve* due to the limitations of space, though gestures were retained as Eve fell into reminiscence.



works against us and off our backs; and not yourself. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don't like the true texts of women-female-sexed texts. That kind scares them". (Cixous et al., 1976, p. 877)

With words such as these, I inscribed myself on the rehearsal space as I performed fragments of myself and fictional stories of Eve, using a reflexive lens that continually refined the work over a period of months (Trudinger, 2006). This was a pleasing development from *Home* where we did not have a designated rehearsal space.

### ***Collage Writing***

Academic Peter Elbow has written prolifically about collage as a writing technique:

Collage uses the simplest but most effective aesthetic principle: put things together if they sort of go. They need to "go" . . . but not too well. Interest and pleasure increase if there is some friction, resistance, difference. A bouquet is a collage, but a good bouquet needs some clash. (Elbow, 1998, p. 26)<sup>201</sup>

It was a satisfactory way to begin writing the play. With Eve's quotes and the related breakdown of the text, as well as other author's contributions, it provided a way of bringing the ideas into a succinct whole. Elbow (1998) proposed that the narrative collage is very suitable for modern concepts (and I would add postmodern) where time and space can be seen as non-linear and not fixed:

The use of narrative collage is particularly adapted to various twentieth-century treatments of time and space. Time no longer courses in a great and widening stream, a stream upon which the narrative consciousness floats, passing fixed landmarks in orderly progression, and growing in wisdom. Instead, time is a flattened landscape, a land of unlinked lakes seen from the air. (Elbow, 1998, p. 27)

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<sup>201</sup> His instructions for writing collage-texts are as follows:

"1. Do or gather as much of your writing on your topic as you can. Go fast, don't worry. Freewriting is a good idea. Take thoughts in any order that they come. 2. Go through what you have and choose best and potentially best bits—freely cutting to find long and short sections. 3. Revise what you have, but only by cutting, not rewriting. Cut paragraphs and sentences; cut phrases and words. Of course you can cheat by doing some rewriting, but it's amazing what is possible by just cutting. 4. Figure out a pleasing order for the bits: perhaps logical, more likely intuitive and associative—maybe even random. Another option: add fragments of writing by others—as I have done here" (Elbow, 1998, p. 26)

Elbow's instructions for writing collage-texts were not so different from my own. Based on his suggestions, I gathered as much of my writing together as possible, collecting the drafts of our first creative development with Leonard 18 years before. I followed Elbow's advice, "Go fast, don't worry" (1998, p. 26), which reminded me of Bolton's (2010) through-the-mirror writing technique, which I adopted in my reflective sessions, putting the pen on the paper and just writing. I would read my primary source material (Eve Langley's original writings) or my secondary source materials (Thwaite, 1989); I would then engage in a free writing session, allowing her words and experiences to wed with my own. I would then send the script to Mercer who would edit and return, ready for the next rehearsal.

By the end of the first action cycle, I had a working script. Nothing in the world of theatre happens alone. As well as Mercer's input, throughout the writing process, I had a young director work with me and research what passages were Eve Langley's and what words were mine. They were so easily braided together, because I had within my embodied-self, hours of learned dialogue from 18 years before and, until my assistant came on board, I was confused as to whose words were whose.

At the end of Cycle 1, we were ready to move forward, knowing that the script I had created could change and develop once I was on the floor with my director. Mercer had edited each reiteration of every scene, so she was well on the way to understanding how the show could evolve. The scenes were mostly interchangeable, and therefore provided enormous flexibility once the script became embodied.

### 5.11 Action Research Cycle 2

For Cycle 2, the team grew to incorporate a very committed student stage manager and assistant stage manager from Griffith University, who came on board to ensure that scripts were updated, citations were recorded, movements were documented, and props were gathered.

I needed to invite a musician on board, someone who could improvise and move well. From the first creative development in 1994, where we had a cellist, I was convinced that live music would add the ambiance needed. We had introduced live music in *Home* and it worked extremely well. I had heard about Moshlo, an extremely talented violinist who also taught Tango. He was a perfect fit. As well as Moshlo, I decided I needed a storyteller, because I was entertaining the idea of weaving *The Selfish Giant* throughout the play, just as we had woven Queen Isis and Osiris throughout *Home*. We now had a team of six in the rehearsal room, not to mention our dedicated producers who were working hard in launching the first season.

#### ***Who Was Eve Becoming?***

I was attempting to build Eve as a genuine, authentic character (within Elbow's "flattened landscape"), in order to understand my own, and in so doing differentiate our two belief systems. I needed the character Eve to believe that her authenticity lies in her separateness. Mardi no longer believed in the authentic self (*Home*, 2015, p.124) but in the act of authenticity. The act of authenticity was at the core of Heidegger's philosophy and I wanted it to be at the centre of the drama of Eve. Heidegger saw the act of authenticity as the way one approached the world in everyday life, "a shift in attention and engagement" (Sherman, 2009, p. 4). He explored the most taken-for-granted views of human action, seeing the individual as relational, rather than separate, believing humans were "embedded in the world" (Sherman, 2009, p. 2). For Heidegger "humans *are* their living in the world with others" (Gendlin, 2010, p. 2). This resonated strongly with me as a

constructionist. Heidegger believed that “being” was a verb that “points to our embeddedness in human activity. We are not born into a world that we theorize before we act within it, we join others already engaged in life” (quoted in Locke & Strong, 2010, p. 58). This was undoubtedly how Mardi saw her world as she explored how she related to humankind.

However, I needed Eve to see it differently. I needed her to engage in life, but her world would be predominantly imaginary, separate from those around her, what Kenneth Gergen defined as a “bounded being” (Gergen, 2009, p. 4).<sup>202</sup> I needed Eve to believe that what was most important to her “lies buried within—in thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, and so on” (Gergen, 2009, p. 4). Gergen offered another way of being in the world with his trailblazing concept of relational being (2009), the path that Mardi chose, believing that “the world . . . is not within persons but within their relationships, and that ultimately erases the traditional boundaries of separation” (2009, p. 5). However, I needed Eve to create a life with imaginary others, and, rather than following Heidegger’s advice regarding the need to “delve deeper” in order to “live more deliberately and resourcefully” (Locke & Strong, 2010, p. 63), I needed her to grow her world of metaphor. As such, she would see everything as symbol.

### ***The Writing Evolves: Eve’s Imaginary Worlds***

Eve’s body needed to be a symbol of something far more significant. She mentions this fact several times in the play, starting with “this is not my real shape. It is a symbol only” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 188). She describes her symbolic body amusingly, and at our musician Moshlo’s suggestion, we decide to have her write her body (Cixous, 1976) in song with strong rhythmic accompaniment. In German, they call it *Sprechgesang* or “spoken singing”: “This is the body. This is who I am. A symbol only”.

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<sup>202</sup> Gergen sums up the bounded being as being “within your shell, and I am here within mine” (2009, p. 4).

(Eve, 2017, p. 184). She flirts with an understanding of self, yet this honesty is not a deep delve into who she is becoming, instead, it is a prelude to her dramatic exploration of her multi-beings within.

She is the girl, the artist, and the crone all at the same time: she is the little girl, the woman, the adventurer, the serious poet. She is also

the woman who is visited on a regular basis by artists who sit a hemisphere away, writing perfection, Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, and Oscar Wilde. I am them, and they are me, Siamese twins if you like. I am the old woman who dies alone her face eaten by rats. I am the body not found for a month, unknown and bloated, unloved. (Eve, 2017, p. 185)

Her sense of belonging to these multiple selves, her internal tribe of artists, is palpable: Eve enrolls Woolf, Flaubert, and Dickinson at different times. Had she read Woolf's *Orlando* (1928/2015b)? Indeed. She most certainly had studied Woolf's seminal book *A Room of One's Own* (1929/2015a). She examined the passages in Woolf's *Shakespeare's Sister*:

[Shakespeare's sister] lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. (Woolf, 1928/2017, p. 174)

Eve chooses not to be Shakespeare's sister. Instead, she prefers Oscar Wilde to be birthed within herself, responding to Woolf's call to arms, urging women writers to

... escape a little from the common sitting room ... go alone and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down ... she will be born ... she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile. (Woolf, 2015a, p. 98)

She escapes from Woolf's common sitting room, leaving her children standing on their heads, fending for themselves:

A door slams behind me and I embark on writing odysseys to places I have never been before ... outback Queensland, far western New South Wales, even Perth.

Wherever I am, the gods follow in their wonder and watch.  
I do not bore the gods. Flaubert.

They come on clouds, drifting across the vastness of western skies.  
I wait for stories to reveal themselves,

like a child,  
playing cloud games . . .  
(*Eve*, 2017, p. 187)

As she waits for the stories to uncover themselves, Eve, in this instance, puts on the body of Wilde, a direct reflection of the real Eve Langley. Being born again as Wilde gives her the courage to continue her life of creativity, even in poverty and obscurity. I thought it curious but entirely logical that Eve would become Wilde, holding firm to the belief that we *interpret* our world, and as such have the capacity to *change* our interpretation. It is not fixed. It could be re-authored or re-written to enable us to function more efficiently, to allow us to map a new sense of belonging. People act in their own logic and, in this case, Eve felt an overwhelming affinity with Wilde, both highly intelligent, gifted writers with a complexity around their sexuality, both dreamers, and victims living paradoxical lives and as such severely judged by their colleagues.

Throughout Langley's novels were many passages referring to her becoming Oscar, which I borrowed with permission from the custodians of Langley's estate:

*[EVE as Oscar]*

And Eve's warm little parcel of flesh disappears into me  
She flies like Nijinsky right into my body.

"I turn my head, incline it to the right and stare into the awful loneliness of the painted looking Australian bush, the coarse blue gums, the yellow dry earth. All these, looking like a vast savage picture. At the same time the thought forms in my mind "what a magnificent country to colonize." (Langley, 1989, p. 242)  
(*Eve*, 2017, p. 189)

Eve did go it alone, with Hilary, her semi-detached husband, seldom present. She was often isolated with her three hungry children, Hilary leaving again and again with the milk money. The real Eve Langley was struggling in a male-dominated publishing industry where it was difficult for women to be published at all. To take on the persona of Wilde meant that she could demand treatment as a man. To her, it was a logical solution to her living arrangements. When the real Eve Langley wrote to Nan McDonald, her publisher, she announced:

As Oscar Wilde, I can take anything and the rottenest rebuff and disappointment this world holds and remain myself inviolate, free, white and twenty-one, without a care in the world. But as Eve Langley I just collapse at the first blow into a vomiting fainting mass of death. (Letter to Nan McDonald, 13 April 1954, quoted in Thwaite, 1989. p. 1)

Despite her fear of becoming a vomiting fainting mass of death, I could not fail to recognise the resilience of Eve. She had a problem: she was not getting published. The publisher's rejections were killing her:

. . . you're killing me you're killing me . . . when I get this book back, I'll be doomed again . . . O God don't turn me down with that book . . . I'm sick, and my brain and my memory are in shocking condition, but I'm making a fight to be myself all the way through. (Letter to Nan McDonald, 12 April 1954, quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 1)

Here Langley was at her worst. She was before her time, possibly the first Australian writer to have written using stream of consciousness. Her ability to “write ten pages about a leaf, so detailed, so intoxicated with the language of Australia, this wide brown land I adore” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 186) drove her editors to distraction. However, it was not only her writing that was of concern, but also her changing personas and her inability to accept any sort of critique. Her too-overt multiplicity of selves were becoming problematic.

I was confused; on the surface, my character Eve seemed to have a developed understanding of multiple selves, which was one of the themes that I explored in *Home*. However, they were causing problems. I needed this character to be committed to the bounded self. I needed to talk with someone who had a deep understanding of constructionism to help me work this out.

### ***Collaborative Action Research: Reaching Out***

I contacted Dr. Mary Gergen, a social constructionist colleague/mentor from the Taos Institute. I asked her about the multiplicity of selves, specifically in relationship to Eve, what Kenneth Gergen called “multi-being” (2009). I wrote to Mary Gergen on 10 February 2015:

One of the characters in my play has multiple selves within her head . . . she thinks she is Oscar Wilde, and in fact had her name changed by deed poll. She also believes she is Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, etc.

If that is the case, is it possible that she is a relational being unto herself?

She is so bounded on the one hand and so relational on the other.

I'm interested in hearing what you have to say.

In real life, Eve Langley is the source of my play, though I have fictionalised and dreamed her on. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia and hospitalised for seven years in Auckland NZ in the 40's. But I do not believe she was actually sick. I think she was misunderstood . . . she was so imaginative and deeply creative. She was I think what Heidegger called "authentic" if I have that right. (email correspondence, 10 February 2015)

In her response to my email, Mary Gergen replied:

We often talk about "multi-being"—that is our capacity to act in different ways depending on the context in which we find ourselves . . . I think what is different about your way of presenting your "Oscar" is that there is a certain distinctiveness about each character, and also [Eve] seems to be quite aware that she is in one role or another. It is not clear from your description how and why she has this awareness and this distinctiveness about each one. In this sense, it seems that her identity is more segregated into various parts than we think of multi-being, which is co-created within relational and environmental processes. Despite the differences, it is always a social constructionist process to come up with the decision to call something an illness or not. What you seem to care about is the pain and suffering that this type of labelling has had on this woman, not whether it was valid or not. Validity is also a socially constructed notion, however powerful it may seem. (email correspondence, 17 February 2015)

It was becoming increasingly obvious that my character Eve was reliant on her multiple and separate selves in order to cope, and, as Mary Gergen suggested, "it seems that her identity is more segregated into various parts than we think of multi-being, which is co-created within relational and environmental processes" (email, 17 February 2015).

Eve was certainly aware of the triggers that prefigured her various separate personas. She becomes Oscar when things become too hard: "As Oscar Wilde, I can take anything . . . but as Eve I just collapse" (*Eve*, 2017, p. 191). She flies like Nijinsky when she is locked away in the asylum, and she also compares herself to Emily Dickinson, indignantly reporting that "On tiptoe Emily lived and on tiptoe she wrote . . . she published only 11 poems in her entire lifetime . . ." (Galeano, 2009, p. 230).



Eve is wanting validity as an artist. Because it is not forthcoming, she decides to write under the name of Eve but get her rejections as Oscar:

I'll be glad if you will understand finally that I just want to write my books at your wish under the name of Eve and get my knockbacks and rejects as Oscar Wilde. Oscar can take it, always remember that. Eve . . . can't. Can't take anything. Write soon, O.W. (quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 2)

One could see this as incredibly resourceful rather than problematic. However, it did make it difficult for her editors to respond. In her efforts to protect herself from the pain of rejection, Eve inadvertently disconnected herself from the very people who could have helped grow her career. She refuses to embrace the relational. She also declines to compromise, which again is very noble, yet so rigidly adhered to that she alienates herself: "Plato exiled the poets from the city. We have fled" (Eve, 2017, p. 187). Eve is exiled despite her awareness and her authentic responses to her situation. She simply refuses "to inherit domestic boredom" (Eve, 2017, p. 190), anathema to any artist. Yet, women are expected to perform gender (Butler, 2010); Eve's refusal to act her gender results in domestic violence. Domestic violence is often triggered by a woman failing to meet a man's expectations about his woman's responsibility to provide caring services or by talking back (Dobash & Dobash 1996, p. 249).

Therefore, in a strange way, Eve inhabits her bounded self, through engaging with her multiple beings as opposed to multi-being. This is an odd combination, but an important one. For Eve to find her belonging, perhaps she needed to be more flexible in her choices. Would it work better if she balanced her writing more with her involved life of mother/wife?

### ***Building on the Home Prototype with Complementary Text***

Plays within plays, stories within stories, have been happening since Renaissance times. In *Home*, I integrated mythology and world stories as a way of extending the reach of the work, problematising the world of the play by providing multiple lenses to unpack the concept of making one's own

belonging. It worked well, and so, in the case of Eve, I decided to highlight her story with Wilde's famous fairy tale, creating tension between Eve's stream-of-consciousness style and Wilde's more traditional storytelling but more importantly, providing a scaffolding for ideas and metaphors to grow. *The Selfish Giant* highlights for the audience Eve's parallel themes of loss and forgiveness in very different, yet congruent, ways.<sup>203</sup>

Wilde's renowned saying in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* about paradox being the way of truth helped me grapple with Eve: "Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test reality, we must see it on the tight rope. When the verities become acrobats, we can judge them" (Wilde, 2000, p. 77).

Eve was a paradox on many levels: "I am going to the grocery store. I search in all the windows. I see my own reflection, I know not who I am becoming. Am I the Giant or the Child? A genius or a madman? Oscar or Eve?" (Eve, 2017, p. 189).

Eve oscillates between these contradictions, sometimes disappearing into the child as a way of escaping the pain that pursued her: "I lean into my daughter's crib 'put your arms around my neck my darling,' and I hold her head between my hands and I know almost everything" (draft 3 of *Eve*, dreamed on from Eve Langley's unpublished words in Frost [1999, p. 190], rewritten for final draft). Yet, in an instant, she would assume the Giant status. Just as the Giant hung the sign "Trespassers will be Prosecuted" on his new garden wall so that the children could not interrupt him, so Eve dismissed her children by isolating herself in her bathtub in the centre of her mulched garden, turning them into acrobats: "They are on top of the stairs, and they are standing on their tiny heads. . . Impossible to fall if you are standing on your head. And so, I am free to write without interruption (Eve, 2017, p. 194). Was she the new born woman, "transcending the heresies of history and the

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<sup>203</sup> I have decided not to deconstruct the bringing together of *The Selfish Giant* and Eve script. Firstly, it is, I believe, self-evident when one sees the show, and secondly, I have had to be selective in what I focus on in this chapter, due to time and space.

history of hysteria” (Gilbert, 2011, p. 82), or was she lost in her battle of paradox, one she could never win, with no family support and no one with whom she could talk other than her imaginary friends?

### ***The Reflexive Self: Hideous Enchantment***

In my writing of the script, I wanted to be clear that it was Eve's internal poet and not her mother-self who was mapping her hideous fantasies. Eve loves her children but simply finds it difficult to cope in the world of drab domesticity. As an artist/mother, I also found domesticity overwhelmingly monotonous, and I strongly identified with Eve Langley when she wrote: “Compared to those lovely, kind competent clean and perfect women I am Lucifer Incarnate when it comes to looking after the house and children” (Langley, from her unpublished book *Portrait of an Artist*, quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 339. This line was used in *Eve*, Season 1, 2012).

Unpredictably, I took pleasure in “keeping house” and cooking some of the time, but what I didn’t like was the conservativeness that came with domesticity and the expected order and routines. I did enjoy creating rituals though, of tea making and hosting friends, and I spent substantial time engaging in rituals to enrich family life. Eve is not afforded the luxury of space to create these rituals of belonging. It is enough that she survives, just.

An important value in the RIC Process emerged from the experience of playing Eve. The lack of ritual and of hosting, when it came to nurturing herself and her children, were profoundly impactful on Eve’s family life (even though she had created intricate rituals to keep the children contained so that she and her husband could work, but that is not what I am intending). Her manner of nurturing “I’ve boiled an egg for you. Come on, eat it, eat it, eat it!” (Eve, 2017, p.193) resulting in a meltdown, and the healing rituals of family life, were absent for my Eve. Because of this lack, I

made hosting and ritual primary values in the RIC Process.<sup>204</sup> Lowe saw hosting as a “foundational process upon which the other major skills [of therapeutic interventions] are built and on which they often depend” (Lowe, 2004, p. 53). Similarly, in the rehearsal room, the act of hosting would provide an environment of trust and nurture. It is only with trust that we can risk, and it is only with risk that we can create work that can potentially change the status quo.

### **5.12 Action Research Cycle 3 Brings Awareness**

After rehearsing and performing Eve for many months, I began to understand and appreciate the extent of the character’s hurt, her intense isolation, and the tension between her multiple roles (writer/mother/wife), not to mention the stress with her husband who wanted a “normal” wife. The therapist in me asked questions such as “How could Eve have grown a rich and vibrant map of belonging, day by day, minute by minute, despite the pressures of homemaking, family, isolation and work?”

It was one I could not answer for some time, because I needed the space to step back, observe, and reflect, in order to comprehend something that was difficult to understand. I was wanting to question Eve’s sense of self, compare it with Mardi’s sense of self, and then in the third play of the trilogy, with The Woman’s sense of self, because I deeply believed that it was not what happened to a person, it was how that person dealt with what was happening that defined them. Epictetus is purported to have said “It is not the things themselves that disturb people but their judgements about those things” (Seddon, 2005, p. 205).

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<sup>204</sup> Narrative and collaborative therapists embrace the concept of hosting their clients because it addresses the power differential, removing the role of expert and moving into a more collaborative way of being (Aman, 2006, p. 4). As a collaborative theatre ensemble, we wished to embrace this this, both in our own work and in the teaching studio.

Eve professes to react well, despite demands and family tensions. However, things are very fluid and change rapidly: “[My daughter’s] screeching carves me up every time” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 193). Whereas many women in the late 1930s and early 1940s would most likely have had family support around them, Eve was alone with her children while Hilary, her husband, stayed away most of the time—“My husband lives a second life away from me” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 183)—so she was left to solve any problems that arose. The real Eve Langley wrote in her diary on 14 November 1939: “the house is almost unconquerable. The sense of disease and death . . . I am alone . . . I tried to beat down the terror that this house holds for me. If only someone would come and break this bubble of hideous enchantment for me” (Frost, 1999, p. 185).

As the performer, I resonated strongly with the explosive “hideous enchantment” of Langley’s living arrangements. I was living just outside of Brisbane surrounded by fertile paddocks in a rambling red Queenslander. Indeed, it *was* enchanting, yet at the same time it was hideously restrictive. I felt bound by its location and distance from everyone and everything, including my remote family. In an earlier chapter, I mentioned that some researchers saw the nature of home as a symbol of how the inhabitants see themselves and even how they wanted others to see them (Despres, 1991). Just as my home reflected my personal isolation, so Eve’s external home, an old tin shack, could be seen as a reflection of her disintegrating landscape of yearning to belong. It was not only her house that was unconquerable; so was she:

The deserted house feeling comes over me. That sense of being locked up.  
That sense of having a loose blind hanging in my face and everyone looking in and seeing nothing because of the darkness of the rooms. (Langley, from her unpublished novel *Last, Loveliest, Loneliest*, quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 309)

Eve has been discarded and ignored throughout her life, developing an overwhelming and plausible desire to be loved, yet constantly feeling alone and “locked up.” Her self-loathing is expressed over and over again, and paradoxically she still manages to elevate her experience to the symbolic.

### ***The Need to Map Belonging***

To belong to a tribe (Heidegger's beings-with) is one of the fundamental premises and desires of belonging and feeling at home. As relational beings, we have the opportunity to “seek to recognize a world that is not within persons but within their relationships and that ultimately erases the traditional boundaries of separation” (Gergen, 2009, p. 5). But, as the play developed, it became clear that Eve has few real relationships to recognise. Her relationships are imaginary, larger than life, and symbolic. Eve belongs to an imaginary archetypal tribe of inner voices, her own tribe of beings-with. Eve is highly strung, extremely imaginative, and decidedly driven. She endures electric shock treatments, isolation, and heavy medication that affect her for the rest of her life. Eve is a woman born out of time and place, where conservative living is encouraged and eccentricities are marginalised. The real Langley was recorded as dressing differently, “why don’t you dress up better Eve? . . . Some people were laughing at you on Friday night when you came down the street with that handkerchief on your head” (Frost, 1999, p. 227). Langley was resigned to people laughing at her; “Well I’m afraid that people are always laughing at me, either inwardly or outwardly” (Frost, 1999, p. 227). When walking the conservative streets of Brisbane, I too caused a double glance sometimes, something that I grew used to. I had become accustomed to feeling displaced. Eve Langley also felt displaced. She longed to be home in Australia, but in her reality, it is the 1920s that Langley wished to return to—when she was “wild Eve Langley.” Her yearning resonated with my own longing to be in Sydney where I felt I belonged. Eve Langley, and my character Eve, remain in New Zealand for over 20 years, and I remained in Brisbane, trying to navigate and grow my quivering sense of belonging, my relational self, engaging with ritual and creativity where I could, things denied to Eve while inhabiting the loneliness of a mental institution.

### *Cycle 3 Continues with the Struggle of the Bounded Self*

Constructionist postmodern thinking helped me understand the healing power of perceiving the self as relational. In *Home*, Mardi was clear about her multi-being in the world, but Eve embraces a more modernist understanding of herself—Kenneth Gergen’s bounded being (2009, p. 3). At the same time, Eve acknowledges that she is the “other” sometimes, Wilde or Woolf. She holds an ambivalence to identity. On the one hand, Eve inhabits her many selves, but on the other, she feels bound by the expectations of society. Regardless, Eve has the courage to dress the way she wishes when she goes out into the world, but she does not know how to change her story of oppression. She feels trapped. Her only escape is her fanciful imagination. As Mary Gergen said in her email to me, “it seems that her identity [was] . . . more segregated into various parts than we think of multi-being, which is co-created within relational and environmental processes” (17 February 2015). What became increasingly obvious as I wrote and re-wrote Eve was her desire to stay bound up inside her internal landscape, making life in her own image, be it herself as Eve or as Oscar:

Let me admit, once and for all that I cannot tell a tale  
My landscapes are the landscapes of dreams  
I am not happy unless I am making life unreal  
Or rather, making life in my own image, as Christ did.  
(Langley, from her unpublished novel *Bancroft House*, quoted in Thwaite, 1989, p. 162)

The real landscapes that surround her—the hut she lived in, the children she bore—are exceedingly chaotic. It is her *mind* that held her fascination in a similar way to the Man in *Dream*. Eve's sense of not-knowing who or where she is terrified her because it is as though something was pursuing her. And indeed, something was. Something that radically changed her life's direction: “It is alarmingly easy to commit your wife. One simply requires the collusion of a relative or two and a couple of medical professionals” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 197). This was Eve's tragedy: her betrayal by her husband and the medical profession. But I was committed to finishing *Eve* with a hopeful outcome. It took time to invent it.

### 5.13 Room of My Own: An Outcome of *Home*'s Research Cycle

Virginia Woolf wrote about the need for the woman artist to have a space in which to write: “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf, 2001, p. 6). Eve was denied this space. For *Home*, we did not have a designated rehearsal space, which meant that any evidence of the rehearsal needed to be packed up and put away at the end of the day or the week, depending on where we were. I wanted to ensure that we had a designated space for Eve, because it became clear from the home theory that space and were important elements when it came to belonging. I therefore rented a large studio off the kitchen at Metro Arts in downtown Brisbane, a dedicated studio to the *Eve* project. I think of that rehearsal room as a transitional or in-between space, a place where creativity could blossom as we negotiated the world of the play and the world of now. Poet Robert Creeley believed “the necessary environment is that which secures the artist in the way that lets him be in the world in a most fruitful manner” (Enders, 2008, p. 1). I needed to create a home for a “fruitful” rehearsal period, one where we could leave evidences of the rehearsals on the walls and floor. I inscribed myself on the rehearsal space as I performed fragments of myself and fictional stories of Eve, using a reflexive lens that continually refined the work over a period of months (Trudinger, 2006). We used washable chalk (though eventually it became difficult to remove), blue tack, sometimes even glue, to paste the script, images, physical scores and postcards around the room. During rehearsals, we unearthed a metre of dowel that transformed into a gun, a doll-sized baby carriage, piles of aged newspapers, and fabric that could transform into whatever was required. We scoured the building for bits and pieces of set, including a broken chair, a milk crate, and a rug. The walls became thick with data and occasionally there were happy accidents in this interactive architecture of script development, and scenes that were never intended to follow each other ended up side by side, so were tested and sometimes moved as a result.



### 5.14 Reminiscence and Being Grounded

Stella Adler, my New York acting coach from long ago, reminded me of the importance of reminiscence, which she described as follows:

Reminiscence loses the present world and creates a time in the past. It is a giving over to a life that has disappeared but still lives in you. Time makes it more significant. Life becomes more terrible or more beautiful. Reminiscing has in it longing, pain, and loss. (Adler, 2000, p. 109)

As Eve dances Nijinsky, life becomes more terrible and more beautiful for her: “Spinning on golden wings. He leaves the earth. His soul opens, he breaks apart, and he flies right through the walls and out into the planets” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 198). Eve becomes Nijinsky through this creative act of reminiscence, and, in a strange way, Nijinsky helps Eve cope with being in the institution. Nijinsky’s howl escaped (Galeano, 2009, p. 264), so Eve escapes too. This moment of reminiscence is an important one in the play, crossing time and space to create a map of belonging in a world far bigger than the one Eve finds herself in. Whereas in *Home* we journeyed to Queen Isis’s Egypt and descended into the king’s chamber, surrounded by earth, in *Eve*, we found ways of flying out into the stars. Eve’s feet were never on the ground. To be grounded is one of the basic components of mindfulness and a first principle in acting training. Embodied training begins with a sense of awareness of where one is in the world, in the room, right now, right here. The importance of being grounded within the therapy room is also paramount. As Dr. Elizabeth Vermilyea (2000) explained in her book *Growing beyond Survival*, grounding is being present, having a “here-and-now awareness—a process of connecting with the present moment so that you can connect with your resources and options. Grounding involves two distinct factors, awareness and connectedness” (p. 30). This is exactly what Eve cannot do. Therefore, she will remain helpless against the terrors that plague her, evidenced by her piercing line to her nurse while in the hospital “Only planets matter in Australia. People don’t. Always remember that” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 199). This groundless belonging culminates in the final few lines of the play, told by the storyteller: “The child slowly opened the giant’s mouth and pulled out planet after planet, and the whole universe lit up” (*Eve*, 2017 p. 202). In

so doing, Eve finally escaped her great Australian Loneliness, ungrounded and unloved. The real Eve Langley believed this, writing “The sense of disease and death . . . I am alone . . . I tried to beat down the terror that this house holds for me. If only someone would come and break this bubble of hideous enchantment for me” (Frost, 1999, p. 185). But I wanted Eve to be more than a tragedy. I wanted her to find, just for a moment, her sense of agency.

### **5.15 Eve, Emily, and Me**

Eve has had a profound impact on my life, shaping not only my recent performative years but also my personal stories. I understand her passion; her need to create, her connection to forces greater than herself, her love of the land, and her intense desire to be loved. What I could not always understand was how she conducted her everyday life. My artistic research objective was to understand Eve's not-belonging, her un-homeable self. However, in the reflective phase, I learned to see her very differently, with new eyes, in my efforts to move her story out of tragedy and into some sort of understanding.

She needed to reinvent herself every day. Her ambition and her audacious, foolhardy approach to life were her means of survival because “writing requires maximum ambition, maximum audacity and programmatic disobedience” (Ferrante, 2016, p. 340). Eve was not afraid to delve into her darkest depth, but it came at an overwhelming cost. Her programmatic disobedience was not tolerated in her adopted country of New Zealand just after World War II, and so she was silenced. Consequently, Eve lost her map or, more correctly, had it ripped away from her. She needed to learn to think differently after her incarceration in order to belong in the world. Usually, when people tell their personal stories, others listen and respond, helping the storyteller refine their original tale (Frank, 1997), but in Eve's case no one bothered to listen to her wounded self, because she was constantly floating away, just like one of the collages I created early on in the writing phase of the research,

with a picture of a woman floating away. Too many electric shock treatments had damaged her. Her stories became chaotic narratives, ungrounded, and she was no longer “understood as telling a ‘proper’ story . . . [and] not heard to be living a ‘proper life’” (Frank, 1997, p. 97). Nietzsche’s expression posted on the rehearsal room wall gave me pause: “one must have chaos in one to give birth to a dancing star” (Nietzsche, 1883–1885, para 5). Even though the real Eve Langley was silenced, blinded, and written out of history by the conservative society of New Zealand of the time, she was still my muse who taught me something that I had not seen or understood before. It was while re-writing this room that I came to a profound realisation. Because I performed Eve over several years, I thought I had embodied her sense of un-belonging: it seemed clear to me that there was no map of home to return to, no space of sanctuary, no place of retreat. But was I judging her too harshly? Had I done what the patriarchal and hegemonic culture had done—marginalised her, invisibilised her? I realised that sometimes these discourses that affect and control us are so dominant that we write ourselves out of history. I almost wrote Eve out of her own history. I almost did not see what was so clearly before me.

I wanted to finish my ode to Eve with a small paragraph from Cixous and Clément’s seminal book *The Newly Born Woman* (1996), because Eve came to mind when I read it, and I was forced to see things differently:

There is a voice crying in the wilderness . . . the voice of a body dancing, laughing, shrieking, crying. Who is it? It is, they say, the voice of a woman, newborn and yet archaic, a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage. (Gilbert, introduction to Cixous & Clément, 1996, p. xi)

Not only did “savage” Eve teach me the enormous cost and compromise of creating a conventional home of belonging, but she also showed me the courage it took to survive in a patriarchal and modernist landscape. Suddenly, she was the voice, the map in my wilderness. Admittedly, she was a woman of excess and because she refused to compromise, she sacrificed her own belonging. But was belonging to her imaginal myth country enough for Eve to experience her own home of belonging?

Like Cixous's sorceress, she no longer wept after her time in the institution. There were no children to return to; her absent husband had seen to that. But Eve had given birth to more than her beloved children. She had also given birth to her writing, and so had the capacity to create her own unique home of spatial and temporal belonging "the newborn woman . . . must fly/flee into a new heaven and a new earth of her own inventions" (Gilbert, 2011, p. 82).

I wondered if Eve was the harbinger of Cixous and Clément's newly born woman. Her place of belonging was destitute, but she was not unused to hardship. The cost of censoring herself was too high a price to pay for comfort. Like Cixous's sorceress, she created her own map of memories, which took her back into her world of writing, the very thing that reaffirmed her deepest being (Cixous & Clément, 1996).

Thus, Eve will continue to walk among us in the flesh—mad to some, eccentric to others, but, as Emily Dickinson wrote,

Much Madness is divinest Sense-  
To a discerning Eye-  
Much Sense-the starkest Madness-  
'tis the Majority  
In this, as All, prevail—  
Assent—and you are sane—  
Demur—you're straightway dangerous—  
And handled with a Chain— (Dickinson, 2005, p. 278)

Eve "demurred" and was "straightway dangerous", but, as an example of a woman who stood her ground, despite the troubles she faced, she is to be admired.

### **5.16 The Forthcoming Rupture**

On the one hand, the first play of *The Belonging Trilogy*, *Home*, presented the opportunity to map my own belonging by exploring diverse experiences of my life and then locating them with significant other world stories, sustained and grounded throughout by the cultural myth Queen Isis

and Osiris. Through experiential, performative means, I learned to map a new account. I learned to believe in my multiple-beings, and that they could all dance together if I planned things well enough.

The play *Eve*, on the other hand, provided the opportunity to do more than just map the workings of the artist and mother. It offered the prospect of interrogating my own prejudice to see with new eyes, to pause, re-wind, re-configure Eve's map, embody her words, her actions, her pauses . . . until I finally saw something that I didn't know was there. I was forced to put aside my blinkers. To see things differently. To hear things differently (Anderson, 2007). To feel things differently.

### **5.17 Time Jump *Eve*, 2017**

As a result of this re-mapping, the third season of *Eve*, five years later, proved to be a very different one. The words were mostly the same, but the tone, the texture, and the cheekiness of Eve came to the fore. I realised that she could never compromise as Mardi did. It simply was not her way. Instead, she used humour to get through her dark times. In the first two seasons of *Eve*, there was only a little humour but in this last season, July 2017, Eve found her comic self. Before she had *talked* about her comic self, but it was only the third season where she *embodied* her comical woman. And in doing so, she showed a strength that I had never noticed before. By the third cycle, Eve presented herself as a woman who knew her own mind. This did not emerge through the lines; rather, it emerged from the embodiment of the lines. It took three seasons of embodying Eve to reach this understanding. A similar thing happened in the second season of the final play of the trilogy, *He Dreamed a Train*.

### **5.18 Conclusion**

At the end of the *Eve* 2012 season in Perth, I felt as though I was getting closer to understanding my new mental map of memory, balancing my artist self with my mothering self. I thought the performative part of my research had found a natural ending and it was now time to write up the

findings. Then my brother was diagnosed with a terminal illness, and it felt as though I was back to the beginning. My map floated away, just like Eve's, and I realised that my understanding of mental mapping was not as rigorous as it needed to be. I needed to know how one re-maps a mental map of belonging when grief and loss overwhelm, something we all face at some time in our lives. This rupture created a turning towards a more spiritual exploration of what it takes to belong, to re-create a new map of belonging.

I now invite the reader to watch the video of the performance *He Dreamed a Train*, performed in July 2017 at the Brisbane Powerhouse, before reading the script of the final season, 2017, in the following chapter.

Click: <https://vimeo.com/233787911> Password: belong

## HE DREAMED A TRAIN SCRIPT

### ACT 1 – TRYING TO LOCATE ONESELF ON A FLOATING MAP

*WOMAN enters the space with trolley, basket, bags for packing.*

#### SCENE 1 – MAPPING

*WOMAN rearranges furniture, then makes tea, then looks out the window.*

WOMAN      Thousands and thousands of years ago, before we made etchings in mud or rock or on paper, before then, I wonder if we still had a desire to locate ourselves?<sup>205</sup>

To understand

where we've been, where we're going, and how to get there . . .

we all etch a mental map of memory;

we make lists, write letters, invent stories,

and then we wait . . . and hope it all works out.

*[WOMAN turns to audience.]*

These mental maps get us through the day.

*[Aware of audience.]*

But I'm finding it hard to read my map.

My map keeps changing: the blanks, ellipses, the question marks, the bits I can't quite see. Hundreds and hundreds of years ago,

at the edge of the cartographer's map,

in the area that had not been discovered yet,

there was a big black hole,

and they wrote in Latin

"Hic Sunt Dracones." *[AV begins.]*

"There are dragons here."

Edges that flirt with us . . . things that we suspect are there but can't name them.

My mental map has brought me here to this vessel of memory.

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<sup>205</sup> Turchi (2004, p. 28).

A place I know really well.

My map morphs to this same room 50 years ago when mum and dad stood at this door,

looking out at us lying in the paddock: "What are they up to? They're so still."

"When is he going to wake up? He has so much potential, but he dreams his life away,"

Dad says to mum as they fold the washing.

"He needs to get out of his own way."

Little did they know my brother and I had seen a dragon train that day

and we were mapping his future through the long uncut grass . . .

Then, thirty years ago, when our children used to play together, screaming around the house on tiny bikes and scooters . . .

And then six weeks ago when he . . .

But I will be careful with what words I say, for in the telling,

uncertain thoughts can be frozen into shapes and I'll not be able to unfreeze them, and it may not be what I intended at all.

I'm feeling . . . like I'm on the outside looking in . . . not hearing anything . . .

Now. That's a bit like family. What's not said . . . That's what I need to know.

Ernest Hemingway, wrote

"If a writer omits something because he doesn't know it, then there's a hole in the story."<sup>206</sup>

A big fat hole in the story.

This big fat hole just appeared one day.

I'd never seen it before.

And that's why I'm here:

To map this big fat hole.

To impose some sort of order over this chaos that is my brother, that is me.

What is fact, what is fiction, what is truth, what is fibs, what is life, and what is art.

[AV SEQUENCE:

*Starts with the blue text above. Maps and images and highlights. Engulfs woman and then the space. Moving lines, scanning the space . . . loud with information.]*

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<sup>206</sup> Godfrey (2016, p. 53) is discussing Hemingway.



## SCENE 2 – THE PHONE CALL NUMBER 1

*Phone rings and WOMAN picks up phone, as though waking up from sleep. She recognises Bub's phone number. She answers warily.*

WOMAN      Oh, hi bub . . . Yes of course . . . I'm fine.  
*(Where are you?)*  
At the farm.  
*(So you found the key?)*  
Yes . . . it was where I left it. No one's been here since . . . let me plug in . . .  
Hey! Hello? Hello?  
Can you hear me now? Oh God . . . just a minute *(goes outside)*  
How's that . . .?  
*(You don't have to yell.)*  
Thank you . . .  
*(Did you hear about the fire?)*  
Uh? No? I can smell it . . .  
*(Well it's right along the ridge. Not far from you. But going the other way . . . did you listen to the radio?)*  
No, it's broken.  
*(Go inside and turn on radio.)*  
OK. Just a minute.  
Oh-oh that's your brother for you . . . just a minute . . . No.  
Ah it's broken too. *[Goes back outside.]*  
*(Well, I'll ring you in a little while to let you know the status of the fire, OK?)*  
*(Will you be OK?)*  
For God's sake. *[Laughs.]* I'll be fine. As long as the wind doesn't change.  
*(We don't want the fire to get those model trains; they're very valuable.)*  
Yes, I'll pack up the trains but not right now.  
*[Sees manifestation.]*

## SCENE 3 – PINK FLOYD IN THE '70S

*WOMAN is looking through the window at a man, aged 25 . . . She always seems a little behind man's actions.*

#### SCENE 4 – WHO IS THIS MAN AND TRAINS AND DIAGNOSIS

*WOMAN enters house and turns radio down.*

WOMAN        He loves his trains. All sorts:  
steam trains, electric trains, solar-powered trains.  
Even miniature ones disappearing into tunnels, complete with flaky smoke coming out of their little chimneys.  
He's set up a huge train track over in his shed.  
Little trees, little people, tiny houses . . . every Tootle's dream.  
He says it's as if all the tiny train tracks are leading him somewhere else.  
It's his laboratory alright.  
It's magic.  
*[She begins to pack up books.]*  
When he could, before his illness, he visited the country towns where we grew up.  
He even visited our old family home, the one before this one.  
The local train had stopped running decades before.  
Now the town was empty: no jobs, no transport, no nothing.  
The front gate of our house hung off its hinge. Windows smashed. Fly screen torn.  
Not even a front door.  
His warm glow of memory definitely evaporated after that.  
But in that moment, his most ambitious dream was born.  
He believed that if he could re-connect all the country towns but with a light rail, solar-powered, he would breathe life back into the countryside.  
So, he set up meetings with every single town mayor.  
And here's how he wanted to do it:  
He believed a radical approach was needed,  
so he mortgaged our family farm to the hilt to buy an airplane.  
And it's still out there, lying in the back paddock behind the shed.  
Just the body of the airplane. No wings. On wheels.  
Low wind resistant. Carpets. Seatbelts. All ready and rearing to go.  
A solar-powered train made out of an airplane.  
What an idea. An astonishing dream.

Who would have thought.  
 Could he have done it? Yes. Maybe.  
 But life got in the way.  
 Strange how you're knocked over just when you are taking off.  
 But have you given up the ghost?  
 Have you, little philosopher king?  
 Shuffled off your mortal coil . . . ?  
 Crossed the river Styx . . . ?  
 Danced the last dance, though you can't dance like you did as a young man. No, not like that.  
 He's a dreamer, that's for sure . . . he does not actually . . . he doesn't care . . . for more practical matters  
*[Packing while talking]* He was diagnosed with a terminal illness: MSA (Multiple Systems Atrophy), a rare, neuro-degenerative disease. A cruel disease. No cure in sight.  
 And so we worry about him living here all alone.  
 We take it in turns to come up and make sure he is OK. Well, some of us do.  
 He can't walk anymore, so he can't look after the farm.  
 He can't talk anymore, or make tea, or clean up, or bathe himself. Or toilet himself.  
 But despite these very obvious setbacks, he says "I'm all right."  
 Well, I think he says that. He's hard to understand. He will only do it his way.  
 Heaven forbid I suggest something else . . .  
 I don't understand it. I'd be doing every exercise under the sun to slow this thing down: yoga, Pilates, massage, reiki, reflexology, Chinese medicine, you name it, I'd do it. But he sort of/ kind of/ seemed to give up. Or rather, it was of no interest. His body did its thing: it was his dream that held his fascination.

## SCENE 5 – COFFEE SHOP STORY

WOMAN      But on a good day, he explored his Elysian fields . . . he loves it here, really does . . . had a garden built that accommodates a wheelchair . . . he grows beans and peas and tomatoes and cauliflower and cabbage . . . and forgets to water them . . .

He has his own daily rituals: reads the paper, does a "wheelie" round the garden before playing in the shed, but then he shuts himself up with his computer all day, blinds drawn . . . doing what?

When I could, I'd take him out, feigning a nonchalant attitude:  
 "All's good . . . despite the fact that you can't walk or talk."

Well one day, we “walk” rather “drag” ourselves towards the coffee shop at the edge of the park, and we see two giggling schoolgirls watching us with enormous interest:

“He’s pissed,” they say . . . “as drunk as a skunk,” they say.

“Drunk as a skunk, are you mate?”

They laugh and turn back to their mobile phones.

You find this ridiculously amusing and with this particular neurological disease, not only can’t you keep your balance (he really does look drunk), but when you start to laugh or cry, you can’t stop, so here we are outside the café, tears running down our faces we’re laughing so hard.

“You have a crazy sense of humour . . .”

And you suddenly smash against the shop window.

You and the window drop to the ground as in slow motion.

I reach out to break your fall.

You push my arm away.

I call to the girls on their mobile phones:

“Hey, can you help here? I need your help here.”

But they just look straight through me, take a picture and turn away.

You straighten yourself up, as much as you are able, sitting in the middle of the footpath, decorated by the broken shards, blood everywhere.

And now it’s your turn to be nonchalant;

I see right through you.

“You’re not safe anymore. You can’t stay at home alone. The time has come. We’ve found a place. It’s beautiful. Like a hotel.”

And you push my arm away. You sit there, you look up at me, and you smile.

You shrug your shoulders just like mum and you try to say something funny-punny, but it won’t come out. You shrug again and look away.

“Hey, I’m talking to you.”

No response. Nothing. I wait.

I reach out again. No response.

OK, STAY. Stay and fall over and break your leg and bleed to death.

Do what you like.

YOU WILL ANYWAY.

Then the waitress from inside the café comes out with some bandages.

And I watch you smile at her, act all coy, and accept her help with grace.

I watch myself walk away. I’m tired of caring.

BROTHER            *[at window]:*  
Does that happen? Do you just walk away?

WOMAN            *[hears his voice]:*  
Of course it didn't fucking happen.  
I need to understand this overwhelming gap between your mental map and mine.  
This big bloody hole that sits in the centre of our living room that I used to own.  
And don't come to me as your 25-year-old self. I have no bone to pick with you. I  
want to talk to you now. The old man. The sick old man. *[Wall shatters.]*

#### SCENE 6 – MYTH OF PLATO'S CAVE AND RESPONSE (written by Travis Ash)

BROTHER            *Night! O Night! Sing! Sing through me! With my eyes for darkness I shall sing! With eyes for darkness I am Er. I am Er-Dragon! The Great Dragon King not of royal blood. Dragon not born dragon. The Flame Singer whom the three Fates will never control. Know, that if you burn you'll hear my song.<sup>207</sup>*

WOMAN            We used to love acting out myths when we were kids. We'd charge our family a penny to sit on the log in the back paddock and hear the latest one.

BROTHER            *When I'm shot at the Battle of Kurrajong, I fall through the earth into sleep. Darkness swirls and seconds fade. I awake. Night fallen. Great golden eagles circling a nimbus lit by the light of stars. Grey dusty gravel digging into my back. With my back bent, I lie as a crescent. I'm lying crooked at the top of a drive looking up at towering Casuarinas. The drive leads to a brick cottage tall to the sky with shingles of clay upon wide walls stretched to the horizon with red bricks fixed in grey mortar. All around a concrete veranda with furrows as deep as a man and before-set graffiti reading Demeter Why? A three-headed dog, big like Uluru, barks and growls. A giant fatter than the Harbour opens the front door, calming the beast with a hush then shouting so powerful the southerly turns north. Hey! Come on down! The kettle's on! A naked man emerges from the earth to my left. He taps me on the shoulder and takes my hand. He leads me down the drive. I limp down, crooked by cracked bone. With bent neck to the star-lit sky, we make our way down the drive and through to the furrows of the concrete veranda. Silent but for our footfalls. No time seems to go by as we make our way and what minutes, hours or years are spent, I cannot say. Finally, the man helps me climb over the door frame and begins his journey back through the furrows. Crooked, I stand in a living room bigger than the whole Opera House! The air is cold. There a couch, there coffee table, and there a colour TV. In the corner upon a wooden stool, a slim giantess leaning her back against the rough brick smokes a cigarette the size of the Statue of Liberty. Her breath is silent. Her face sags. Her face. Just like Mum's. A steel ladder rests against the couch and I climb. Each rung my footfalls ring as if I'm climbing a hundred-string guitar. I reach the pillow plateau and sit cross-legged. I wait for the tea. The giant enters from the kitchen and I make out*

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<sup>207</sup> The myth of Er monologue was written by Travis Ash.

his old grey face and smell his sharp hospice sick rot. It's Dad. He kneels down to me and extends his hand where sits a cuppa. I take the tea and shout thanks. "No need to shout," the giant says. "My ears were made for small and large alike. I am Hades, Lord of the Dead, but don't you worry son, you're not dead yet. My son, you have been chosen. Chosen to see the secret of life. Look at the painting on the wall. You shall enter that painting and travel to the Meadows Bright and Dark where you'll see the secret of life." The dog enters the room. "This is Cerberus." The dog turns to me and says "I'll wait for you here for 10 years but no more. If you are gone a minute more than 10 years, I will not be happy now. I'll jump into that painting and find you. I shall bite at your ankles until you make your way home. Do not make me find you."

Hades turns me big. He nails wings to my crooked back and I fly into the painting. In the mountain range, I find a train station with a train heading to Meadow Dark. I board the train and am led through to the first-class carriage where the attendants wring from me my wings, one nail at a time. They seat me and bring cakes and tea and ices, and I look out and see the bushland, vast and angry. We arrive, and I exit the train and look out onto Meadow Dark and there I see three men suspended in the air like helicopter leaves that just don't want to fall. They are the Judges. They wear funny white wigs. Down below are the dead souls. So many like ants scurrying along the valley bed, as if having being driven from their colony. Above the judges are two vortexes. One leading to Heaven and the other leading back to the Meadow Dark. Below another two. One leading to Hell and the other leading back to Meadow Dark. Some souls go to Heaven and come back, but others never return. Some souls go to Hell, and but others never return.

I see one man thrown into Hell's vortex with his skin stripping off and his bones falling in upon themselves. Screams in the wind of "my name is Aridaeus," "remember me," "how they tricked me." The souls that return from Heaven and Hell fly to another meadow called Meadow Bright and here three women are suspended in the sky like stars. The Fates. Lachesis, the breath giver. Clotho, the body maker. Atropos, the family assigner. Lachesis speaks first. "Souls, you'll soon return to the world, but first you must choose your next life. What will you do? What will you be?"

When the souls hear her words, they all rush to her, scrambling to be first in line. "Stop idiots. Each of you first get a number from the card dispenser. When your number is called, you may approach." One of the dead souls who wears a wooden panel around his neck reading "The King of the Jews" smiles at me and gives me a number. Though his smile portrays kindness, he knows not what he does! They don't know who I am. After all, I'm alive! But I don't have a guide, I don't have anyone to translate. Everyone but the fates are speaking in some gobbledegook language! I cannot let them give me a new life! My heart burns with such rage and wrath that my legs begin to move, and I run, and running through the mountains, I come to a train tunnel whose darkness is total. I run into the darkness, but yet with my eyes blind, I can still see, and I see, I see a dragon beneath me. A Dragon of the Darkness.

Once the Dragons of the Light, the Dragons of the Darkness were the makers of the world, but now they hide in train tunnels. The Judges and Fates took over the land and tricked them into the total dark of the tunnels. These dragons have four heads,

*one for earth, one for water, one for air, one for fire. In the darkness, I see a dragon with no head to sing his fire song, and so I jump onto the dragon and as we fly, I hold him tighter and tighter and whisper "I will give you my heart of fire." My body transforms into the dragon's fire head and my soul through the scales seeps and we become one flying to the City of Darkness. The City of Darkness, where they crown us king. I learn the Dragon tongue and sing each day in flame.*

*In the tenth year of my reign, Cerberus comes to find me. "Er, come home. Come home, Er." Her language hates my ears and I burn her to ash, singing flames to the harmony her screams. No one here can command this Dragon.*

*For I am Dragon-Er. I, with eyes for the darkness, am the Dragon King not of royal blood. I'll never die. I'll live in the darkness and never be judged. I'll live beyond the Fates and never be known. I'm Dragon-Er. The singer of flame. If you burn, you'll hear my song. And my flame'll never be doused. Never. It is my Sun in this darkness. It will never be doused, nor shall your Son, my father, my mother, return. No, the Night will never be beaten by day. Dream never crowned by light. I am Dragon-Er. The great Dragon-King. Today, tomorrow, and yesterday.*

WOMAN

And we all clapped. "Such a storyteller," "Our little Plato," "Our Philosopher King." I watched you bow. The chosen one. My shaman. My hero. You knew it all. And for the next few decades, you convinced Mum and Dad you knew it all . . . but you really knew fuck all. You told a story and called it a myth . . . you defied the fates: a dangerous thing to do.

*[BROTHER runs out.]*

Walk away why don't you!

*[WOMAN slams door.]*

The easiest course of action.

Nothing ever changes!

*[WOMAN goes back to bookshelf to continue packing.]*

Everything has changed.

You fall in love with woman after woman,

and attend to their every need..

You buy them second-hand cars and lend them houses . . .

You even lent this one for a few years

before you gave it away.

Space for everyone (else).

Your choices continually reworked the fabric of our family and left a hole.

"But every living creature has gone silent:

every cricket, every bird;

even my own body stopped and held its breath”<sup>208</sup>.

## SCENE 7 – WOMAN WANTS TO MAP HER BROTHER

*WOMAN moves to storytelling chair.*

WOMAN        I want to understand the complexity that is my brother . . .  
Everyone I talked to before I came here said,  
“There’s nothing else to understand,”  
but I think there is.  
*[Pause.]*  
I want to understand the sense of entitlement that my brother had, that some men  
seem to breathe. I don’t want to just stand back, silent, waiting, playing the role of  
“the comical woman,”  
what a joke that’s been, ha-ha.  
I remember a time when I was certain of you.  
When you used to build me things.  
A money till—how ironic—  
where we’d collect our pennies. You’d play with wood and nails and would come up  
with something that was . . . untidy but practical. I loved it. It fell apart quickly, but  
so did my attention, so we worked well as a team.  
But I know so little about you. Now.  
You made yourself a hero,  
you made yourself a king, that little boy.  
And you never came home again . . . not really . . . you ran away to build a train to  
save the world.  
*[PAUSE. Softens again.]*  
I am afraid of losing you,  
of moving into unknown country—  
country that I have visited  
at . . . other times.  
I know its steep landscape.  
Dreams have edges . . .

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<sup>208</sup> Paraphrased from Brown (2013, p. 179) where he writes “Then the world goes dark, and every cricket, every cow, every bird, even your own body stops and holds its breath.”



Cups of tea grow cold.  
Phones ring hard and corners fill with dust.  
This is my future.  
I will lay your clothes out like we did for dad.  
I will leave your teacup next to your bed.  
“He’ll be back any minute,” I will say.  
The weak sunlight will struggle through the kitchen window.  
The jug will boil.  
The milk will be off.  
And my tea will go cold . . .  
My map floats away.

## SCENE 8 – 1970S AND PRESENT COLLIDE

*BROTHER enters.*

*WOMAN listens as if through time and memory. BROTHER is singing and playing piano. She begins to dance. He straightens his shoes, plays with his glasses, and sits on the piano stool. Phone rings.*

## SCENE 9 – CONVERSATION WITH SISTER PHONE CALL 2

WOMAN           Hello?  
*(It’s me.)*  
Why did you call on this phone? We never use this phone.  
*(Well you wouldn’t answer your mobile.)*  
*[Checks phone.]* Oh, sorry.  
*(Hey, are you alright? You sound strained . . . I want to come up and be with you. I know this is a difficult time right now.)*  
No, don’t come. You’ll make it worse.  
*(Have you been crying?)*  
What are we going to do about the piano?  
*(What are you talking about? There’s a fire. It’s close. You have to get out . . . hurry up . . . are you OK?)*  
OK.  
*[Pick up hat . . . the phone conversation just fades out . . .]*

## SCENE 10 – ONCE UPON A TIME SCARY DRAGON STORY

*Piano swells and the memory of the keys awaken the “I spy”*

I spy with my little eye  
a little boy,  
a little girl.

WOMAN           *[Sits on piano stool upstage]:*

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago and only this morning, a little bird sat upon my shoulder and whispered in my ear:

“Is this the day you are going to die?”

And you said:

“Let us have an adventure, just in case.”

And we walk through the long uncut grass which leads to the casuarina drive next to the dam where the sacred waters flow . . . where magic happens, according to the Celts.

You’re the first to notice.

You’re always the first to notice things. Back then.

BROTHER       “Dragon tracks!”

And we begin to follow them until we reach a very large flat rock covered in etchings from thousands of years ago. Then the tracks disappear.

WOMAN       “Oh, look, a HOLE . . .”

BROTHER       “Don’t be stupid.”

“It’s a tunnel. A dragon’s tunnel.”

WOMAN       I can see only the smallest patch of pink at the end of the tunnel. So small. Like when you look through your clenched fist: the palest patch of eternity.

And I stand there, so excited and scared at the same time. “I can’t breathe.”

BROTHER       Shut up, stop breathing so loud. Come on. Hurry up, slow coach.”

WOMAN       And I close my eyes and leap onto your dragon back and we disappear into the tunnel.

It’s dark, so dark. Water drips down onto my head. “Are we going into Hades’ Living Room?”

BROTHER       “You are being anointed by the Daemons.”

WOMAN       By the demons! Turn around. Turn around.

BROTHER       No, not yet. Not yet.

WOMAN And the wind screams through the tunnel and we go “Ahhhhh,” and our voices get louder and louder and louder. We must be going to meet the Fates—Lachesis, Clotho, Atropos—to choose our new destiny. Let’s not waste time!!!

And you tear through the tunnel, your dragon tail streaming out behind you.

And we reach an intersection. We suddenly stop . . . but the sound keeps going on and on.

It’s magic. We follow the tracks up and up, and we ascend through the vortex into a beautiful meadow and there, in front of us, is Mum and Dad. “Come on. It’s time to go,” they say, “Come closer.” And as we move towards them, dusting off all the dirt and soot and dust and yuk, I see they’re standing in the centre of a great big hole. “Come on . . . you are almost here.”

And suddenly the hole they’re standing in, bursts into cracker night bonfire with Catherine wheels ‘n penny farthings.

“You can’t come,” Mum and Dad say to me, as you leap into the fire. *[MAN leaves.]*

“Stop. Stop. Don’t leave me alone.”

They all ascend, holding fire sticks, writing their names in the air, as they enter the vortex that leads to the heavens *[WOMAN stands]* “Come back come back, don’t leave me alone!”

I stand here, wondering if I will ever see any of you again.

Then I let go and fall, down, down, down, until I land where the train tracks should have been.

But they’re not there.

Something else holds me. Something that has no name.

It isn’t hot. It isn’t cold. It is something. It is nothing.

It seems to have always been there. It seems to know who I am.

And I stand still. In fear of this blackness.

Suspended in time and space.

It is the place where dreams are born.

*[Pause.]*

And when it is time, when the darkness has left,

I walk towards the pale patch of eternity at the end of the tunnel.

I step out into the dark light of morning. I look up and the sky is alive. The casuarina trees burst into flame and light my way and I move passed the sacred waters and I make new tracks through the long uncut grass until I arrive home.

BROTHER Where have you been? I’ve been home for hours! Mum’s worried about you. Yuk, you’re so dirty.

WOMAN And I try to tell you about my adventures and you said—

BROTHER Don’t tell mum about the tunnel and the dragon and the thing without a name.

WOMAN           How do you know about that?  
                    But I did what you told me . . .  
WOMAN           Silence.

#### SCENE 11 – WILL I KNOW STORY

WOMAN           I have been silent.  
                    Years of silence.  
                    “It’ll be OK.”  
                    Until it wasn’t.  
                    I sit here, trying to work out my mental map in these echoes of memory.  
                    Remember you said, “Choose your words carefully because once you let a wrong  
                    word out, it’s very hard to find your way back.”<sup>209</sup>  
                    So, I’ll try to say the right words so that you will understand. So that I will understand.  
                    But perhaps there are no right words for saying this.

                    You said you wanted to finish it, wanted to end your life, when it got too much.  
                    Remember?  
                    “When it’s time I’ll know,” you said. “I’ll go down to the tunnel and wait.”  
                    Remember?  
                    The light will shift. “A slow turning off of the day.”  
                    But you turn to me and smile. You shrug your shoulders just like mum and you try to  
                    say something funny-punny and it won’t come out right and you shrug again and  
                    look away . . .  
                    And I watch my mental map float away and I do not know where I am anymore or  
                    where I’m going. To etch. To dream the bits, I can’t quite see.  
                    What is fact, what is fiction, what is truth, what is fibs, what is art?  
                    I look at my hands and see that they aren’t mine.  
                    The hands of my mother, my father, my sister, my brother.  
                    What is trying to happen?

#### SCENE 12 – VORTEX

WOMAN           Six weeks ago. Twelve missed calls.

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<sup>209</sup> Brown (2013, p. 49).

It was so hard to hear your voice.  
 That night I drove myself to the farm.  
 You're there, lying on the floor, crooked, bleeding.  
 I couldn't make out your sounds.  
 "Now . . . let's do it now . . . before she comes."  
 Did you say that or did I dream it?  
 "I saw your face preparing,  
 your face was God's face.  
 I swallowed your face";<sup>210</sup>  
 the longer I sat with you, the smaller I grew.  
 The great Australian loneliness.<sup>211</sup>  
 My pale Australian loneliness.  
 That old disease of ours.  
 Blinds pulled.  
 Walls bare.  
 Our corner of the world.  
 I want to go back.  
 I want to go back before you were sick,  
 "when I didn't worry about you,  
 have to think about you;  
 didn't have to love you so much."<sup>212</sup>

### SCENE 13 – TRAIN IS COMING

*WOMAN is at front door.*

WOMAN      It's morning.  
                  The light has changed.  
                  Red sunrise from the smoke.  
                  The wind has shifted again. The fire's retreating.  
                  But the casuarinas still smoulder.

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<sup>210</sup> Travis Ash wrote this in rehearsal.

<sup>211</sup> Langley (1954/1989, p. 157).

<sup>212</sup> Travis Ash wrote this in rehearsal.

And I trace my map till I reach the moon, the moon that slowly covers the sun,  
 and I look down into your small crowded house.  
 Seven rooms made of bricks,  
 seven rooms thick with dust.  
 To be packed, sealed and stored when the time comes,  
 When I step out of my way.  
*[Opens his door.]*  
 Someone must have been telling me lies about The Man. He seems all right to me.  
 He rises from his bed and walks through the doorway,  
 Unencumbered.  
 Wake up, the train is coming.  
 I will board it now.  
 No map. Don't need one.  
 The mental map I'm holding  
 begins to melt away as you step onto your dragon train.  
 You make yourself very tiny, so you can enter your little picture and you climb into  
 your little train and sit in your Carriage Nine.  
 As you take your seat in the first-class booth, the train starts moving.  
 It starts to disappear into the darkness of the tunnel.  
 For a few seconds, a bit of flaky smoke comes out of the round hole.  
 Then the smoke blows away and with it the picture and with the picture your  
 person.<sup>213</sup>

## SCENE 14 – RITUAL

WOMAN            Most of the rituals that grieving people perform are personal.  
                       My mother used to wash my father's car once a week, although it didn't leave the  
                       garage.  
                       A friend of mine would re-visit the location of her brother's death each anniversary  
                       to sit and plan her year.  
                       Another friend played Pink Floyd over and over again and danced like a crazy.  
                       *[Step off stage].*  
                       I enter your lounge room.

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<sup>213</sup> Hesse quoted by Bachelard (1994, p. 150).

I make a cup of tea.  
I talk about mapping.  
I answer the phone.  
The reception is bad.  
A fire is on its way.  
I see you through the window preparing for the day.  
You are 25.  
I tell my audience about your dream of reconnecting the countryside.  
I tell them about your rituals.  
The coffee shop.  
I watch you fall.  
I reach out to you.  
I walk away.  
I see you through the window holding a fire stick.  
You changed the Myth to suit your needs.  
The beginning of the end.  
You ignored the Three Fates,  
a dangerous thing to do.  
I watch you lie there, as you prepare to meet the gods.  
It was as it was.  
You dreamt so many dreams.  
You dreamt about a train,  
but dreams require means  
and you just smiled, and gave your means away.  
I will no longer be silent.  
There is no map to follow.  
I step off the stage. I step away.

## ROOM 6

### *HE DREAMED A TRAIN*

#### 6.1 Introduction

When I began this research, I did not intend to create a trilogy. I envisaged creating one show, *Home*, a means of exploring the social construction of self through performance in order to appreciate and co-create a map of belonging. While in the final stage of *Home*'s first inquiry cycle, I realised I needed more. How could I understand belonging if I still did not understand what it was to not belong? So, I created *Eve*, thinking that she was a character who could never find home and belonging, and she would have much to teach me. But then, a year later, while performing *Eve*, I received a phone call with news that could not be dismissed: my brother's terminal illness. In the ensuing weeks, I came to realise that my understandings of home and belonging were still too narrow if they could rupture so profoundly, leaving me isolated, discombobulated, and full of questions. This room will examine the inquiry cycles of the final play of the trilogy, *I Dreamed a Train*. I will appraise the *Dream* journey, including the *Dream*'s background, mythic awareness, personal mythology, and consciousness, in an effort to arrive at a multifaceted, constructive and decidedly spiritual understanding of the potential of belonging and home in our decidedly chaotic world. The main character in the play, The Woman, is deliberately not named, which is symbolic of the biased gender history within her family of origin.

#### 6.2 Uncharted Territory

According to some researchers, when relatives hear news such as an impending death, it is normal to go through a period of distressing questioning. One enters uncharted territory with no map to follow: "Personal loss compels us to reconfigure our world and reconstitute our identity since we define ourselves in relation to others" (Scott, 2009, p. 79). Anticipating the death of a loved one, what the



literature refers to as anticipatory grief, suggests that it does not necessarily make the grieving easier when the time comes; “in fact, it has been suggested that it may complicate it and more importantly, result in a withdrawing from the one who is dying” (Ponder & Pomeray, 1996, p. 4). I was aware of the notion of “withdrawing.” It was distressing witnessing the relentless physical deterioration of someone close, and I watched relatives and friends withdraw, too hard to stay. In a sense, one loses one's standard way of being in the world because of the ambiguity of terminal illness: wanting to be present and caring, and at the same time wanting to escape because to witness the slow decline is unbearable (Raphael, 1984). It seems better to remember the person as they were.

But it was not only the anticipation of my brother's death that disturbed me; it was the realisation that stories and encounters would no longer be shared together (Rando, 1986). The importance of relationship as part of creating one's home of belonging came to the fore. In creating *Dream*, I provided an opportunity to address this by re-creating, dreaming-on, and appreciating experiences that did not necessarily happen in real life, but rather occurred in the mythical landscape of our childhood. I also created scenes to discuss the issues and themes that could never be addressed within the culture of my family, and as I reflected on the whole experience of writing this exegesis, I was reassured that the process was meaningful and significant and moved me towards a profound understanding of what home could become.

During the year following my brother's diagnosis, I became preoccupied with entering this uncharted territory of grief with no map to guide me and little ability to create one: “Yea be dragons” (paraphrased in *Dream*, 2017, p. 237). In our Western culture, we have few rituals to help us observe and externalise loss, so we become numb, we go dead inside (Doka & Davidson, 1997). My task was to invite this loss into my life, externalise it, examine it, and hopefully transform my way of being in relationship with it (Young-Eisendrath, 2013).

In terms of my research, I wanted to explore the possibility that my map of belonging, my understanding of home, could expand even more. The process of making *Home* taught me about the importance of place and space, and reinforced a philosophical approach to identity by allowing me to embrace the concept of relational being. *Home* also clarified the importance and power of stories, both cultural and personal, to help us thicken our understanding of where we belong in the world. Working on *Eve* taught me the joys of unique artistic inner landscapes, but also the terrible cost for Eve and her family. Her bounded being and focused vision limited her ability to create a life of balance and connectedness. She was isolated and alone. *Eve* was a story of warning, a cautionary tale, informing us that we need to be grounded and connected in order to create home.

As I began the task of packing up our family home, the place where my brother had lived for some time, I contemplated the relationship between place (having a strong connection to the house), time (multiple memories over many years), and soul, and how they interacted with each other, not only in pragmatic terms but also conceptually. It is not unusual to turn to ideas of the soul when one is faced with the loss of a loved one, providing an experience that could result in an expansion of the capacity to love. In Robert Romanyshyn's classic *The Soul of Grief* (1999), he wrote that the gift of grief is an expansion of the soul's capacity to love.<sup>214</sup>

It made sense that the play was set in the lounge room of the family home:

The unconscious often chooses houses, buildings, and secret rooms as symbols. The basement or cellar is often a metaphor for the unconscious, of something hidden that needs to be explored, whereas the attic or roof or opening to the sky often reflects a desire to explore transpersonal realms or spiritual directions. (Marcus, 2006, Chapter 2, para 3)

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<sup>214</sup> Perhaps that is what happened in my experience of *Dream*, a conscious approach to grieving, as opposed to an unconscious one, which can present as self-abuse (Fidel-Rice, 2014, p. 20). The processes of unconscious and conscious grieving are discussed in Anna Marie Fidel-Rice's *The Alchemy of Grief* (2014).

Jung believed that the house represented the self in some way—one's many levels of perception—with the lounge room representing one's consciousness or awareness (Marcus, 2006, Chapter 2, Memory or Fantasy, para. 6). It is a perfect location for the ensuing adventure into awakening to consciousness, which is "a state of awakedness, and at its centre there is an "I" (Stern, 1998, p. 13). The Woman has come to this room, which has a significant metaphorical hole in the centre of it, in search of understanding. She is stuck and needs to find a way of moving forward.

It was logical that The Woman revisits her childhood dream, because "When we feel stuck in our lives, or in a home that seems to express an outmoded symbol of self [which the farmhouse did], it may help to pay attention to dreams" (Marcus, 2006, Chapter 3, para. 1). The Woman was wedged within her stories and expectations of the past, and she needed to find a way to move through the grief and guilt, through her hurt and anger, in order to heal. Thus, she turned to dreams and ritual.

### **6.3 Ritual of Mourning**

In *Home*, I had learned from Queen Isis of the healing power of the sacred as the audience and I participated in the re-storying of her husband's death through ritual. Scott (2009) asserted that people can reconfigure their world by engaging in what he called rituals of mourning. He suggested that these ceremonies can open up spatial and temporal windows, providing a transitory connection from the world-of-loss into the world-when-things-were-normal, a respite, an in-between space, where the griever can experience what it would be like if only it hadn't happened. To realign myself and my sense of belonging, I needed to write my own ritual of mourning about a brother whom I admired enormously, particularly when we were children. He was exceptionally inventive, dreaming up imaginings that made me laugh and also impressed me:

There was a time I was sure of him  
When he used to make me things.  
A money till. How ironic

He'd play with wood and nails and would come up with something that was untidy but practical. I loved it. It fell apart quickly but so did my attention so we worked well as a team (*Dream*, 2017, p. 246)

I would go to my brother when I needed to resolve an issue or solve a problem. But this time, I had to do it alone.

#### **6.4 Man in Quotation Marks**

On a visit to see my brother in Sydney in 2012, the two of us were walking along the Glebe foreshore. He was walking very slowly and needed to rest every few minutes. I thought it was strange, but he talked about low blood pressure and vertigo. A month later, he contacted us to say he had been diagnosed with Multiple Systems Atrophy (MSA), a rare and complicated neurological degenerative disease. MSA is a not-so-slow breakdown of all bodily functions, both internally and externally. It begins like this: the first thing we noticed was that my brother began to walk in a jerky sort of way. He was better with a stick, then with a walker, then a wheelchair, then he hardly moved at all. He was no longer able to control his body temperature or bodily functions and finally he was unable to talk. He ate pureed food and refused a feeding tube. He had difficulty moving even a finger, so he could no longer communicate online. It is a cruel disease, especially as it leaves your intellect relatively intact, except perhaps for decision making, though my brother was never very good at making decisions.

When someone is diagnosed with a terminal illness, when one becomes aware of the impending loss, the grief-of-anticipation is multifaceted. So much comes into play, not just the need to mourn but also the requirements to cope and organise what needs to be done. We decided the best way forward, our survival strategy, was to host family days once a month where friends and relatives who lived varying distances from Sydney would gather around my brother, sharing food and stories. Some of us had not seen each other for quite some time.

## 6.5 A Sister's Promise

At one of the gatherings, when he could still be understood, my brother said his greatest wish was to publish the novel he had just finished writing, titled *He Dreamed a Train*,<sup>215</sup> a confusing journey at times, but a spirited and layered investigation of a man who, through various encounters, developed a deep passion for small country towns and wanted to revitalise the countryside. Just as my search for deeper meaning was triggered by the news of my brother's illness, so his dream was triggered by the death of our father.

The long illness had finally won, his father was gone . . . The suffering was over, leaving the face of Bert behind, the dignified man Tom remembered from earlier years . . . Tom . . . watch[ed] the sunrise. It was so raw . . . blinding. *The first day my father will never see*, he'd thought . . . (Brown, 2013, Chapter 1, para. 6)

Soon after our father died, my brother drove into the countryside where we had lived as children and watched the sunrise. As he sat there, he dreamed about a time when our father had shown him an abandoned train tunnel. Our father had been an engine driver before the war and knew the country train tracks intimately. My brother wrote that "inside [the tunnel] was a space without end, filled with sounds. Perhaps they weren't sounds at all, but feelings that he had never known" (Brown, 2013, Chapter 1, para. 29).

Sound evokes emotions for many.<sup>216</sup> Most of us have experienced this at some time, but what fascinated me here was that he was talking about feelings he had never known. A puzzle was forming. Something I recognised during the years of my brother's illness was that his spirit, his soul, was deep and unfathomable despite his imprisoned body. He had our father's dignity. I was perplexed by my brother's tolerance of his physical limitations and his silence. Was he experiencing something significant that he hadn't noticed when he was well? The illness changed his emotional control, and on a regular basis, he would burst into tears and then not be able to stop crying. Was this something

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<sup>215</sup> I loved this title, and even though the play I wrote was initially called "Man in Quotation Marks," it ended up being named after my brother's novel.

<sup>216</sup> For an expansion of this idea, see Rettner (2010).

that he was interrogating deep within himself? After all, in real life, he was a scientist. And not only a scientist, but a clinical psychologist who was fascinated by human behaviour. Was it his scientific curiosity that held his attention? To me, it was as though he was rehearsing the concept that his death was his own, as Ruth Robson did in her essay “Notes on My Dying”: “I am inside myself so deeply the world is an abstraction” (Robson, 2001, para. 9). It was as though my brother thought the same as he explored the riches of his consciousness and his spirit without the distractions of daily life.

Our father (and his character's Tom's dad) was a prisoner of war in Changi and was described by a fellow inmate as someone who “always kept his spirit. If a man lost his spirit as a prisoner, he would fade and die within days . . . the spirit that your father had was deep . . .” (Brown, 2013, Chapter 17, para. 13). Again, it was as though my brother was not only talking about our father when he wrote this, but he was also deep inside himself, constructing his future self: he had learned from our father the importance of keeping one's life force animated. I noticed at each visit that his spirit was deepening, a soulful fortitude that seemed to flow through him. I felt I could learn from him: slow down, stop, and notice.<sup>217</sup> I was in search of what my brother called (in his book) “true hands,” the answer to his question “What's on the other side of the door inside you, that you keep trying to shut?” (Brown, 2013, Chapter 10, para. 3). Was it the spirit? One's essence? One's true hands? Is that another way of describing belonging?

I offered to do a reading of sections of my brother's book to a group of friends gathered to celebrate his birthday. After hearing their candid response, I tentatively promised to adapt the novel for a stage play. Creating a performance that focused on my brother's work was one way of coping with grief, a conscious ritual of grieving. Stories would sit within stories, just as they had in *Home*. My starting

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<sup>217</sup> One of the values that helped thicken the RIC Process emerged from this experience of witnessing my brother's illness, staying with it, and questioning his complex motivations as he journeyed through his illness. It was the experience of configuring *Dream* that led me to add a spiritual aspect to RIC Process, a gentle exploration of our expanding consciousness. See Room 7 and Appendix 4.

point would be the main character Tom (most like my brother in real life), who also embarked on a road trip after the death of his father as a way of processing his overwhelming grief:

Tom sees a disused train line running beside the road, and is flooded with memories of childhood, his connection with trains and his disconnection with his present life.<sup>218</sup> Tom stands on the cliff top and watches the abandoned railway track of his youth running into the distance. In that moment, Tom decides to re-awaken his dream. Perhaps then he will have the opportunity to understand who he was becoming (2012 draft of *He Dreamed a Train*)

My brother had focused on this dream of reuniting all the decaying towns by inventing a light rail made out of an airplane fuselage. Despite his scientific background, he had always wanted to be an artist, so this surprising act of creation could have been the beginning of his journey to understand his real hands. He called his book a novel, but it was far more than that.

Even though the news of my brother's illness resulted in the walls of my comfortable home-of-belonging tumbling down, I had his guidebook, a map of his personal mythology, if only I knew how to read it. One thing that kept me on task: my brother's novel had a by-line, "The Way Home." My brother's book was written several years before his diagnosis, in a similar time-frame to my writing of the first two plays of the trilogy. In it, he mapped this strange new landscape, a presentiment of what was to come:

For weeks the pain kept going, but one morning it all stopped. Blackout of the soul. He didn't know if he was numb or paralysed . . .  
He looked at his hand, and saw that it wasn't his . . . he was looking at the hand of a stranger. So, who was looking at the hand? Where had he gone?  
The whole show ran on regardless . . . All that seemed clear was that he was here, a "man" in quotation marks (Brown, 2013. Chapter 27, para. 2)

He wrote about Tom walking his body for miles, something that our mother and father had done each day, as though he was aware of what was to come. Was he following Rousseau's wisdom? In an interview for his new book about walking, Frédéric Gros (2014) reported that

. . . when you walk, all is possible. Your future is as open as the sky . . . And if you walk several hours, you can escape your identity . . . You are nobody. You have no history. You

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<sup>218</sup> This reminded me of Eve, her relationship with her imaginary world, and her disconnection from the world around her.

have no identity. You have no past. You have no future. You are only a body walking. (Gros, quoted in Cadwalladr, 2014)<sup>219</sup>

My brother (as Tom) seemed to understand this. He strolled, albeit awkwardly, then with a walker, then a wheelchair, until he was able to escape his deteriorating identity and to re-create who he was becoming, moving from a pragmatic to a more sacred way of being. So, I promised myself I too would walk daily, and as I walked, ideas emerged, ideas such as:

No. It's not my job to write his story. He's already done that. I want to map my own version—my own myth—of what it's like to lose someone you love, someone who's complicated, difficult to understand, aloof yet infinitely lovable in the in-between moments. (author's black journal, November 15, 2012)

## 6.6 Plotting a Story

I configured my world of grief by plotting it into a story (Sitvast et al., 2008). The story would bring to life the unknown landscapes of fear and loss of control, and consider what was on the other side of the landscape of grief. I realised that my philosophical investigations into relational being and bounded self would need to be put aside for a while, as they are concepts for the living. What was important now was to understand the transition from life to death, the embracing of spirit and still finding a sense of home and belonging. Adamson (2017) calls dying an aesthetic experience, embracing a developed sense of serenity, an awakedness, and a heightened sense of awareness, all qualities I recognised in my brother.

Nevertheless, I was angry about what was happening. Anger is not necessarily unusual when experiencing loss; rather, it is "essential in the resolution of a grief reaction" (Young-Eisendrath, 2013, Demeter's Folly, Demeter's Folly and "Complex" Terminology, para 21). To embrace creativity is also not an unusual response to loss; Young-Eisendrath (2013) proposed that we find a way to discover a more profound meaning in dying than just seeing it as a life ending. She suggested

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<sup>219</sup> Gros's *A Philosophy of Walking* (2015) is a profound meditation on walking.



we “Build a temple. Practice a ritual, embrace many possibilities and you will apprehend a new perspective on human life and death” (Young-Eisendrath, 2013, *Demeter’s Folly*, *Demeter’s Folly* and “Complex” Terminology, para. 31).

And so, just as Queen Isis created the ritual of building 14 temples to honour and remember her lost husband, I began to develop a ritual of mourning to map a new perspective. Even though the performance ritual was transitory, it was what Seligman et.al. (2008, p. 180) called a pocket or window of time where I could see more clearly. *Dream* provided these windows of memory with beautiful moments of connection where there was potential for me to flourish again.

## 6.7 Rules of Engagement

As a prelude to the action cycle, a constructed story began to grow: monologues emerged, then dialogues between the voice of The Brother and his sister, The Woman, in different time zones and various locations on our farm. A very early draft of *Dream* set out the boundaries. I began writing quite clinically, for initially, it seemed the only way forward. I had to remain relatively distant in order to deal with the material. Early on, I clarified the relationship between the two characters of The Woman and the brother:

*SISTER/RESEARCHER:*

*Standing in a shiny, empty hospital corridor with a view of the sea and a train station*

My Rules of Engagement

I have no interest in talking facts . . . I want to enter “a different register” in order to find something to hold on to:

Fact. I am a woman in her sixth decade: a writer, a sister.

Fact. I have a brother in his sixth decade: a philosopher, a dreamer.

Fact: I am waiting in a hospital corridor.

A nondescript corridor where we have all waited, at some other time.

While I wait, I read Mark Twain. Angela Carter. T.S. Eliot.

They will wait with me . . . So much of dealing with disease is waiting. Waiting.

While I wait, I think about the man who is my brother (gesture to hospital bed).

(*Dream*, draft 1, 2013)

As a beginning, these words provided me a framework, a set of simple guidelines, many borrowed from *Home*, not quite a map but an outline to start the journey. The voyage would not be descriptive.

Further on in draft 2, The Woman announces that every adjective would be killed. A different register would be embraced, and she would journey with the writers who had gone before as she solved the ensuing problems.

## **6.8 Research Cycle 1**

As researcher, I engaged in multiple action research cycles. In Cycle 1, I began with known stories. The stories that presented themselves were written down and examined. Sometimes, the stories were collaged and then recorded after reflecting on the visual depiction using the adapted MIECAT process. Through the placing of images on a blank page without thinking (“Rip and Stick”), I created a potential conversation to enrich and thicken the known stories. And I began to find new understanding through depiction and writing. When the script was a complete draft, I moved the text on the floor and we found more insights. I also employed several experienced actors to act out the monologues, so that I could configure some sort of new meaning. Then I was able to stop and refigure, incorporating what I had learned from observing other actors reading and moving the script, followed by another creative development showing and feedback session.

Throughout the six creative developments, I continued reading the source material written by my brother, which gave clues about his spiritual life. I embraced memories and dreams, as well as creating a physical and emotional landscape which included our old farmhouse and surroundings. I relied on my therapeutic training in grief and loss to inform the process. Whereas with *Home*, I changed physical locations throughout the rehearsal period, in *Dream* I remained firmly in the one physical place, both for the writing as well as the creative developments, something I also did with *Eve* (aside from the Perth adventures). In *Dream*, we engaged in six creative developments at Metro Arts and then three weeks of rehearsal at Brisbane Powerhouse Stores Rehearsal Rooms, before we opened a two-week season at the Powerhouse in 2014.

In this final refiguration of writing this exegesis, focusing on the entire reflexive journey of the research, I physically moved myself to the other side of the world, to Finland, in order to find enough space both physically and mentally to delve into and appreciate the density of the exploration.

### ***Mythical Dreaming***

The central myth in *Dream* is the Myth of Er, the last chapter in Plato's *Republic* (1497/2008), was rewritten and performed by Travis Ash (my son), who plays The Brother. It is about how we are able to choose our own life-after-death in the Elysian Fields, those same fields that I had walked the year before when participating in a research pilgrimage. The Myth of Er resonated strongly when I first heard it. It is about a man who witnesses what happens when we die and returns to life to inform every one of life after death. The original myth provided me with hope that there is an afterlife and that even when we die, we have self-agency, something that MSA had taken away from my brother, or so I thought.

The myth also sat in tandem with an archetypal dream I had repeatedly had as a child where the whole family ascended into heaven. I recreated this vision in the script, a shamanic journey where both The Brother and The Woman, as children, enter a tunnel on the back of a dragon. The tunnel story echoes the shaman's journey, where the shaman "develop[ed] intimate and lasting relationships with personal helping spirits by consciously leaving ordinary reality and journeying into the non-ordinary realms of the spirit world" (Cowan & Cowan, 1998, p. 2).

This was an iconic journey into that other world, the world that my brother talked about in his novel. The world that sat on the other side of the door that we were not willing to open, what my brother referred to as the place of true hands. The Woman as a young girl stands firm, watching her family

ascend, knowing that she is existentially alone. She alone can create her own way of becoming in the world, her own personal mythology. I could not help but notice how grounded this young version of The Woman was, which is in stark contrast to Eve, who was always wanting to fly out into the planets.

### ***Mythological Research***

As noted above, my interest in personal mythology as a way of making meaning began when working with my mentor Dr. Jean Houston, a good friend of Joseph Campbell who awoke the passion of mythology in the West with his seminal study *The Hero with One Thousand Faces* (1949/2008). Houston also played a pivotal role in popularising myth, focusing on how the cultural myths impacted our ordinary lives. As part of my research for *Home*, I had joined Houston in Egypt in 2010, visiting the temples of Osiris, mythically built by Queen Isis. Several years later, I joined Houston again, this time to the Elysian Fields of “Ancient” Greece, where the Myth of Er was enacted, followed by a discussion of the Eleusinian Mysteries, celebrated for nearly 2,000 years before Christianity, the citadel of patriarchy, prohibited the rituals. The Great Mother Goddess, made up of Persephone, Demeter, and Hecate, embraced and honoured for her power of transformation, was far too powerful for the new Christian framework.<sup>220</sup>

As my research deepened, I realised that, apart from Houston, most of the mythological research that I read (both cultural and personal mythology) had been written by men, and a select group of men at that, who appeared to know each other or had worked with each other at some time, many attached to mythological studies at various universities in the USA. It was also apparent that many of them were clinical psychologists and much of the research was done from the 1970s to the 1990s as a response

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<sup>220</sup> There is little documentation regarding what went on in the Mysteries, but anecdotally, it was an incubator of sorts, where dreams were held with the utmost regard and women were highly valued (author’s notes from a workshop with Jean Houston, 2014). See Joshua Mark’s (2012) article about the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Myth of Er.

to Jung's writings, Hillman's texts, and the human potential movement. These facts were intriguing. If many of our Western myths are patriarchal (hence, the need for revisionist mythology by many feminist writers including Margaret Atwood) and many of the popular researchers into this world of myth are male (with notable exceptions including Larrington [1992] and Murdock [1990]), then I needed to remain alert, despite their earnest scholarship. Adrienne Rich warned me in her classic article, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," that "we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it" (Rich, 1972, p. 19). It is also worth quoting Rich's definition of patriarchy:

A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor—determine what part women shall or shall not play. (Rich, 1986, p. 56)

While confronting, this is worth keeping in mind due to the fact that in *Dream* (as well as the other two plays of the trilogy), gender is a strong and influential construct that overshadows and threatens all three characters. According to Dorschel (2011, p. 3), there were only two types of women represented in the Greek myths and the Bible, and *The Woman*<sup>221</sup> represents one of them: woman as defined by man. The other representation was women who identified with masculine values, such as Eve, who sometimes identified as Oscar Wilde but also was defined by her husband. In the fusion of these roles Eve acted out the outsider myth, the lonely one, ignored by all; after all, she was only an undignified woman, according to her critics (including her husband), divorced and ill. Eve was able to re-write her personal myth but found it hard to live it.

In *Dream*, I was provided the opportunity to construct a revised version of what it was to be a woman. *The Woman* no longer needs to be defined by the men of her family, but instead, she is able

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<sup>221</sup> Mardi in *Home* was also defined by her husband until she followed Keen and Valley-Fox's advice (see next section) and created a new personal myth for herself.

to revise the stories that define her and make visible the invisible discourses and familial patterns that limit her opportunities. The Woman rewrites her personal mythology.

### ***Personal Stories, Personal Myths***

Keen and Valley-Fox (1989) proposed that it is the bringing together of personal, familial, and cultural stories that contribute to our own personal mythology:

We gain full dignity and power as persons only when we create narrative accounts of our lives, dramatize our existence and forge a coherent personal myth that combines elements of our cultural myth and family myth with unique stories for our own experience. (Keen & Valley-Fox, 1989, p. xiv)

For Houston (1996), the stories we live can be traced back to our cultural myths, suggesting that the broad patterns of our lives could be seen in the dramas of the gods. Like Houston, Campbell believed that mythology affords us explanations and guidance when it comes to relating to the divine and understanding our inner selves (Campbell & Moyers, 1991). He also added, and Houston would agree, that myth helps us understand the cosmos as well as understanding relationships with others. These four functions, which he labelled as spiritual, pedagogical, explanatory, and sociological (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 519), were simplified by Stephen Larsen (1998) into two primary purposes: cultural learning and psychological function (1998, Introduction, para. 42). If cultural knowledge also incorporates a numinous lens, then myth has the capacity to profoundly influence our lives on multiple levels. But Krippner (1990) warned that there is danger: “Just as cultural myths can be adaptive or maladaptive, personal myths can construct reality in a manner that facilitates or retards the positive growth of an individual” (Krippner, 1990, p. 138).

The personal stories that make up the life of The Woman have a traditional and well-known structure: she is presented with a problem, she struggles with the problem, and then she overcomes the problem. She rewrites or re-authors her no-longer-useful way of being in the world and in so doing, refigures her way of being, moving from victim of gender-bias within her family of origin to someone who walks away and begins again, allowing a broader sense consciousness to spring into

being: “The source of your mythology [story] is also the source of your motivations, of your imagination, of your emotions, of awareness itself. It is the point at which consciousness springs into being” (Feinstein & Krippner, 1997, *An Invitation. Renew the Dream*, para. 2). The Woman is prepared and organised; she is motivated, imaginative, and aware; she is ready for a new type of consciousness to spring forth.

### ***With Awareness Comes Change***

The first thing I ever learned as a student of psychotherapy and consequently the opening line for my own lecture series on healthy living for artists is the aphorism, “With awareness comes change.” The problem story of gender inequity is often implicit rather than overt. As The Woman's story develops, so does her realisation and acknowledgement of her family's gender politics. With awareness, she is then in a position to re-author her own relationship to those politics and consequently refigure her own sacred story of self (Feinstein & Krippner, 1997).

One of the unanticipated outcomes for The Woman was not just the evolution of her new story (to be written post-PhD),<sup>222</sup> but the resolution of The Woman's subjective beliefs, previously controlled by a patriarchal church, modernist classrooms, and a xenophobic culture. Moreover, in the recreation of her mythical dream, she experiences a connection with what could be called consciousness. In the tunnel, she is suddenly aware of something that has no name, something greater than herself, calling up “fresh perceptions, values and a revitalized sense of purpose” (Feinstein & Krippner, 1997, *An Invitation: Renew the Dream*, para. 1):

Then I let go and fall, down, down, down, until I land where the train tracks should have been.  
But they're not there.  
Something else holds me. Something that has no name.  
It isn't hot. It isn't cold. It is something. It is nothing.  
It seems to have always been there. It seems to know who I am.

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<sup>222</sup> Mercer and I are planning to devise, write, and produce a performance about The Woman (who will have her own name!) and Leadership, and how, by embracing her own leadership style (rather than the patriarchal model of leadership), she can reach her potential as change agent. The story will pick up where *Dream* left off.

(*Dream*, 2017, p. 249)

Her journey, which seems to follow the path of *The Heroine's Journey* articulated by Maureen Murdoch (1990)<sup>223</sup>—quite different from Joseph Campbell's mythic structure of the hero's journey—is a process of her learning to embrace the feminine by acknowledging her own value, and in so doing “heal the deep wound of the feminine” (Murdoch, 1990, p. 3). She has grown up in a chauvinistic environment, and she wants to right that wrong. But in the meantime, she discovers something that changes her irrevocably.

### ***Mythic Awareness***

The Woman's cultural myths had taught her very early on that there are particular behaviours that are acceptable for women to partake in and certain behaviours that are not tolerated (Hale, 2013). As she reformulates herself through her performance of memory and invention, she creates a new version of herself (Kennedy, 2012), somewhere between “fact and fiction, truth and fibs, life and art” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 238). She is a multi-being. There would never be just one personal myth that she is enacting: “Living one's myth doesn't mean simply living one myth. . . . as I am many persons so I am enacting pieces of various myths” (Hillman, 1992, p. 158). What myth was The Woman living before she entered the room at the beginning of the play? A myth created by her culture to serve as a roadmap that she could no longer read? What was behind the door that took so long to open? (Brown, 2013) The dutiful sister? Who had come to bury her brother?<sup>224</sup>

As she redreams her stories of the past, The Woman begins to understand the implicit power and gender games within her family structure that need to change. But how to do this? She needs to differentiate the cultural myths that have been imposed upon her from her autobiographical “truths”

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<sup>223</sup> Murdock was originally a student of Campbell.

<sup>224</sup> In *Antigone Interrupted*, Honig (2013) reports that “The unwritten law told Antigone, and should tell the world, that her brother must receive burial rites, whether the state allows it or not” (p. 254).



relating to her personal mythology, “the loom on which [she] weaves the raw materials of daily experience into a coherent story” (Feinstein & Krippner, 2008, p. 3). This mythic awareness—or mythic consciousness, as Thomas Moore called it (1996)—opens up many possibilities for The Woman. It keeps her imagination “at a level where emotion and meaning have a home but where rational analysis has no entry” (Moore, 1996, p. 233). She needs to look at her experiences through a numinous lens, leaving rational analysis behind.

## **6.9 Research Cycle 2: Consciousness**

In Cycle 2 of the process, I had been reading about Jung (1968) and the power of dreams and his use of Active Imagination. Psychoanalyst Barbara Hannah who studied with Jung, saw active imagination as hard work, and

we undertake it in order to open negotiations with everything that is unknown in our own psyche . . . our whole peace of mind depends on these negotiations; otherwise, we are forever a house divided against itself, distressed without knowing why and very insecure because something unknown in us is constantly opposing us. (“Barbara Hannah on Active Imagination,” 2014)

Active imagination provided the means for the dreams of my childhood to intersect with the writings of my brother, the result being the pivotal scene where The Woman relives her childhood dream, generating a new state of consciousness and experiencing heightened awareness. This was the central dramatic moment of the play, just before The Woman's world tumbles down around her through a cacophony of projected images, before her experience of conscious awakening. Krippner et.al. (2002) suggests that dreams (such as this one) could strengthen and facilitate the necessary move from one personal myth to another. Dreams are there to process new ways of being in the world, helping the dreamer move from the old personal myth into the new. Was her fall through the earth a representation of Persephone who fell to become Queen of the Underworld, a place of depth rather than evil? In Ancient Greece, initiates would enter the underground to generate an altered state of consciousness in their search for wisdom

and their physical descent was seen as their journey towards enlightenment (Ustinova, 2009, p. 238). With The Woman's mythic consciousness awoken, she becomes aware of something greater than herself, she becomes the darkness and the pale patch of pink. She feels the trees, the dam, and the grass. She is aware, yet cannot rationalise it<sup>225</sup> (Moore, 1996), and so it is not surprising that she stays silent.

### ***The World Is Not Outside***

Krippner, in his foreword to Laszlo, Houston, and Dossey's *What Is Consciousness?* (2016), presents this same conflict: the world needs to move from the conventional way of viewing consciousness (such as being housed in the brain and relying on the brain's sensory input) and view the overwhelming evidence that proposes something far more significant: "Conventional thinking limits the parameters of consciousness to sensory input, but Laszlo cites evidence from para-psychological research that indicates that there is communication 'beyond the reach of the eye and ear'" (Krippner, 2016, p. xiv).

"The world is not outside of me, and I am not outside of the world" declared Laszlo (2016, p. 122). Houston (2016) argued that consciousness is far more than just our sensory input, our physiology. Consciousness, she stated, is the quantum field of the cosmos, the basic reality of the world. Larry Dossey developed this idea of open-endedness: "Evidence overwhelmingly suggests that

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<sup>225</sup> On reflection, I observe that all three characters experienced this shift in consciousness, though Mardi and Eve did not have the opportunities to explore its richness like The Woman did. Mardi underwent a shift in consciousness in the king's chamber, where Queen Isis gave her the message that she will journey forward, to love life, and to live with excruciating vulnerability. It did not change her life per se; rather, it enriched it. With Eve, her altered state of consciousness happened when she was in the hospital, when she flew, like Nijinsky, out into the stars and she could see the secrets of the great Australian loneliness, that old disease of hers. Eve, however, did not have the support needed to pursue this shift in consciousness so that it enhanced her life. It was only The Woman, who, through excruciating reflection (signified visually by hundreds of AV images flashing over her as she crossed the floor), was able to move forward with her new knowledge, albeit decades after the original experience.

consciousness is both trans-spatial and trans-temporal, that it is not in space and time . . . brains are separate but minds are not” (Dossey, 2016, p. 63).

The Woman's time in the tunnel as a girl is experienced as outside of time and space. She feels suspended. Finally, feeling peaceful and connected to the earth in a way that she cannot rationalise, she leaves for home, guided by the presence of the trees and the spirits of the dam, “where magic happens according to the Celts” (*Dream*, 2017, p. 248). But once she arrives home, she is silenced. It is not until many years later, when she can relive this pivotal dream, that she is able to awaken and understand the gender bias that had silenced her and, in so doing, closed down not only her creative imagination but also her childlike understanding of consciousness. She had lost her connection to the nature of consciousness. With new awareness through the retelling, she is able to move into a more resilient and transformative way of being in the world; in other words, she finds a way to remap her belonging.

### ***Silenced***

I like to think of creating this character as completing a pilgrimage. It is ironic that the only way The Woman finds the courage to remap her belonging is in the pretext of responding to the needs of her brother, placing herself in the mythical category of female being defined in relation to a male (Dorschel, 2011, p. 3). However, it could also be viewed as a sacred journey or a mythical adventure, whereby she challenges the constructs that controlled her for decades, such as gender inequity and chauvinism. She unpacks, re-authors, and begins her journey of reconfiguring new ways of being in the world.

When she steps through the door at the beginning of the play, she has Cixous and Clément's craving, though it is hidden from her at first:

She has a woman's craving . . . For everything of course, for the Great Universal Everything . . . to this immense, deep desire, vast as the sea, she succumbs, she sleeps . . . she slept, she dreamed . . . The beautiful dream! And how can it be told? (Cixous & Clément, 1996, p. 4)

The archetypal story of her belonging, her Great Universal Everything, unfolds in the house of her youth, a symbol of self, a place of transformation (Ginty, 2000, p. 19). However, as she recalls memories from the early years of her life, she cannot not be sure if they are real or imagined: "But sometimes I find it hard to read my map, My map keeps changing: the blanks, ellipses, the question marks, the bits I can't quite see" (*Dream*, 2017, p. 237).

She compares her situation to the old cartographer:

Hundreds and hundreds of years ago,  
at the edge of the cartographer's map,  
in the area that had not been discovered yet,  
there was a big black hole,  
and they wrote in Latin [*look around room*]  
"Hic Sunt Dracones."  
"There are dragons here."  
Edges that flirt with us . . . things that we suspect are there but can't name  
them. (*Dream*, 2017, p. 237)

But did it matter? The images are there, and the figures are telling her something. She needs to map the big fat hole that stands in the centre of her living room:

I'm feeling . . . like I'm on the outside looking in . . . not hearing anything . . .  
Now. That's a bit like family. What's not said . . . That's what I need to know.  
Ernest Hemingway wrote  
"If a writer omits something because he doesn't know it, then there is a hole in the story."  
A big fat hole in the story. A big fat hole.  
This big fat hole just appeared one day.  
I'd never seen it before.  
And that is why I'm here.  
To map this big fat hole.  
(*Dream*, 2017, p. 238)

It is essential that she solves this problem, the "big fat hole" where it all started. She addresses it by going underground; on her return, however, she is silenced. Mary Beard, in her *London Review of*

*Books* (2014) lecture, reminds us of the silencing of women<sup>226</sup> throughout history, beginning with Homer's Penelope and her silencing by her son: "'Mother,' he says, 'go back up into your quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff . . . speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.' And off she goes, back upstairs" (Beard, 2014, p. 11). In *Dream*, The Woman goes back inside, the silence separating her and her family. Solnit recently wrote about the power of being silenced, suggesting that

Words bring us together, and silence separates us, leaves us bereft of the help or solidarity or just communion that speech can solicit or elicit. Some species of trees spread root systems underground that interconnect the individual trunks and weave the individual trees into a more stable whole that can't so easily be blown down in the wind. Stories and conversations are like those roots. (Solnit, 2, *A Short History of Silence*, para. 4)

In *Home*, Mardi understood the power of trees, her mother reminding her that the redwoods had stood for over 2,000 years, with very shallow root systems, surviving by standing close to each other and interconnecting their roots. Solnit sees conversations to be like these root systems, and in The Woman's family, those conversations simply did not happen. The Woman needed to be sitting at Mawr College and listening to Ursula Le Guin's 1986 Commencement Speech, where she demanded the women to speak:

. . . this is what I want: I want to hear your judgments. I am sick of the silence of women. I want to hear you speaking all the languages, offering your experience as your truth, as human truth, talking about working, about making, about unmaking, about eating, about cooking, about feeding, about taking in seed and giving out life, about killing, about feeling, about thinking; about what women do; about what men do; about war, about peace; about who presses the buttons and what buttons get pressed and whether pressing buttons is in the long run a fit occupation for human beings. There's a lot of things I want to hear you talk about. (Le Guin, 1986)

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<sup>226</sup> Adrienne Rich talks about the silencing and the "invisibilising" of women, in her essay "Invisibility in Academe" (1984, 1986). She writes: "But invisibility is a dangerous and painful condition . . . when those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you . . . when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors (Rich, 1986, Chapter 13, para. 2).

The Woman needed to speak and she needed to be heard. She came to the house of her childhood to reconnect with her younger self before she was silenced. She entered an altered state of consciousness and she returned changed.

### **6.10 Cycle 3: Final Inquiry Cycle**

In the second season, the final research cycle of *Dream*, I needed to hear something different. I wanted to hear my brother speak honestly about his dying. I needed to hear words that would never be said in real life, words that would press Le Guin's (1986) buttons. As the creative team, we felt that we had let ourselves off lightly in the first season, and, after reflection, I'm clear as to why we thought this. My brother's book was communicating far more than I had wanted to see, or even acknowledge. His book was a personal myth, his guide book, yet so far, I had only used it as a story. I did not venture into the contentious field of consciousness because, like The Woman, I simply was not ready or perhaps I felt I was not worthy. And, it seems, neither was he. My brother wrote in code, and I needed to deconstruct and re-interpret the code.

#### ***A Scene of Potential***

The Brother, after he has died, could have talked directly to his audience, or his voice could have been broadcast through the auditorium, or as words on a screen, or as a note under the seat. He could have said something like this:

After breathing my last breath, I left my mortal body and moved into what could only be described as an extension of my being "that held no parallel" (Laszlo, 2016, p. 108). I saw myself as the same thinking self but with enormous capacities far beyond what I was ever capable of in my corporeal self. It was as though I stepped into the light and I could now touch both sides of the world. [This last line was the final line of my brother's book.] (author's *Dream* rehearsal notes, May 2017)

Houston's teachings also refer to this human capacity, arguing that people have an enormous facility when we are alive on this earth—we do not have to wait until we die. She wrote:

Our creative imaginations are truly divine . . . it affects the very blueprint of reality . . . We appear to live in a universe of open-ended potential at each and every moment. We are partners in what is being dreamed up. How our universe manifests depends on how we both individually and collectively observe it. The real power then is in the viewing. (Houston, 2016, p. 9)

I believe this was exactly what my brother was communicating in his book, but I was not ready to see it initially. The responsibility rests with the individual regarding how they perceive their world. It was through the reading, writing/performing, and reflecting that new meaning regarding an understanding of consciousness emerged. I had observed my brother as he deteriorated over a relatively short amount of time. Yet, his spirit was always shining through, just like the shining moments that he wrote about throughout his book (Brown, 2013) and the shining moments that writers mention when discussing consciousness (Dossey, 2013; Donfrancesco, 2009; Moore, 2014; Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011).

Returning to the possible scenarios for the play, rather than have The Brother speak, we decided that simplicity was the most powerful choice. We also wanted to keep the story as open as possible, so that the ending could be interpreted in multiple ways. The Woman, in a new scene used in the 2017 season, addresses the spirit of The Brother, reliving the last moments when she arrived at the farm and saw him lying on the floor:

I want to go back.  
I want to go back before you were sick,  
“when I didn’t worry about you,  
have to think about you;  
didn’t have to love you so much. (*Dream*, 2017, p. 251)

The Woman's clarity, particularly in that last line, gives her the power to find some sort of understanding, some kind of resolution. Once she says this confession of sorts, she cannot go back; she cannot go home again. She crosses the floor as her world reconfigures itself around her, represented by hundreds of images flashing on the walls of the stage. Once at the door, she witnesses

the sun rise, a new day, something that surfaces in each of the trilogy plays. There is always a new day, a new beginning, if we are open to it.

### **6.11 My New Map of a Home of Belonging**

This new exploration of consciousness moved me, the researcher, towards a deeper understanding of the map of my home of belonging. It did not only consist of bricks and mortar, although I loved my home; it wasn't just family and friends, although I held them in high regard; it wasn't artmaking either, as it was for Eve. The map of my home of belonging crystallised once I began to understand the spirit, the soul of the universe, that universal consciousness that connects every living being. This way of seeing the world transported me above the politics of being silenced and the pain of being "invisibilised." It did not negate these things but helped me rise above them and engage with something that was not black or white, male or female, or any form of dualistic thinking. It was a new way of looking at the world.

Robert Atkinson (2017) has summed up clearly and succinctly this need for change. He wrote in his latest book *The Story of Our Time* how our present story, the one we have lived for so long, has lost its power and, "most alarmingly, its hope for the future" (Atkinson, 2017, Introduction, para. 5). Jung is then quoted, pronouncing that "Our myth has become mute, and gives no answers" (Atkinson, 2017, Introduction, para. 7). Many scholars (e.g., Atkinson, 2017; Houston, 2016; Laszlo, 2016; Dossey, 2016) believe that the crisis we face as a world is a crisis of consciousness. David Chalmers, an Australian philosopher who researches consciousness, has called it "the hard problem" (Horgan, 2016), which became a catch-cry for decades, because no scientist or philosopher seemed to really know how to define it. It was most often explained in mystical terms, which is the angle that is of interest in this research. Laszlo (2016) saw the need to change our thinking, to embrace a



transformation of this thing called consciousness, what Chalmers once described as “the feeling of being inside your head looking out—of having a soul” (quoted in Burkeman, 2015). Laszlo (2016) extended on this idea of soul, emphasising the connectedness of consciousness, believing that we are not only biologically united but also spiritually, and there is an urgency for us to move away from the consciousness of duality (and for the purposes of this analysis, I highlight the duality of male and female), and embrace a consciousness of connection. bell hooks offered a provocation that moves this idea forward:

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interactions. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. (hooks, 2015, p. xiv)

hooks argued that a feminist revolution alone will not create a world of equality (racism, class elitism, and imperialism still need to be addressed), “But it will make possible for us to be fully self-actualised females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realising our dreams of freedom and justice living the truth that we are all ‘created equal’” (hooks, 2015, p. xiv). I interpret her provocation as a move towards embracing female values,<sup>227</sup> that of equity and compassion, a profound shift of consciousness. This change embraces what hooks called a “beloved community” and Houston called a “culture of kindness”:

We are at that stage where the real work of humanity begins. This is the time and place where we partner Creation in the recreation of ourselves, in the restoration of the biosphere, and in the assuming of a new kind of culture—what we might term a *culture of kindness—where we live daily life in such a way as to be re-connected and charged* . . . (Houston, quoted in *Rising Women, Rising World*, 2016, my italics)

Therefore, we have come full circle: the social constructionist philosophy that I chose to frame this research (because it was such a strong personal philosophy) now moves the inquiry from an

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<sup>227</sup> Emeritus Professor Wilson at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, believes that the values of women are the values we need in our exhausted world: “Female values are all that can save humanity. Why? It is because women give birth and understand the earth’s rhythms; because of their endurance as mothers; and because they have been on the receiving end of violence for so long. In this way they have accumulated the values needed now—not only for survival, but for regeneration of the exhausted earth” (Wilson, quoted in *Rising Women, Rising World*, 2016).

accessible way of looking at things to a crucial tool for the deconstruction of duality and an embracing of “a culture of kindness”, “a beloved community,” resulting in a shift in consciousness.

## **6.12 Conclusion**

As a result of experiencing her shift in consciousness in the tunnel, The Woman was able to build a personal myth that guided her, orientated her, and awoke her understanding of what was possible, introducing her to the mysteries of life. She was the heroine of her own myth and, after many years of not knowing, she finally followed her own path, a path linked to every other path in the universe, just like the roots of the redwoods connected to each other.

Our consciousness grows throughout our life: “Shifting our awareness shifts our level of consciousness, which shifts our sense of identity” (Atkinson, 2017, Chapter 1, consciousness Changes with Experience, para. 9). Once we allow ourselves to be aware of this universal consciousness, the interconnection of all things, a collective wisdom that connects all beings, our worlds begin to change. No longer are we separate. We are together in our home of belonging.

## ROOM 7

### CODA

#### 7.1 Introduction

The desire to go home, according to Solnit (2008), “is a desire to be whole” and to know where you stand, “to be the point of intersection of all the lines drawn through all the stars, to be the constellation-maker and the center of the world” (Solnit, 2008, p. 167). Not everyone needs to be at the centre of the world, but everyone needs to create their own map in order to know where one belongs: “human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 522). This chapter’s purpose is to draw the resultant map of the *Trilogy*, with the intention, or the longing, to find the points of intersection where all the elements come together. I will endeavour to create this map of belonging made up of enduring interpersonal relationships, both with place and with those who inhabit that space, be it mythological, psychological, relational, or spiritual. To be the constellation-maker of one’s own life requires courage and commitment. Having explored the methodological approaches and theoretical implications of the works throughout this document, I will now summarise what has transpired, presenting a Coda as conclusion, before discussing what will move the work forward towards new ways of being in the world.

In my process to communicate *The Belonging Trilogy* journey, I decided not to engage with Hannula et al.’s (2005) challenging provocation of “Why is not the art work in itself sufficient to count as research? Why do we accept the hegemony of the word?” (p. 119). Instead, I have observed that by engaging in “the word,” I have created an opportunity to pause and reflect on years of creative output. This extensive reflection has allowed me to deeply consider my processes of becoming and provided me with a map of integration. Jennings stated that “we are in desperate need of a pedagogy

of belonging, one that is able to invite diverse people from every walk of life . . . into a shared project of lifelong learning together” (Jennings, 2017, p. 59). And if Barbara Walker was correct, then “the Old Woman—who acknowledges no master, may be our best guide in this long dark labyrinthine spiritual journey” (Walker, 2013, p. 14). I gladly took on this self-appointed task as a senior artist in our theatre community, to awaken stories of agentic capacity. Salman Rushdie (1991) in his essay “One Thousand Days in a Balloon,” asserted that we need to have power over our stories “because those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts” (Hassumam, 2002, p. 104). In order to gain power over my stories, I deconstructed and retold many small, personal narratives, connecting them to much larger experiences of mythological dimensions, in order to make sense of my place in the world (Chalquist & Elliot, 2009).

Journeys towards agentic capacity, what Rushdie referred to as having power over the stories that dominate our lives, were demonstrated in all three plays. The three scripts and performances became sites of transformation to be witnessed and experienced by audiences, with the intent of demonstrating one’s capacity to transform and generate new meaning, and in so doing, recreate maps of belonging and thicken one’s sense of home.

## **7.2 Research Outcomes**

The research has several strong outcomes, both artistic and pragmatic. The artistic outcome is a trilogy of award-winning productions, with three new performance texts written and performed over a period of six years. From and through these texts, I was able to re-position and re-author my personal stories, addressing and shifting my own ontological insecurities in a susceptible world. In thickening these new stories of belonging through re-authoring and re-visioning the notions of place

and space, time, mythology and relationship, all the time growing a deeper understanding of consciousness, there was a growing appreciation of one's agentic home. The surprising outcome, however, was the pragmatic Relational Impulse Cultural (RIC) Process, a new approach to working in the rehearsal room. There is a pressing need to understand one's sense of belonging in an industry that is particularly gender biased, focused on individuality rather than ensemble, and personal gain rather than community engagement. The RIC Process is one of collaborating creatively while learning vibrant ways of mapping one's belonging as not only artists, but social artists. The RIC Process encourages the performer to develop mature leadership competencies and self-agency, an agentic home.<sup>228</sup>

### 7.3 Four Factors of Belonging

As my research developed, so did my appreciation and understanding of four factors:

1. An appreciation of the impact that space/place has on belonging and home, including community and the environment. Space/place was explored in all three plays, its importance symbolised by the three very different, yet fully realised, set designs.
2. An awareness of relationship (familial/community) and its changing impact on belonging and home. We witnessed this in all three plays, where relationships were fluid and impacted on the character's trajectory, sometimes to great detriment.
3. A knowledge of mythology and personal stories, and how they were revised and restoried to create an imaginal spatial and temporal home of belonging for each character; in particular, for *Mardi* and *The Woman*. Eve was more problematic, "lost

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<sup>228</sup> It is of interest that presently, abuse and harassment charges are emerging regarding some of the most successful people in the entertainment world. The statistics are staggering, with the *Sydney Morning Herald's* headline of November 1, 2017, stating: "'Happening in full view': Up to 40 Per Cent Report Sexual Harassment in Actors' Survey Yet Rarely Reported" (Cuthbertson, 2017). The survey can be accessed at <http://surveys.alliance.org.au/index.php/956666?lang=en>. The intention with RIC is that actors can, through agentic action, stand up and create a safe work environment by demanding from their peers what we have traditionally thought of as "good manners."

in the vastness of . . . [the] world” (Solnit, 2013, Chapter 1. Apricots. para. 1).<sup>229</sup>

Mythology was highly valued in the creation of the plays, engaging with stories that problematised and eventually clarified the character’s journey.

4. An understanding of the power of ritual to heal and support new stories of belonging, explored in particular in *Home* and in *Dream*. In *Eve*, we did not engage with overt ritual (as we were exploring unbelonging); however, despite this deliberate choice, a ritual action of sorts occurred in the final scene, as Eve’s children crept in, opened their mother’s mouth, and “pulled out planet after planet after planet until the whole universe lit up” (*Eve*, 2017, p. 202).

#### **7.4 Remapping My Belonging in Order to Embrace Change**

Considering myself a postmodern therapist, I believe that as multi-beings, we are constructed, not made, and that we create our worlds rather than discover them. I also believe that we live in a world of implicit power structures, and that social, political, religious, and economic discourses keep us self-regulated. Consequently, we can forget that we have the ability to re-map what has gone before (as The Woman and Mardi did) and therefore we remain stuck in our old story (as Eve did perhaps, at least for a while), usually because it is known and comfortable in its uncomfortableness.

As this was an exploration of the postmodern self, elements constantly changed throughout the process. We had people working together from around Australia and field trips that took us across the world. A gentle irony was that much of the research was conducted away from my home. I visited Egypt and Greece in search of myth and Israel and Palestine in search of the meaning of

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<sup>229</sup> The beginning of Solnit’s (2013) *The Faraway Nearby* is a cry for story “What’s your story?” she begins, “It’s all in the telling. Stories are compasses and architecture; we navigate by them, we build our sanctuaries and our prisons out of them, and to be without a story is to be lost in the vastness of a world that spreads in all directions like arctic tundra or sea ice. To love someone is to put yourself in their place, we say, which is to put yourself in their story, or figure out how to tell yourself their story.”

home; I tested *Home* creative developments at Collaborative Conferences run by Houston Galveston Institute and Taos Institute in USA and Mexico; and I presented *Home* at Theatre of the Oppressed Conference in Chicago and a few years later presented *He Dreamed a Train* in Omaha. Even in Australia, we straddled the shores, rehearsing and performing in both Brisbane and Perth. Finally, the reflexive process demanded by this exegesis occurred in Finland, New Zealand, and Tasmania.

Throughout my writing, I never intended to set out to prove something to be true or false. Rather, it was my intention to explore the ideas and hunches associated with home and belonging, for without belonging, there is no home. I made visible my own vulnerable positions in domestic life, artistic life, and therapeutic life. The work demanded that I assume an ontological commitment to understanding myself. This affected my positioning in the world and provided me new ways of seeing, opening up innovative pathways, different maps of fresh topographies. Susan Finley (2014) suggested that:

Good critical arts-based research grasps our imaginations, grabs a hold of our souls, and unabashedly strives to affect our very ways of living, being, and co-being, as researchers, as social scientists, as people. It transforms our identities and gives new ways of expressing our differently evolving identities. (p. 531)

Performative research was my way of opening liminal or in-between transitional spaces, in order to transform and communicate my evolving identity, creating what was “not yet” there (Finley 2014, p. 532) or what I did not know was there. In so doing, I evolved my understanding of who I was becoming, and consequently provided opportunities for others to do the same. I had been working and studying at a postgraduate level for many years, delving into postmodern theory, exploring contemporary performance, and applying social constructionist therapies. Bringing my disciplines together seemed not only a logical choice, but also a creative one, providing a strong philosophical scaffolding on which to build personal, social, and political insights into the re-positioning of myself as artist, mother, wife, and therapist.

### 7.5 Three Poetic Performances with Themes of Belonging

Having a worldview of narrative-based and narrative-focused values, different stories represent different realities and are not just a different perspective of the *same* story (Parry & Doan, 1994; Gergen 1994). By using three performances as my methodology and engaging with multiple action research cycles, coupled with my own developing RIC Process, I interrogated the concept of belonging, un-belonging, and belonging in transition. In so doing, I was able to extend beyond the written narrative and spoken performances into a world of liminality, that in-between space where transformation takes place. I engaged with re-storying place, re-authoring relationship, and revising relevant mythology, using rituals of mourning, rituals of mindfulness, and rituals of performance. The language of theatre allowed me to embrace the poetic, to express much more than just words. Brady (2009) understood poetic methods as an amplification of the subject, calling for self-conscious participation: “Instead of being inverted like a telescope for a distancing effect, poetics turns it back around for magnified encounters with life as lived, up close and personal” (p. xi).

Presenting my research as poetic performance broadened my horizons and those of my audience: I re-created, re-invented, and re-dreamed stories from my past, tapping into my perceptions, awakening my emotional echoes, engaging the body in motion, embracing temporality, time, and space.

Belonging could be written about rather than performed, but I needed to experience it, perceive it, sense it, enter into the landscape of home, in order to gain an embodied understanding of belonging, not just an academic understanding of what it might mean. By physically and robustly embracing the characters that I had written—Mardi as a representation of self; Eve as the archetypal artist within; and The Woman, as an example of the socialisation of the individual when in transition—I allowed my audience to put down their need to logically understand the concepts of belonging and not-



belonging and embrace poetic illusion and aesthetics, images, thoughts, and emotions. As visual artist Olafur Eliasson proffered, “Art does not show people what to do, yet engaging with a good work of art can connect you to your senses, body, and mind. It can make the world *felt*. And this felt feeling may spur thinking, engagement, and even action” (Eliasson, 2016). My intent was to engage my audiences emotionally, physically, and intellectually with three different worlds, three different time spans, three different locations, and three different myths in order to explore homes of belonging.

### **7.5.1 *Home***

*Home* was made up of stories that moved me towards understanding the unfolding of my own map of belonging. The play was an exploration of my personal, generative, and transformative shifts that had transpired since studying collaborative constructionist philosophy, a move from believing in the “bounded self” towards an appreciation of myself as a multi-being, “relational self.” This involved a shift away from modernist thinking towards a postmodern way of being. The stories of the bounded self highlighted not-belonging and ruptured family situations. The stories that emerged when we devised *Home* and acted relationally welcomed a connection with community, family, and friends and an aliveness to the power of myth and ritual.

The play *Home* therefore, became an archetypal journey of the bounded self towards the relational self with the support of mythology, world stories, ritual, and the participation of audience members. But was that enough? The end result of *Home* was a deeper understanding of my personal stories and how the relational self and mythology enhanced and enriched that journey, but I felt that something was missing. If we focus on our relational selves, embracing the great stories of old, and dream them on to empower our lives with personal myths, then we can have agency regarding constructing our home of belonging. But I was still unsure what belonging actually meant. I felt that I needed to

explore what it was to not belong, because for too long I had a fierce tension between artistry and domestic life, which ruptured my sense of belonging every now and then. This is why I wrote *Eve*. The character of Eve was a remarkable example of the bounded self, or so I thought, but in the adventure of writing and re-writing *Eve* across three seasons, I found something surprising.

### **7.5.2 *Eve***

*Eve* was an examination initially of what I thought not-belonging would look like, but by the time we finished our third season, five years later, I realised that I had misjudged and underestimated her. Eve is not one to compromise. Using humour as her shield, and her vast network of imaginary friends, Eve creates her own map of belonging, albeit very different from my own, incorporating her artistic ancestors, myths, and personal stories to thicken her place in the world. By the third season, Eve presents herself as a woman who knows her own mind. This does not emerge from the lines per se; rather, from the *embodiment* of her lines—her comic appearance, her ability to nod and wink at the audience, enrolling them in some of the ridiculous games she plays. “Do not take me too seriously,” she infers when she winks, or holds a look with an audience member a little longer than comfort allows. In so doing, Eve taught me to accept difference, to appreciate that we all carry distinctive values at different times in our lives. This was something I intellectually understood, and thought I modelled, but *Eve* required me to embody this sense of other, not just analyse it. And in doing so, I found a more comfortable fit, finding some sort of peace between the world of artistry and the world of domesticity.

### **7.5.3 *He Dreamed a Train***

*Dream* opened up entire new worlds of knowledge, more so in the second season. I finally came full circle: the social constructionist paradigm that I chose to frame *Dream* now moved the research from a convenient and inclusive way of looking at things to a crucial tool for the deconstruction of duality.

I believe that this is what my brother's life message was, and by embracing a reworking of the Myth of Er, I was able to see things I could not see before. The Myth of Er guided me, oriented me, and awoke within me the mysteries of life and death. As we re-authored the stories of my youth, I was awoken to the concept of connectedness in a visceral and instinctive way, a more spiritual way: the path we follow is linked to every other path in the universe. Consciousness grows throughout our life and it is the shifting of our awareness that alters our level of consciousness and in so doing modifies our identity (Atkinson, 2017). Once I gave myself permission to embrace the idea of universal consciousness, the collective wisdom that connected everyone, my world began to change. No longer was I separate; I was in relationship but not just with other people, but with the entire world at large. There is enormous freedom in this: the embracing of every mother, father, sister, brother, other. The embracing of the displaced, young, old, the in-between. The embracing of the natural world. Our map is a shared map if only we released our need to control it. As Baumeister and Leary stated, we have "a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments" (1995, p. 522), and this is evidenced within *Dream*.<sup>230</sup> I can now add that these connections are not just interpersonal but also embrace what Macy and Brown (2014) believe is essential to the survival of our world, what they called "work that reconnects," the central purpose being to "bring people into new relationship with their world" (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 65). *Dream*, in particular, focuses on this relational connection with nature,<sup>231</sup> and it is an area that I will explore further in the years to come, heeding Macy's warning that unless we take action that can map "ways into our innate vitality and determination to take part in the self-healing of our world" (Macy in Macy & Brown, 2014, p. xxiii),

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<sup>230</sup> Interconnectedness is a theme in all three plays because without it, we cannot maintain relationship, one of the essential learnings regarding belonging.

<sup>231</sup> Although not overtly central to the *Dream* themes of grief and loss, the significance of the earth's power regarding The Woman's consciousness in the tunnel was profound and life changing, and the menacing threat of the bushfire kept the supremacy of nature at the foreground.

we are in trouble.<sup>232</sup> The RIC Process is an insightful and generative way of mapping this “innate vitality.”

## 7.6 RIC Process

Creative inquiry can catch the researcher in most surprising ways. As Philip Gerard (2017) wrote in *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers*, “The very act of research can lead you in creative directions, can help you discover not just a subject worth writing about but a way of writing about it” (p. 22). As described by Gerard, “It’s the *not* knowing that always gets me, the surprise waiting at the end of the road” (Gerard, 2017, p. xii). To my surprise, the RIC Process grew, imperceptibly at first, alongside the *Trilogy*’s creative work and was then tested and refined at the QUT Acting Academy.

In engaging in the *Trilogy* process, *ImpulseTraining*—the outcome of my Master of Arts—morphed into the RIC Process. RIC is a way of working with actors using embodied means, to ensure that they develop a consciousness of self-agency and an expanded sense of who they are becoming. In so doing, they have high regard for not only their own lives, but the lives of others and the life of the world in which we live.<sup>233</sup>

### 7.6.1 Background of RIC Process

Building on *ImpulseTraining*, the RIC Process became what Harper (2008) called a complementary text, evolving at the same time as the *Trilogy* productions developed. RIC gives actors permission to

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<sup>232</sup> Solnit has taken this concept further, believing that the way we are disregarding our world (resulting in climate change) is an act of violence. She purports that we need to change the language that we are hiding behind: “Once we call it by name, we can start having a real conversation about our priorities and values. Because the revolt against brutality begins with a revolt against the language that hides that brutality” (Solnit, 2014, para. 17). The importance of language use cannot be overstated, and has been a central focus throughout the *Dream* experience, as well as in other two plays. The languaging of new ways forward, the embracing of good manners and the implementation of collaborative values have been deeply considered during the process of creating these works.

<sup>233</sup> Macy and Brown wrote that “When we establish a broader body awareness and a deepening of our senses, we feel both more joy and more pain” (2014, p. 301), what I believe to be a new vitality and a strong sense of self-agency.

move away from “functioning at the level of a social façade” (Philipson & Gary, 2015, p. 1), which can keep them ostensibly safe yet denies genuine connectedness. This experience of disconnection often occurs in the world of theatre, where actors perform with a sense of deep affiliation, but as soon as the season is over, this connection often ceases. There is a belief in the theatre that “you are only as good as your last gig” and I would add that, to a certain extent, “you are only as connected as your last show.” RIC draws upon this simple, yet profound instruction: “Think with everything we have. We have to think with our muscles. We have to think, as Einstein said, with feelings in our muscles. Think with everything” (Bohm, in Jaworski, 2011, p. 82). In the last chapter, I discussed the need for a shift in consciousness, an embracing of the realisation that we are part of everything: “I am part of the world. The world is not outside of me, and I am not outside of the world. The world is in me, and I am in the world” (Laszlo, 2016. p. 122). This way of thinking, doing, and feeling is inspirational and connects the performer to the world on a profound level, creating an interconnectivity that brings with it a sense of belonging. RIC encourages the actor to think and feel relationally, to value bodily knowing and inner emotions. At the same time, the actor is encouraged to embrace an intellectual and vigorous reflexive practice, and in so doing, learn and expand their own inner wisdom in conjunction with the acumen of others. In fact, RIC could be framed as a life-long collaborative research project, with the objective of mapping and plotting one’s artistic journey towards an evolved understanding of belonging and identity in relation to those around them. RIC is an empowering and rewarding process requiring trust and honesty. The point of difference with this way of working is that it is not just for the actor when they are *on* stage. It is a collaborative and relational approach to living and creating, both within the rehearsal room and in the community, providing the actor new ways of locating themselves in relation to others, while generating positive change with transformative futures.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> It is important to note that although I am talking about RIC in relation to actors, it is as relevant for multiple creatives. As a director, I utilise RIC; as a writer, I employ RIC; and as a facilitator, I use RIC. It is not confined to just the actor; it is a way of being.

RIC consists of many stages, contributing to vital, compassionate, and responsible artists-as-leaders. This way of working, however, cannot turn wine into blood, or chalk into cheese, because, as Herman Hesse (a favourite author of my generation) so clearly stated, “I can give you nothing that has not already its own being within yourself” (Hesse, 2001, p. 204).<sup>235</sup> In other words, these processes awaken what is already there, but is not known yet.

The RIC Process is written up in a workbook (see Appendix 4 for more detail), but will be further developed following the submission of this PhD, with the intention of publishing in 2018. The workbook initially guides the actor at work, but more importantly, incorporates processes that could be useful in the transitional times between gigs, when the mental health of the artist can be compromised. The workbook provides the actor with a strong philosophical and mythical lens to explore the multiplicity of relationships within the script and within their day-to-day living. Using the RIC Process, actors are able to create and re-story personal mythology, not just for their characters but for themselves, building on their strengths in order to create their own unique sense of relational belonging. As Vicki Bell (1999) pointed out, “one does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction” (Bell, 1999, p. 3). These levels of abstraction are brought to the fore in RIC, making overt the invisible discourses that impact the actor and are highlighted within a constructionist philosophy, such as gender and culture, power, language and multiplicity.

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<sup>235</sup> In his iconic *Steppenwolf*, Hesse articulates that “It is the world of your own soul that you seek. Only within yourself exists that other reality for which you long. I can give you nothing that has not already its own being within yourself. I can throw open to you no picture gallery but your own soul. All I can give you is the opportunity, the impulse, the key. I help you to make your own world visible. That is all” (Hesse, 2001, p. 204).

### 7.6.2 How RIC Emerged from the *Trilogy* Research

The RIC concepts were cultivated and refined within multiple demographics:

1. While working on my Master's research, I developed an embodied framework called *ImpulseTraining*, a way of working with actors on the floor where they were encouraged to trust the in-between space, attentive to what is happening in the room and responding to it in surprising ways.<sup>236</sup>
2. Once in the world of *The Belonging Trilogy*, we incorporated *ImpulseTraining* within the rehearsal. However, I realised as the months went on that it was not expansive enough. I was discovering things in the writing studio that excited me, things such as the power of consciousness, yet *ImpulseTraining* only gave me an avenue to develop my practical performance. I wanted to incorporate this practical way of working with a more *transcendent* approach.
3. These steps were then extended and tested at the Queensland Academies of Creative Industries (QACI), where I co-devised, co-developed, and co-directed a youth version of *The Belonging Trilogy* for 22 young acting students in 2015, in collaboration with Benjamin Knapton and Travis Ash, the team from *He Dreamed a Train*. A summary of the QACI process can be found in Appendix 5, showing how the process enriched the content.
4. This was followed a few months later by a two-week intensive at QUT Acting Academy, where I devised and delivered a customised cultural program using the RIC Process for the first-year acting cohorts in 2016, 2017, and will again in 2018.

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<sup>236</sup> I began to develop *ImpulseTraining* after working with leading US choreographer and dancer Deborah Hay in 2005 in Denmark, where she engaged us with her Perceptual Practice process.

Four different groups of people—our own ensemble, QACI, and two different cohorts at QUT—contributed to the thickening of the RIC Process.

### **7.6.3 RIC: A Practice of Connectedness**

The RIC approach can be seen as a continuing cycle, similar to Macy and Brown's model of connectedness. Macy and Brown (2014) proposed a never-ending circle, a spiral that reconnects humanity and moves towards healing and world sustainability. Their process begins with gratitude, moves into honouring what is wrong in the world, seeing it with new eyes, and then going forth. RIC's never-ending cycle dreams on these steps for the rehearsal room and, coupled with constructionist processes, begins with gratitude and ends with a multifaceted understanding of how to construct one's home of belonging.

### **7.6.4 RIC and Circular Leadership**

As my constructionist arts practice developed and strengthened throughout my doctoral research, so too did an enriched way of being in the rehearsal room, with an emerging awareness of the concept of higher consciousness.<sup>237</sup> I became interested in actors being called to do more than just create performances, but stepping into the shoes of what Houston (2012) called social artistry. Houston suggested that leadership in today's society is lacking, unable to deal with the complexities of the world. She argued that the social artist can make a difference by providing inspiration to help people achieve their potential: "Social artistry is the art of enhancing human capacities in the light of social complexity. It seeks to bring new ways of thinking, being and doing to social challenges in the world" (Houston, 2012, p. 78).

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<sup>237</sup> This adventure into consciousness was a direct result of The Woman's experience in the tunnel in *He Dreamed a Train* and was expanded on in Room 6.



RIC has the potential to awaken within the participants an awareness of their personal responsibilities, not just as artists in search of excellence, but as social artists committed to bringing new ways of thinking, being, and doing into the world. This responsibility need not be in the manner of a designated leader; rather, artists can be proactive in activating their leader-as-link potential, rather than leader-as-rank. Gloria Steinem, in Macy and Brown's seminal book *Coming Back to Life* (2014), affirmed that: "Altogether, we are changing from a society whose organizing principle is the pyramid or hierarchy to one whose image is a circle. Humans are linked, not ranked. Humans and the environment are linked not ranked" (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 5).

By linking together, we create a community of strength and resilience. RIC moves the artist away from the pyramid model of leading, which is still the traditional style of leadership within the theatre industry, to a more circular way of managing: linking the participants, leading from the middle, valuing collaborative practice, and encouraging responsibility. This was the way we led each other in the many rehearsal rooms of *The Belonging Trilogy*, and we found it to be effective and efficient, a valuing of each other's gifts and strengths.

### **7.7 How the Lens on Leadership Emerged**

When I was conducting a series of workshops designed for QUT acting students in 2016, I realised that I was missing a great opportunity: I was coaching the actors from the side as they engaged in *Impulsework*. The question passed through my mind: What would it be like if I asked one of the actors to co-coach with me? I had lectured in leadership models for the Master of Counselling course at QUT, so I had some experience with different types of collaborative leadership models. I decided to follow my hunch and invite one of the actors to join me. The first time I did it, I invited an actor who was reticent about joining in the *Impulsework* and was sitting on the side of the stage. She tentatively agreed after I suggested that I would whisper in her ear what she needed to say to her

cohort. This reminded me of how I whispered in the ears of my audience members when they joined me on stage in the *Home* performances. This bodily memory, this connection between my role as actor and my role as teacher, was strong, one informing and enriching the other. And as I reflect on this, I am aware that the therapist also overlaps with the artist who intersects with the teacher. All of my multi-beings come together, informing and enhancing each other. In a unique way, they move me closer to belonging, either on stage, in the therapy room, or within the academy. When I saw the young actor gaining confidence each time she issued an instruction, I suggested she “carry on.” And she did. Suddenly, one of the shyest members of the ensemble was calling out instructions such as “Locomotive Movement!” “Axial Movement!” and “Isolation!”<sup>238</sup> This experience appeared to be a turning point for the student. She never sat on the side lines again. Building on my initial hunch as the workshops progressed, every time the actors and I had a lesson, we not only talked about leadership (concepts such as leading from the middle; stepping up to your potential; collaborative leadership models; circular leadership models), but we practiced leadership, either overtly as the “coach” on the side line or silently while doing the *ImpulseTraining* on the floor. Leadership moved from being a noun to a verb.

### **7.8 Reflective Practice: Is RIC a Verb That Takes Us Home?**

RIC could be described as a verb, a doing word, a concept of action. On stage, during the first week of many rehearsals, actors often name their actions,<sup>239</sup> adding a “to” in front of a verb. Each line needs a beat action and each scene requires a scenic action— “to amplify” or “to interrogate.”

Although “to RIC” goes against our sense of what sounds right, what would it look like? It would be relational and dialogical action, with a deep sense of conscious awareness. “To RIC” would be open,

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<sup>238</sup> These instructions were borrowed from Australian dancer Gerrard Sibbritt’s *Basic Elements of Movement*, a method he devised for dancers after being a ballet dancer for several decades. I had worked with him throughout the 1970s and early 1980s and found his system worked extremely well with actors.

<sup>239</sup> Stella Adler, my acting coach, believed, as did all the great coaches, that acting is doing, and therefore it was important to spend a lot of time studying actions. For more information on action playing, see Adler (2000) *The Art of Acting*.

co-operative, and responsive. “To RIC” would be adventurous, with an ability to take risk. Moreover, “to RIC” would make a sense of belonging on the stage.

What if there was a better word to describe this ability to bring belonging onto the stage and into the life of the creative? I tentatively offer the word “Home-ing,” for it seems to hold the timbre desire within it at the same time as action. I define it as a fluid sense of being able to re-create or re-map our home of belonging, wherever we are and whatever our needs. Homing spelt without the “e” is an adjective that describes how an animal returns to their home place after being away.

I have retained the “e” to distinguish and emphasise the importance of the artist who is home-ing, incorporating three embodied environments:

1. their internal landscape: their feelings and emotions, their thoughts, and desire;
2. their external landscape: the place/space where they feel at home and;
3. their soulful place/space: their sense of acute awareness and their sense of connectedness, of relationality both to others and something greater than themselves.

If home is defined as both internal and external landscapes (see Home Theory in Room 2), then it makes sense to keep this unusual spelling to highlight the meaning and potential of our home of belonging. Home-ing could be the action that moves us towards enriched relationships, both on and off the stage, real or imagined. When home-ing, we could be aware of the multiplicity of relationships around us. When home-ing, we could become more resilient and more politically and socially aware, being trained to focus on invisible cultural, social, and political discourses that often sit unnoticed, including gender imbalance, diversity issues, inequality, etc. We could become, if we wanted to, extremely curious, vibrant, vital beings.

Keeping this game of words alive, how do they relate to the *Trilogy*? Did Mardi, Eve, and The Woman reach an understanding of home-ing? It is clear that Mardi found a place where she knew she belonged, because she understood that belonging was fluid and therefore home was too. The Woman also found a space, despite the ruptures, despite the obstacles and handicaps, where she could, with curiosity and effort, create belonging. Eve chose a different register, however, remaining with her beloved planets rather than grounding herself in place. Could that be an option? Could that be Eve's own sense of belonging perhaps?

If we were home-ing, would we become more connected, grateful, and enriched by place? Would we embrace life as a vital process of meaning-making? Would we become more aware of the fluidity of home and belonging? Would we have a deeper capacity to incorporate art forms, nature (wild and tamed) and community, literally and figuratively, into our lives? I hope so.

Macy's (2014) spiral of re-connectedness could continually remind us that with awareness and gratitude, we could see with new eyes and create work that would help enrich our world. We could adapt conceptual roadmaps enhanced by multiple stories as a means of creating and developing our own personal mythology which then could journey with us throughout our career, albeit changeable and fluid. We could embrace a higher sense of consciousness, in the sense offered by James Hollis (2006), in his Jungian exploration of individuation:

Perhaps the highest achievement of consciousness is not the self-serving reiteration of its own glories, its agenda of regressive reinforcement in the face of the large, intimidating cosmos that is our home, but rather its capacity to acknowledge that it has been called to witness, and to serve, to serve something much larger. (2006, p. 259)

Home-ing is a call to witness each other, to serve something much larger than the individual actor.

RIC actors, directors, producers, and writers must firstly commit to what Martha Graham wrote to Agnes de Mille—a need to embrace a consciousness of the present, “All that is important is the one

moment in movement. Make the moment vital and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused” (de Mille, 1991, p. 264).

To this, one needs to add the relational aspect of the training, and together, commit to a profound mindful practice, creating “a portal into the deeper strata of our human reality” (Hjelland, 2015, p. 332) in order to access a developed sense of consciousness and create new vibrant stories that facilitate home-ing.

The RIC Process, as used in our rehearsal rooms, does not show me how to act; rather, it models circular and decentred leadership and it encourages good manners by using impeccable language and reflexive dialogue. As a social artist, I can step into my own agency by respecting and responding to my impulse. The result is change both within myself and within my community.

RIC is a difficult terrain, but with care it can move an actor from being “good” to being “exceptional,” not only as an artist but also as a citizen. For this to occur, the rehearsal room has to be a “container” of trust, and this requires addressing implicit and explicit issues such as power, intimacy, social and cultural discourses, the careful use of language, and the multiplicity of selves and stories. Often, these concepts are disregarded in the rehearsal room because “they take up too much time”. However, when issues are made explicit, when the ensemble’s group norms insist on transparency, then the work on the floor is economical and profound.

When the ensemble becomes deeply aware, trust develops, and only then can the possibility of risk, an essential ingredient of creativity, be embraced. This work can, however, be dangerous. It can threaten the director and the teacher who want to be the primary creator because it empowers the actor to take on an overt role as co-creator. This work can be threatening because it cannot be

controlled by anyone other than the artist themselves. It creates an access to the muse (that which is greater than oneself) that is palpable. It is work that only the courageous embrace. The actor trained in this way is risky, brave, compassionate, loving, and generous. They do not bow to the traditional idea of ego. Rather, they value relationship and “the space between.” They are the actor of “Tomorrow.” A detailed summary of the RIC Process can be found in Appendix 4.

## **7.9 What Is Next?**

This work has been an intense six-year exploration of belonging and how to map belonging in order to create a sense of home, with home transforming into the verb home-ing. This is applicable on a personal and a professional level. I would like to continue to refine RIC Process, so that it becomes more mainstream and I will continue to teach it at the universities around Brisbane as well as use it in my directorial and acting work. However, there is a pressing social issue that needs to be addressed at this time. I want to pick up where *The Belonging Trilogy* ended. What does The Woman do next?

As we look around at the leadership in our world, there appears to be a condoning of bullying tactics that is only getting worse. Our politicians give the impression that they are out for personal gain rather than holding the world’s needs at the forefront. Our leaders seem focused on “business as usual” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 5): “The central plot is about getting ahead. Economic recessions and extreme weather conditions are just temporary difficulties from which we will surely recover, and even profit” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 5).

What would happen if we looked at leadership in a different register? What if we examined it using a mythical, feminist lens, embracing a relational consciousness, engaging in processes that expanded the social artist so that the leaders of tomorrow could step into their own belonging? What if we moved closer to Macy and Brown’s story of a “life-sustaining society” where the “central plot is

about joining together to act for the sake of life on Earth” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 5), rather than for personal gain?

Mercer and I have begun to plan a production doing just this. We would employ the RIC Process and engage with the *Home* prototype, as we begin to grow a new performative piece about a woman and her relationship to leadership. We wish to initiate and legitimise an alternate way of leading, more suitable to women’s needs and wants by engaging a circular, less hierarchical, style that has emerged from RIC. We feel that with the RIC Process firmly established, and the *Home* prototype securely in place, and a deep understanding of belonging and home-ing, we are in a perfect position to begin our journey towards re-storying leadership in the 21st century.

With the restorying of leadership, we will address the violence that is committed in the world, both against ourselves and our environment. Although in the following quotation Solnit is referring to climate change, I believe it applies to all hostility, both inside and outside the home. As a constructionist, I see how, if we can change the way we language our world, we can move towards a place of belonging and, as Solnit purported: “we can start having a real conversation about our priorities and values. Because the revolt against brutality begins with a revolt against the language that hides that brutality” (Solnit, 2014, para. 17). I believe that on the other side of that brutality lies our home of belonging—to each other and to the world.

## APPENDIX 1: PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL FOR *THE BELONGING TRILOGY*

### *HOME* SEASON 1: LA BOITE, BRISBANE, JULY 2012

#### POSTCARD





## HOME SEASON 2: QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY, JULY 2015

### PROGRAM



- From Queensland Theatre Website:

*Welcome! Come on in. Sit down ... would you like some tea and raisin cake? I'm Margi and this is my son Travis, always playing his piano.*

In Margi Brown Ash's HOME, you are not an audience member, you are a guest—or even a family member—visiting a warm and welcoming place where Margi shares with you stories of her life and family. She blends these “ordinary” joys and tragedies with “extraordinary” stories of family and love—from Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris to perhaps even your own story.

This experience will leave you relishing and re-imagining what makes each of our stories remarkable. Welcome HOME.

***EVE* SEASON 1: METRO ARTS, MAY 2012**

**POSTER**



## EVE SEASON 2: THE BLUE ROOM PERTH, OCTOBER 2012

### POSTCARD

The Blue Room Theatre and the nest ensemble present



*"...one of the finest examples of independent theatre you'd be likely to see anywhere in Australia this year"*  
(Australian Stage)

Writer & Co-Director: Margi Brown Ash  
Director & Co-Director: Leah Mercer  
Designer: Tessa Darby  
Original Designer: Backwoods Original  
Co-Director: Dan Evans  
Costume Designer: Bev Jensen  
Sound Designer: Travis Ash  
Production Manager: Jennifer Friend  
Stage Manager: Kannah Parker  
Publicist: Gamma Sydney

With Margi Brown Ash as Eve

Featuring Philip Millin as the Storyteller  
& Rolana Adeney as the Musician

*"If I were alive today, would you consider me mad?"*

*Eve is the story of a writer caught somewhere between the domestic and the artistic – the story of a woman who vehemently rejected her expected role as wife and mother, instead adopting the masculine persona of Oscar Wilde.*

*Watch Brisbane theatre luminary Margi Brown Ash crawl beneath the skin of Australia's Virginia Woolf: the enigmatic Eve Langley. As the story unfolds in fragments of poetry, Eve is revealed as a passionate artist who longs to be left alone to interpret the world through her viciously beautiful prose.*

*Part memoir, part fiction, part homage to the sacrifice of the artist, this is a story for anyone who felt as if they never belonged, trapped in their own skin, called by the planets but stuck precariously on a shaky middle ground.*

Preview: Tue 23 Oct  
Members' Night: Wed 24 Oct  
Season: Thu 25 – Sat 27 Oct, Tue 30 Oct – Sat 3 Nov, Tue 6 – Sat 10 Nov  
Meet the Artists: Wed 31 Oct  
Austrian Interpretation: Thu 1 Nov  
All shows: 7pm

The Blue Room Theatre, 53 James Street Northbridge  
Tickets: Full \$25 / Conc. \$20 / Blue Room Theatre Members: \$20 / \$15  
Previews and Groups 6+ \$20  
Bookings & Info: [www.blueroom.org.au](http://www.blueroom.org.au) or 9227 7005

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Graphic Design: Leigh Davidson

the nest ensemble  
change coaching  
MPS FOR ARTISTS  
IMetro Arts  
Curtin University  
Australian Government  
Government of Western Australia  
Department of Culture and the Arts  
latteywest  
City of Perth  
BLUE ROOM

The Blue Room Theatre Season Two is proudly supported by the City of Perth

**SEASON 3: DOUBLE BILL *EVE* AND *HE DREAMED A TRAIN***

**BRISBANE POWERHOUSE, JULY 2017**

**POSTER**



***HE DREAMED A TRAIN* SEASON 1: BRISBANE POWERHOUSE, 2014**

**PRESS RELEASE**



**HE DREAMED A TRAIN**

**WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY MARGI BROWN ASH**

**POWERHOUSE VISY THEATRE:**

**WED 15–SUN 26 OCTOBER 2014**

**PRESENTED BY BRISBANE POWERHOUSE AND METRO ARTS AS AN OFFICIAL SWEET  
SELECTION: A FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE PRODUCTION**

Written By: Margi Brown Ash (with text extracts from David Brown's book by the same  
title)

Performed By: Margi Brown Ash and Travis Ash

Director: Benjamin Knapton with Margi Brown Ash

Design: Benjamin Knapton

A family's joys and challenges are revealed in this special new show by one of Brisbane's theatre  
treasures, Margi Brown Ash, together with her son Travis Ash.

*Multi-award-winning artist Margi Brown Ash and acclaimed director Ben Knapton join forces to create a new show that combines digital projection and old-fashioned storytelling. He Dreamed a Train is the compelling, heart-warming, and beautiful story of a writer and her entrepreneur brother as they face his premature death.*

TIMES: Wed (15)–Fri (24) 7pm; Sat (25) 2pm+7pm; Sun (26) 7pm (70 mins)

TICKETS: Full \$30\* Concession \$25\*

\*An additional fee applies to each booking transaction. Single tickets \$3 / Multiple tickets \$6.

### **Reviews (on previous works)**

*This amazing piece is a superb piece of theatre—it's a long time since I've actually been moved to tears by a performance—and it's a must-see for anyone who thinks that live theatre has out-lived its usefulness, or who is interested in the power of story.*

—Crikey, on previous work HOME by Margi Brown Ash

*Without ever being melodramatic or didactic, Ms. Brown Ash opens herself up with extreme honesty to share some wonderfully intimate memories. The lasting affect is that of having visited an old friend.*

—Actors Greenroom, on previous work HOME by Margi Brown Ash



**SEASON 2: DOUBLE BILL *HE DREAMED A TRAIN* AND *EVE*, BRISBANE**

**POWERHOUSE, JULY 2017**

**POSTER**



Poster placed outside of the Brisbane Powerhouse

Photo by Stephen Henry

## APPENDIX 2:

### OUTLINE AND REVIEWS OF *HOME* 2012 SEASON

#### OUTLINE

*Home* is a new, original and experiential performance, written/co-devised/performed by Brisbane's Margi Brown Ash, co-devised/directed by Perth's Leah Mercer, with an original live music and spoken score performed by Sydney's Travis Ash within a Perspex performance installation designed by KarraGarra Island's visual artist Bev Jensen.

*Home* has been written as a prototype performance, an example of what can happen when we embrace and re-examine our stories from the past. There is much research to support how re-telling our stories help us change. We can awaken to new possibilities and begin to uncover previously unknown potentials. *Home*, both performance and workshop, is more than just an opportunity to retell our stories; it provides us an opportunity to re-enact our stories, re-dream their potential, and step into a reimagined world, playing with Time, with Space, and with Mythology.

Using autobiographical stories of belonging and not-belonging, Margi Brown Ash's script moves backwards and forwards across Time and Space from Australia to Egypt and to the USA amongst others, but always returning again and again to Brisbane. Taking on the writer/performer's multiple lived perspectives as a daughter, wife, mother, actor, and therapist, *Home* considers how our past continues to imprint upon our present and future. One of the script's central threads is a re-telling of the Egyptian Myth of Isis and Osiris—a story of love, betrayal, and re-birth—that extends the reach of Margi's first-hand narratives by connecting the story of her individual transformations to this mythic tale of resurrection. The script also reports, via a spoken and musical score by Travis Ash, on world conflicts, of others' grief and loss, running parallel and sometimes in contrast to the autobiographical experiences.



Overall, the work advocates the multiple ways in which we are connected to, rather than isolated from, each other, and the idea of “Who am I becoming?” rather than “Who am I?” A dialogical play in a monological form, audience members find themselves incorporated into the playing space, some of them enacting roles prescribed by the performer; e.g., herself at other ages or significant people in her life. By the end of the performance, up to nine spectators have joined the performer, sharing the performance space together.

To ensure the work is conceptually sophisticated, we have tested it through three work-in-progress showings in Mexico (Taos Institute), Brisbane (Metro Arts), and Chicago (Theatre of the Oppressed Conference), followed by a season at La Boite, Brisbane, in July 2012. The responses (see below) resoundingly support our premise that *Home* works as a compelling and engaging theatre event that appeals to multiple audiences, age groups, and nationalities.

Our first self-funded work-in-development was performed in February 2011 at the "Play with Purpose" seminar hosted by the Galveston Institute in the Gulf of Mexico. Feedback included the following responses:

- ...an amazing, moving, and transformative experience ... Margi invited us all to become co-creator[s] and moved us from spectators to performers and back to spectators. I am currently working in Mexico City with Fundacion Origen that provides education for women in situations of violence ... I am exploring the possibilities of having Margi design a series of workshops using her work *Home*. (Sylvia London, Mexico)
- It was both your story and mine ... one person's story and everyone's ... in time and timeless ... for me: it did multiple, ongoing, relational selves ... with only arbitrary beginnings & endings, where past and futures are in the present and made our ancestors & children present ... it was not talking about but doing. (Dr. Dian Marie Hosking, The Netherlands)

In June 2011, we did a two-night moved reading in Brisbane at Metro Arts' FreeRange festival that was reviewed in *Real Time* as “prodigious in scope and potential ... epic theatre about intimacy”. Here are some of the other responses:

- Home is a beautiful/engaging/mature/heartfelt/inclusive piece of experiential theatre. (Brian Lucas, Brisbane)
- ... the clever yet gentle improv with audience who then remained a part of your map ... You have crafted a piece of work ... as precious a symbolic legacy as a king's pyramid... (Bernie Mayer, Brisbane)

In July 2011, we presented *Home* at the Theatre of the Oppressed Conference in Chicago. We received pages of inspirational feedback, including:

- The way each spect-actor entered the story under Margi's nurturing guidance enchanted me, so personal, so multidimensional, so intimate and yet so profound. (Prof. Brent Blair, USC)
- HOME is a breath ... I ran away from home, it chased me. With you, I turned around ... glad it caught me. (Janice, Community Arts Worker, Chicago)

## REVIEWS

In July 2012, we performed the first professional season of *Home* at La Boite, as part of their Independent season. Some of the published responses are as follows:

Home is a unique production ... This is theatre of the moment and the future ... speaking directly to us ... and making us understand the value of story for its own sake. It's real and it's personal, and the overall effect is of a tender love which is both intimate and cosmic. It's political ... it's homely ... it's inclusive ... This amazing piece is a superb piece of theatre—it's a long time since I've actually been moved to tears by a performance... A brilliant concept, and a brilliant performance, but more than that, a piece of theatre that comforts and reassures us, because Margi Brown Ash has proved Thomas Wolfe wrong—you can go home again, because home is here and now, wherever love is... (Cotes, 2012)

*Home* helps us remember. I remember and I don't remember. At *Home*, we are your special guests. Thank you for inviting us to share your stories, your memories and those of other people's. When you enter the space, everybody feels welcome. Your warmth is infectious and your joy contagious. I love the way you embrace the audience. Leading them. Guiding them. Involving them. Sharing your applause with them. I've never heard such long, warm, appreciative applause! (Coward, 2012)

Ms Ash's performance here is stunning. Memories that are potentially decades apart or barely connected are brought together unquestioningly by her performance. The audience is never lost or confused for a moment. We literally holds [*sic*] hands with the performer and the message is powerful. 'Your story is my story,' is the continually echoed peace anthem of the show. (Burton, 2012)

This sensitive, lively work empowers the audience as Brown Ash brings us all Home. A rare and refreshing theatrical work that connects the whole audience. Not to be missed. (Peters, 2012)

As evidenced above, *Home* transgresses borders, providing the audience a sense of empowerment and engagement as they explore universal and personal questions such as “What constitutes home?” “How do we overcome loneliness and loss?” and “How can we re-author our stories so that they empower rather than reduce us?”

*Home* is an autobiographical/biographical exploration of belonging. Margi and her son Travis Ash engage with their audience as stories from Egypt, USA, and Queensland merge to create a collage of experience. Margi and her audience hold hands in order to explore the idea that “your story is my story”:

It’s real, it’s personal ... intimate and cosmic. It’s political ... it’s homely ... it’s inclusive ... A brilliant concept, and a brilliant performance ... Margi Brown Ash has proved Thomas Wolfe wrong—you can go home again, because home is here and now, wherever love is... (Cotes, 2012)

## APPENDIX 3

### ADAPTED MIECAT PROCESS: WRITING CREATIVE TEXT

**Extended from my Master of Arts research (2009) and inspired and guided by Warren Lett's (2011) *An Inquiry into Making Sense of Our Lives***

This is an adaptation of the MIECAT Process, an experiential and creative arts therapy model.<sup>240</sup> I have used Warren Lett's (2011) book *An Inquiry into Making Sense in Our Lives* as a guide to the process, adapting the application not only for my own writing practice, but also for other artists with whom I work.

- 1. THE ACTOR DECIDES ON THE ISSUE THEY WISH TO EXPLORE OR THEY DECIDE TO WAIT FOR IT TO REVEAL ITSELF:** The subject of the inquiry may be decided upon by the actor as they engage in conversation with their director. In the rehearsal room, the material is more likely to emerge while “ripping and sticking.” This is when the actor and director sit and engage in problem-free chat while the actor sticks images torn from magazines. The actor is instructed not to think too much about what they are doing with regard to their chosen images and their placement on the page. This keeps their “critic” at bay.
- 2. IMAGES ARE DESCRIBED IN DETAIL:** The images created can be in the form of collage, drawings, paintings, movement or free writing. Most often in our rehearsal room I use collage to begin the process. The collage is considered, and described in considerable detail, by both the actor and the director. It is a factual description, not an interpretive one, with the instruction “Notice what you notice.”

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<sup>240</sup> In the early 2000s, I completed a Graduate Diploma of MIECAT (MIECAT was founded by Warren Lett), which has proved enormously valuable when it comes to creating one's own scripts. It is also very useful when engaging with artists in their search for new meaning in their arts practice and also in their personal lives.

3. **INDWELLING:** The next step is to indwell the materials through contemplation, meditating on the images or engaging in creative, generative and non-interpretive conversations until key words, key images, gestures, or tones emerge. These are recorded.
4. **INTRASUBJECTIVE RESPONDING:** Both the actor and the director construct their own personal response (in any art modality) to the collage and the key words, sharing their personal experiences of the work. This can be a rich addition to bring new meaning. Lett (2011, p. 279) calls it an intrasubjective response where the actor and director may express their own feelings in response to the emerging work.
5. **INTERSUBJECTIVE RESPONSE:** The director then creates an intersubjective response to the actor's text. According to Lett (2011), an intersubjective response lies between "the pre-reflective<sup>241</sup> and the conscious awareness of emergent possibilities" (p. 278), and the responses can be "reflective and considered" or "spontaneous and intuitive" (p. 278). The intersubjective response sits between the actor and the director: "a felt resonance...between the participants" (p. 278). Together, they grow new meaning.
6. **DEPICTION NO. 2:** The actor depicts again, taking into consideration the intersubjective responses, their own intrasubjective response, along with new material which may have emerged as a result of the former. The actor decides whether or not to write immediately or to do another collage before writing. They may also decide to amplify part of their original collage and write about that.
7. **THE PROCESS CONTINUES EACH REHEARSAL:** Depiction of collage, indwelling, intrasubjective and intersubjective responding, until the text begins to take shape.

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<sup>241</sup> By "pre-reflective," I am referring to things that happen outside of our own knowing. Lett incorporates within pre-reflective knowing things such as intuition, embodied sensing, emotional awareness, and prior experience (Lett, 2011, p. 283).

## **APPENDIX 4: RIC TRAINING**

### **WHAT IS RELATIONAL IMPULSE CULTURAL (RIC) TRAINING?**

RIC Training (explained in Room 7) is made up of the following steps:

1. PROBLEM-FREE TALK (borrowed from therapy room practices): Ten minutes *before* rehearsals begin.
2. GROUP NORMS (borrowed from group-process work): Group generated, a list of value-driven behaviours to adhere to, visually depicted on the wall.
3. RITUAL: MEDITATION OF GRATITUDE (a way of centring): Ten minutes at opening of rehearsal.
4. RITUAL (adapted from Solution-Focused Therapy): Bridging In/ Scaling/ Goaling/ Bridging Out.
5. RITUAL: *IMPULSE TRAINING* (outcome of my Master of Arts research, 2009): An embodied way of working on the floor with a strong philosophical framework embracing collaboration and constructionism, a shifting of consciousness.
6. RE-STORYING (borrowed from Narrative Therapy): Using myth and stories to enrich and thicken.
7. LEADERSHIP TRAINING (emerged as a complementary text while simultaneously teaching and rehearsing the *Trilogy*): Opportunity to lead/ to step up.
8. REFLECTIVE PRACTICE (processes borrowed from MIECAT and Narrative Therapy): Journaling/ Multimodal Art Making.
9. “HOME-ING”: Moving forth with new ideas with a sense of belonging inside and out with a belief in something greater than self: a change in consciousness.



***RIC Process***

## IMPORTANT PRACTICES OF THE RIC REHEARSAL ROOM

### HOSTING IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

One of the most important values in the RIC Process is the strong emphasis on hosting. Our company engaged with hosting practices in our rehearsal periods of the *Trilogy* and found that the comfort and the attention to detail made for a nurturing container in which to create work. For the RIC rehearsal, the room is prepared; it is clean and, where possible, bare of all but essentials. Cushions are placed in a circle, and art supplies are set out in an orderly and aesthetic manner. Music is ready; lighting is bright.<sup>242</sup> Water is available, as well as tea and snacks, ready for the break. Most importantly, the group is aware of their own hosting responsibility to bring forth ideas to enrich the gathering. People who have not contributed in the circle are invited to do so, stepping respectfully over the cultural conditioning that can sometimes silence that of gender inequity.

### AWARENESS OF GENDER AND DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEADING

Initially, I noticed a difference between how I was in the rehearsal room with a female director (Leah Mercer, who directed *Home* and *Eve*) as opposed to a male director (Benjamin Knapton, who directed *He Dreamed a Train*). With Mercer, I found it easier to take the initiative, to make riskier offers and push the boundaries. Yet, I observed my slight reticence when it came to offering suggestions to Knapton, using a more tentative way of communicating. I found myself slipping into old rules of engagement, learned decades before in drama school. What was pleasing in my case was, once I had identified this, Knapton and I were able to talk about it as a cultural phenomenon and cordially adjust it. I then took this expanding awareness into my teaching and directing practices.<sup>243</sup> I

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<sup>242</sup> I learned this from Deborah Hay. She would always insist that the lights be on, and initially, I wondered why. But I have observed light in rehearsal rooms over the years; I realised that substantial light not only allows us to see but for me, it also acts as a metaphor.

<sup>243</sup> Although I had for a long time been aware of the gender inequity in our profession, I had not actively made steps to address it, too caught up in raising a family and balancing my artist/mother, the very subject matter of *Eve*. This is



noticed in my classes that many of the actors, particularly the women, were reticent to question or lead in the rehearsal room. Rather than just describing this observation, I introduced them to The Stick Exercise,<sup>244</sup> a very simple yet revealing relational process that provides the participants the opportunity to distinguish their leadership preference. Briefly, two actors work together, taking turns in leading each other around the room, using two sticks that sit lightly between the palms of the leader and the palms of the follower. The leader moves the follower around the room by gently directing them through the pressure of the sticks. The leader encourages the follower to move forward or backward, up or down, slow or fast. They then swap. After each has experienced the exercise as leader and follower, the instruction is to repeat the exercise, but this time collaborating, neither leading nor following. They move around the room as before, as collaborators, until the exercise finishes. This is then followed by conversations about leading, following, and collaborating. It can also move into a discussion of socialisation and cultural impact of gender inequity.<sup>245</sup> Once the actors, both female and male, become aware that their leadership preferences are not just personal traits, but socially and culturally conditioned, they are able to make changes if they wish, and notice when these “invisible” discourses present themselves.

## **GOOD MANNERS AND REFLEXIVE LISTENING**

Good manners can be easily forgotten in the theatre industry due to time lines and scarce resources. It was a value that we upheld throughout our six years of creating the *Trilogy*. If we ever slipped, we knew we had the responsibility to address the issue. Sally St. George and Dan Wulff, two Taos Institute colleagues, see it like this:

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another example of my different multi-beings informing each other, in this case, my writer/actor informed my teacher self.

<sup>244</sup> I first engaged with a version of The Stick Exercise at a MIECAT workshop co-facilitated with Kevin Jeynes. Before that, I used long sticks as a training tool with Brisbane based Frank Theatre. It was only a slight adjustment to employ smaller sticks in my own rehearsal rooms. Over the next decade, I developed The Stick Exercise designed to address gender inequity and leadership styles.

<sup>245</sup> The gender equity discussion usually arises as a result of the conversations; often, women feel more comfortable following whereas often men prefer to lead. If this is the case, it is made overt, and a discussion follows. The intention is not to change people, but have them aware of their preferences.

...using manners reaffirms our basic human connectedness and interdependence despite the hierarchies that compose so much of our professional and personal lives...manners are a crucial part of the behavioural repertoire of the collaborative life style. (St. George & Wulff, 2007, p. 407)

Good manners in the RIC Process include engaging with reflexive listening: we respectfully listen, we hear, and then we speak in order to understand, rather than just waiting for the other person to finish. We begin with curiosity. Harlene Anderson, another Taos Institute colleague, talks about reflexive language as a way of being genuinely curious about the other and asking questions to ensure that you heard what the other person needed you to hear (Anderson, 2003). The RIC Process also focuses on what is working rather than what is wrong. In therapeutic research, there appears to be little solid evidence to support the modernist contention that we need to examine the dysfunction or what is wrong in order to solve the presenting problem (Bertolino & O'Hanlon, 2002). I have built on this in the rehearsal room, focusing and building on the strengths of the actors, rather than focusing on their perceived weaknesses.

## **HERITAGE OF THE CIRCLE**

The circle is used throughout the RIC rehearsal period. As Margaret Wheatley wrote in the foreword of Baldwin and Linnea's book *The Circle Way*:

...we don't discover circle practice, so much as we remember it. As humans, our species memory is filled with circles...circle welcomes us back into a shape where we can listen, be heard, and be respected, where we can think and create together. Circle process is not a technique, it is a heritage. (Wheatley, 2010, p. ix)

In Native American culture, the circle is the symbol for understanding "life's mysteries," and in Indigenous Australian cultures, the circle is used when the mob comes together. The importance of the circle is reflected in the shape of the world, the planets (that Eve Langley so loved), and the seasons that continually change (Wilbur et al., 2001). In RIC, we regularly use the circle as a coming together to meditate and to enact the rituals of the training. In our *Trilogy* rehearsals, whenever we didn't make an effort to move into circle, the sense of being heard and being able to contribute

equally was compromised. It takes a substantial amount of time to bridge into the rehearsal space, and if there are many people (in a class of 20, for example), we have strategies to make it more manageable.<sup>246</sup>

## **GROUP NORMS**

Group norms can be defined as “a generally accepted way of thinking, feeling or behaving that [is] endorsed and expected because it is perceived as the right and proper thing to do” (Turner, quoted in Jetten et al., 2002, p. 191). When working in theatre, which demands vulnerability and risk, it is important that members have an understanding of what values they hold and how they operate within the group. Group norms may need to be adjusted in order to provide the optimum environment in which to encourage excellence. In our rehearsal room, our group norms included punctuality, respect, and a “yes and” approach, accepting all offers and collaborative dialogue. An important outcome of my research Master’s suggested that one of the group norms was the need to embrace Jacques Derrida's idea regarding the responsibility of response. If we are active and responsible participants, we need to contribute to the group (Kinman et al., 2004). Problems can arise when a participant refuses to respond to the other. Derrida talked about irresponsibility as being the refusal to look someone in the face (quoted in Kinman et al., 2004) and Kinman et al. elaborated on this:

It is about how we look someone in the face. It is about whether we look someone in the face. And it is about how do we respond, together, in the context of that looking ... And it is about how do we respond, together. (p. 243)

After detailed discussions, we tabulate our particular group norms and display them on the rehearsal wall. Everyone in the group has the opportunity to contribute to the group norms. There are also some group norms that the company contributes, such as responsibility of response. When we

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<sup>246</sup> One way is to have the whole group sit in silence for a short while, and then write down on post-it-notes three words to describe how they are feeling right now. These three words can be placed in the centre of the circle, and then everyone can view the brief descriptions. They can then be transferred to the wall for the duration of the rehearsal.

experience a critical incident or hotspot in the classroom or the rehearsal room, we go back to the group norms to help realign ourselves.

Group norms could include statements such as:

1. Assumptions need to be tested (derived from Ruiz, 1997).
2. We need to address the problem; the person is not the problem (derived from Narrative Therapy).
3. We need to speak up when something is wrong.
4. We need to be able to trust.
5. We need confidentiality (therapeutic construct).
6. We need to be able to collage as a way of finding new meaning (derived from Creative Arts Therapy).
7. We need to embrace honesty and openness.
8. We need to question.
9. We need to know when we are playing and when we are consolidating.
10. We need to be responsible for our own responding.

## **REHEARSAL RITUALS**

Ritual is extensively employed in both theatrical contexts and collaborative/constructionist therapy sessions throughout the world. Ritual is defined in many ways; the definition that enriches the RIC Process is suggested by Claire Schrader in her book *Ritual Theatre*: “A ritual ... is a journey of the heart, a rite of passage, which enables us to arrive at a deeper understanding of ourselves and others” (Schrader, 2012, Kindle version, p. 13 of 318). The RIC Process embraces a cycle of rituals providing a safety net so that the artist can move securely from their known world into an unknown and exciting landscape of creative practice. These rituals engage in familiarity, repetition, and finally

transformation, and include bridging in, scaling, goaling, meditation, *ImpulseTraining*, and bridging out.

## AN EXAMPLE OF RIC REHEARSAL RITUALS

### PROBLEM-FREE TALK:

Before we begin our rehearsal, we engage in conversation not necessarily associated with the rehearsal as a way of interacting, relaxing the group, and providing an opportunity to acquire clues regarding the actors and the group's resources and strengths. This happens ten minutes or so before rehearsal begins. We use this process in the therapy room too, resulting in the client being more relaxed and open. It gives the therapist an opportunity to notice some of the client's strengths that otherwise may go unnoticed. This also happens in the rehearsal room. As a strengths-based practice,<sup>247</sup> the aim is to build on the performer's potential and the more we know what they are good at, the easier it is to be able to draw out their gifts.

### BRIDGING IN:

Originally called "Check in/Check out" in my Master's thesis, this ritual of engagement is highly valued by the group, as it requires everyone to voice what is happening in their lives and what they are hoping to achieve in the rehearsal process. The change from Check in/Check out to "Bridging in/Bridging out" helps emphasise the ritual of moving from life before rehearsals and entering into a liminal zone of engagement ready to participate in the rituals of *ImpulseTraining*.

Bridging in seems to resonate well with the idea that the artist brings all of themselves to the rehearsal room, rather than leaving their private life at the door, which is the dominant story within

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<sup>247</sup> This is one of the differences between the RIC Process and other ways of making theatre. I believe that if focus is placed on the strengths of the artist, rather than on what is often referred to as their weaknesses, the artist has the potential to flourish and the areas that need to develop seem to adjust accordingly. Perhaps it's because the artist has developed their own sense of capacity. In a similar way, in the therapy room, the collaborative therapist believes that if they grow the client's strengths, the things that need to be developed often look after themselves, without having to call attention to them.

the traditional rehearsal construct. We walk the bridge into rehearsal and at the end, we walk the bridge out of rehearsal. The bridge joins real life with the playful life within the rehearsal room. Early on, in group work, passing an object around the circle (with respect and acknowledgment of Australian Indigenous cultures' talking stone or the talking stick of Native American cultures) allows each participant the opportunity to speak uninterrupted both at the beginning and the end of each rehearsal. This is not needed in my own rehearsals, but I use it when I am working with a group of artists, at least until the habit of interrupting dissolves. As we bridge in, the aim is to understand where the artist sits emotionally and physically, and we do that by scaling.

### **SCALING OURSELVES:**

The personal scale usually goes from one to 10, one being the lowest mood, 10 being the best you have felt. Scaling provides a simple way of gauging the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual landscape of the individual and the group. Sometimes, actors use several scores depending on what is happening: "Emotionally, I am a four but physically I am a 10." Numbers provide the group with another language to succinctly state their internal landscape. This method is a useful one because the artist does not have to move into content to communicate how they are feeling. The lower the score, the more the facilitator asks: "What could we do as a group to move you up the scale?" (Berg & de Shazer, 1993) or "How can the group help you move up 0.5 of a percent?" Just to know that it is possible to change one's score in the group is enough to begin the process.

### **GOALING:**

The method of goaling, borrowed from the constructionist therapy room, provides the artist with an opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. If they state an objective or a dream they want to achieve/explore, then at the end of rehearsal, they reflect on how they have achieved that goal. Often, the goalposts move throughout the rehearsal and they become aware that although they

may not have achieved their stated goal, they actually achieved something as valuable or even more valuable. Impulse work often awakens within us what we do not know we know. This commitment to goaling allows autonomy and self-agency. If our goals are not met, we can follow up with reflective practice, either by journaling and/or using the adapted MIECAT process, believing that we can write ourselves to new meaning. May Sarton, one of the USA's leading 20th-century writers, wrote "Perhaps we write towards what we will become from where we are" (Sarton, 1992, p. 208).

## **MEDITATION:**

Meditation can lead to increased creativity (Muller, 2016), and helps connect mind, body, and brain to promote pure awareness (Saitzyk, 2013). In my own practice, I was introduced to formal and consistent meditation late, even though I had employed it semi-regularly in *ImpulseTraining* as a brief focusing technique. When I attended Arteles Creative Centre in Finland in early 2017, we were encouraged to engage in a 25-minute meditation, focusing on the breath, twice a day. Initially, I found it difficult staying still for what felt like a long time, but as the days progressed, I started to feel the benefits of this slowing down, focusing, and stillness. This is the most significant practice I have learned over the last 10 years and I brought it back to the studio, adjusting the length of the meditation to suit the situation. Several times a day, I would meditate for 10 minutes either before rehearsal or in a rehearsal break and in particular between the shows of the Double Bill, where we only had a one-hour turnaround. I found that my usual nervous sensations were quieter. I felt more in control and more aware. After the performance season, I continued to meditate, especially when I wrote, extending it to 20-minute sessions twice a day. It was as though it rebooted my creative thinking. Researchers have noted that mindfulness meditation can release us from senseless striving and restlessness. Meditation can help transform a negative way of thinking into a more positive way forward (Hyland, 2009). Meditation is now a central component of the RIC Process. We begin the

day, before Bridging In, with a 10-minute meditation practice and again after lunch to help get over the “after lunch slump.”

### ***IMPULSE TRAINING:***

*Impulse Training* remains an important part of the RIC Process, where the artists move with one another on the floor, responding to each other by mirroring or replying to each other’s movements in some overt way, constantly building on each other’s offers. For an actor to do this, they need to have a developed sense of awareness and an ability to see the other person in a non-judgmental way (Stromsted & Haze, 2007), as well as a willingness to take responsibility for their own actions. The initial instruction is to bypass the brain and allow the metaphoric tiny little brains distributed around the body’s 53 trillion trillion cells to respond to external stimuli (Hay, 2000). The body becomes a site of exploration (Foster, 2000, p. xiv). Contemporary performer Margaret Cameron wrote about the “what if?” as a hypothesis, opening “an experiment, stepping into experiences of unknowing and observation” (Cameron, 2016, p. 18). At the launch of Cameron’s book in Brisbane in 2016, I spoke about how she had influenced my practice:

You introduced me to perceptual practice, something you had initially learned from Deborah Hay ... Perceptual practice was a way of awakening our perceptions, allowing the brain to rest for a while, trusting that the body could do remarkable things if only we invited it. “What if there was a tiny brain in every trillionth cell?” you would call out to us as we moved on the floor. (Author’s speech at the launch of Margaret Cameron’s book *I Shudder to Think*, Metro Arts, 2016)

This shift from thinking to doing does not happen immediately, but requires constant coaching from the side. Actors are instructed not to “create”; rather, as they move, they continually ask the question “What if?”<sup>248</sup> and in so doing, accept all offers. By removing the assumption that actors need to “be creative”, they find a new freedom on the floor, responding with open eyes and open body, moment

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<sup>248</sup> These ‘what if’ questions could be ‘What if this is where you belong?’ ‘What if this is exactly what you need right now?’ ‘What if’ questions such as these originally came from a workshop with Deborah Hay in Denmark, 2005.



by moment, to what is happening in front of them. They enter “Kairos” time, rather than “Chronos” time.<sup>249</sup> In fact, on the floor, time seems to disappear. The space between each actor remains alive with possibility as unconscious material (“what they don’t know they know”) manifests. It is important to allow the actors time to find the space of surrender. Mary Whitehouse, founder of Authentic Movement,<sup>250</sup> talked about the feeling of will in contrast to surrender: “‘I move’ is the clear knowledge that I am personally moving. The opposite of this is the sudden and astonishing moment when ‘I am moved’” (Whitehouse, 2000, Kindle version, p. 81 of 321). Whitehouse compared Authentic Movement practice to Jung’s Active Imagination: “I think that body movement is active imagination in sensory or sensation terms, just as a painting is active imagination in visual images ... It has to do with the flow of the unconscious material coming out in physical form” (Whitehouse, 2000, Kindle version. p. 20 of 321). The ego of the actor surrenders to the Self, the unconscious, one’s “spiritual essence.” Because the director/facilitator is observing, watching the practice take place, the actors know they are being witnessed, an important part of the process:

Surrender can be stated as a letting go. However, there is fear in letting go. It is risky. Something unfamiliar may happen. Within the safety of a strong vessel held by the conscious witness the mover moves, trusting that whatever she brings can be held... (Plevin, 2007, p. 111)

Once the group develops the ritual of *ImpulseTraining*, where they surrender each time they approach the floor, there is space to transform, knowing that “The body is the physical aspect of the personality and movement is the personality made visible” (Whitehouse, 2000, Kindle version, p. 51 of 321). Once the actor can free their own body, then they can have access to their character’s physicality.

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<sup>249</sup> The Ancient Greeks have two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. Chronos is durational time, while kairos is “the right time.” We don’t have a word in English, but it can mean “seizing of a time that is opportune” (Smith, 2002, p. 47).

<sup>250</sup> Authentic Movement is a method of moving on the floor whereby the unconscious expresses itself through the body; eyes are usually closed and there is someone witnessing the movement (see Pallaro, 2007).

## AN EXAMPLE OF AN *IMPULSE* TRAINING SESSION

The following is an overview of how *ImpulseTraining* is deployed and articulated both in my own rehearsals and when I work as a facilitator with groups:

1. Relax, allow the body to be supported by the floor, and at the same time you support the floor and become aware of this tension, without the need to change anything. Visualise cellular movement: your 53 trillion trillion cells moving, alive, awake: As Deborah Hay asks, “What if every cell was alive and firing?” (author’s notes, Hay workshop 2005)
2. Slowly, allow every one of your cells in the body to awaken, allow the cells of your blood, small muscles and finally large muscles to move the body from horizontal to vertical position.
3. “What if every cell has a tiny little brain?” (author’s notes, Hay workshop 2005)
4. I then dream this on: “What if each cell has a tiny little heart and a tiny little ear?”
5. We now have inter-connective movement among the actors (with strong overtones of Authentic Movement), where actors respond to the space between each other, accepting all offers. They do not create, rather they respond to each other, answering each other’s call.

Once the group has a working understanding of *ImpulseTraining*, they can then apply it to scene work and performance. In the *Trilogy*, I applied *ImpulseTraining* to my entire performance, enlivening the space between myself and my audience, my fellow performer, props, furniture, walls and floor. *ImpulseTraining* keeps the performer in the unknown. I do not know what will happen, even though the script is learned a thousand times over. *ImpulseTraining* keeps the performer in suspense, always with the question “What is happening now? What is happening now?” Because of this, no performance is the same. Each night, new challenges present themselves. It could be a late audience member. The energy in the theatre changes. The performer needs to adjust to that change. Or a prop drops. The space alters which in turn, alters the performance. It is this aliveness that keeps the performance fresh and unknowing, rather than repetitive and predictable.

## USING AN ADAPTED MIECAT PROCESS TO CO-CREATE TEXTS

Here I will briefly discuss how we use the MIECAT Process in the RIC rehearsal room, mindful that it is used as a creative process, not as a therapeutic tool. MIECAT uses a phenomenological approach in the search for meaning, and it has been a remarkably powerful method to create new work.

Each project or rehearsal period begins with a collage session (in fact, we do many collage sessions over the weeks of creative developments) as we build our theatrical score. The writer/actor may use collage as a script writing exercise, a character development process, an inspiration for an improvisation, the source material for relationship building, and/or problem-solving. The collages that the writer/actors create are then journaled and, if willing, are discussed in the circle at the end of rehearsal. Sometimes we hang them on the rehearsal room walls so that they can provide stimuli for improvising or writing text<sup>251</sup> and creating movement patterns, in a similar way to what we did in rehearsals for the *Trilogy*.

Texts and movement scores, usually gestural with a physical mapping on the floor, are created by the actors as a response to their collages. They work in pairs; it is a co-creation.

1. The written texts are described to each other, in considerable detail. Initially, it is a factual description, not an interpretive one, to allow for a greater range of possibilities.
2. The next step is to “indwell” the described material until key words, key images, gestures or tones emerge.

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<sup>251</sup> As an example, in my own experience as actor/writer, the themes I wrote about in the *Trilogy* emerged from a collaborative conversation with my directors, focusing on different temporal zones, stories from the past, present or future. Sometimes I would create “rip and stick” collages, a process that emerged from my Master’s research, allowing the writing theme to emerge from the collage, rather than the other way around. While collaging, Mercer and I would engage in “problem-free chat.” I would not consciously think too much about what I was doing with the chosen images and their placement on the page. I allowed my body to stay in command. This kept my intellectual critic at bay, anathema to creativity. I worked this way in my own creative practice, and also when I was teaching, directing and facilitating, taking on the role of Mercer, being witness and engaging in conversation.

3. The actors then create a response, either an intrasubjective response (from the creator of the text) or an intersubjective responding (from the observer of the work), incorporating text and/or movement.
4. The actor has the choice of whether or not to incorporate their partner's intersubjective response into the work itself. In my own rehearsals, I invariably choose to incorporate my director/devisor's suggestions because of their clarity and insight.

The clearest way of demonstrating this process is to provide an example of how my director/devisor and I began weaving the physical score with the written text in *Home*. A version of this particular example was initially experienced by Leah Mercer when she attended a Margaret Cameron workshop in Perth several weeks before this *Home* rehearsal:

1. Director calls out the instruction: "Silence."

With director's instruction in mind, I begin to whisper the text that I have just written.

TEXT: The woman begins her journey tentatively at first.

2. Director calls out the instruction: "Tip-toe onto floor."

I tip toe as I deliver the next line, allowing for my intuitive responses to meet the physical instruction.

TEXT: Each time is new for her.

3. Director calls out the instruction: "She looks around."

I do a 360% exaggerated looking around.

TEXT: "Yes," she thinks, "I could belong here, at least for today."

4. Director calls out the instruction: "Go to the front of the stage, step through the imaginary door and look at your audience. Remember your mother's expression."

I do as instructed, taking my time.

TEXT: One day at a time, sweet Jesus, one day at a time.

5. Director calls out the instruction: “Speak directly to your audience.” I respond accordingly

TEXT: "Yes," she thinks. “That’s a good way to begin.”

This particular text and physical score came from an early rehearsal of *Home* (2011), but was not used in the final draft. However, direct address to audience occurred throughout the show and the tiptoeing ended up being a physical score in *Eve*.

Once the improvisation was over, we reflected on the weaving of movement and text and decided what worked and what didn’t. I then created another collage<sup>252</sup> followed by a written response, taking into account the improvisation that I just performed, as well as the key words of both collages and any similar images that both collages shared. The process repeated itself: perform, edit, and record. After several reiterations, we arrived at Draft 1.

This is the process that the RIC Process teaches, a way of helping actors find their own voice and a way of sidestepping the inner critic. The RIC Process provides opportunities for the actors to work and create together, rather than individually developing ‘silo’ characters; we are most interested in the relational space between the actors.

## **USE OF MYTHOLOGY AND STORYTELLING:**

While writing and acting in the *Trilogy*, I became aware of the power and impact that myth can have on the individual. I realised the importance of developing a suitable personal myth that could lead one to deeper and more inspirational ways of being in the world. I had embodied Eve Langley, who,

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<sup>252</sup> Creating a collage on a collaged embodied response amplifies the first collage. We could just as easily have selected part of the first collage, reduced it and found the essence. The intent is to find deeper meaning in what went before. It is a reiterative process and can keep repeating until we are satisfied.

for many reasons, stayed trapped in what Feinstein labelled a nameless anxiety: “A personal mythology that is unable to serve as a bridge to deeper meanings and greater inspiration than an individual can find in the outer world is typically accompanied by a nameless anxiety” (Feinstein, 1997, p. 508). The Woman in *He Dreamed a Train*, on the other hand, along with Mardi in *Home*, developed personal myths that served as a bridge to deeper understandings. Based on this and my own work with Jean Houston years before, one of the exercises that I employ in the RIC rehearsal room is the writing of one’s own personal myth. According to Singer, one’s personal mythology is “the vibrant infrastructure that informs your life, whether or not you are aware of it. Consciously and unconsciously, you live your mythology” (Singer, 1997, Kindle version, foreword, para. 1). The actors approached their personal mythology in the same way they approached script writing, beginning with collage, prefiguring, configuring and refiguring their storyline and finally sharing their story with the group. When the QACI season of *Coming Home* was over, the Year 10 student cast handed me a handmade book full of their personal myths, with drawings, poems, and stories that moved me deeply.

On deep reflection, I realised, that, after creating personal myths within the *Trilogy*, as well as devising *Coming Home* with an enthusiastic group of Year 10 students, having the opportunity to write a new personal mythology that one can aspire to is a most generative and transformative act. It is an essential addition to the RIC Process.

### **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE:**

In her book *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher*, Kim Etherington (2004) talked about the importance of reflecting by listening with an ear, eye, and heart that deconstructs. Freedman and Combs (1996, p. 71) suggested that “listening deconstructively begins with the ‘not-knowing’ attitude,” arguing that when therapists cultivate such an attitude, “therapy is conducted in an atmosphere of wonder of

‘What If?’” (Freedman & Combes, 1996, p. 71). Although these authors are talking about therapy, it is just as relevant in the rehearsal room. We allocate time in each rehearsal to reflect on what has happened and how to dream it on in an atmosphere of wonder.

Reflective practice is a method of inquiring, wondering, asking questions, being curious, and finally consolidating. We engage in stream-of-consciousness writing, collages, sometimes even playing with Plasticine (seeing the shapes created as symbolic signposts), or engaging in Sandtray.<sup>253</sup> I use these tools (both in my own practice and as a facilitator) to access what we “don’t know we know” (similar to the MIECAT Process). These depictions are then deconstructed and reflected upon by engaging in creative conversations. Without reflection, *ImpulseTraining* remains just a warm-up activity instead of a generative and often transformative process.

#### **MIGUEL RUIZ’S FOUR AGREEMENTS AS A REFLECTIVE TOOL:**

One of the tools that I employ in my reflective practice is “The Four Agreements” by Miguel Ruiz (1997). The Four Agreements include four reflective steps to enrich communication:

- using impeccable language;
- always doing one’s best;
- not taking things personally; and
- not making assumptions. (Ruiz, 1997, Kindle version, p. 25 of 144)

At the beginning of the rehearsal period, these agreements are discussed in group and become part of the group norms. They need to be constantly reinforced because although they appear simple, they are difficult concepts to deal with, particularly the final two—not taking things personally and

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<sup>253</sup> Sandtray is a tactile, non-verbal and safe intervention that deepens the client’s awareness of their emotional landscape (Webber & Mascari, 2008, p. 1). It is a suitable choice when talk therapy may not be appropriate or the client is fearful (Webber & Mascari, 2008, p. 3). It consists of placing a wide array of symbolic shapes and figures in a tray of sand, arranging them in a particular order, in order to tell a visual story. This process works very well in the rehearsal room and I have used it as a basis for writing scenes and having students deconstruct characters.

making assumptions. The way to help artists incorporate these agreements is to discuss it in group at the time miscommunication happens. The responsibility of the group is to work collaboratively so that these principles are upheld.

### **BRIDGING OUT:**

At the end of the rehearsal, the actors come together in the circle and reflect on what has happened in rehearsal, scoring ourselves and reflecting on whether we have achieved our goals. What are we going to develop? What are we going to leave behind? In performance season, I embrace a 10-minute meditation and conduct my own rituals to help me transition out of character. After meditation, these rituals include changing clothes, cleaning up, drinking a cup of tea, and debriefing with my director, fellow actor, and partner. In the RIC rehearsal room, actors are required to create their own bridging out ritual/s to enact after the show. Some include showering, walking, reading, and listening to music as part of the actor's post-show ritual. The only requirement is that all of these activities are engaged with mindfulness, elevating the activity to ritual rather than habit. What I realised after my six-year doctoral journey was the magnitude and power of engaging in ritual, which was only lightly explored in my earlier Master's research.

### **DIFFICULTIES ARE BOUND TO HAPPEN**

Hosting, good manners, and reflexive listening are highly valued in our rehearsal rooms. This does not mean our rehearsals are without incident. "Hotspot" is a term used in group dynamic work where conflict occurs within the group and needs to be addressed in order to keep the group functioning at a healthy level. To listen reflexively, one requires an invitation to do so. One of the hotspots that almost prevented our company from continuing occurred in Perth in the *Eve* 2012 season. For us, our hotspot occurred at a time of personal exhaustion and massive transitional life shifts for some of the members of the company. I was outside of my comfort zone, away from my support networks, with a new Perth cast and crew, and was very unhappy. I think my good manners slipped because I disregarded my value of hosting. I became withdrawn and consequently lonely, despite having a team around me. I refused to talk about what was happening because I needed permission to do so and that permission was not forthcoming for all sorts of reasons. Out of this

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what I was experiencing and everyone in the company was too anxious to invite the opportunity to unpack. Fortunately for us, we managed to overcome this period of difficulty, but it was months before we had the courage to sit down and sort out how to avoid this in the future.<sup>254</sup>

Another earlier critical incident occurred in the creative development showing of *Home* that we presented as part of the FreeRange festival at Metro Arts Theatre in 2011, less significant or emotionally overwhelming than what I described above, but the following is a good example of how to deal with hotspots.

### **A STORY OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

We were preparing for our first two-night creative development showing. We were ambitious; we wanted to create a nurturing environment in a theatre that was dark and bleak. We set up a “tea bar,” with an assortment of exotic teas and home-made snacks; we borrowed an old organ for our musician; we brought in colourful knitted rugs (it was cold), multiple cushions; and we turned on as many lights as possible. We moved the theatre seats down onto the stage floor, so our audience would be very intimate, and we hung an enormous red velvet curtain where the fourth wall used to be, creating a friendly and loving environment in which to perform. We set up a soup table where we had a vegetable soup slowly cooking each day. We had a team of designers wrapping furniture in thick white pleated paper, a time-consuming task. We had five days to mount the presentation, and tensions were high. A couple of designers wanted to do it one way; the chief designer wanted to do it another. The director and I felt it was overstretching our resources; I was nervous that it would not get finished in time. Then, facing overwhelming time restraints, illness hit. We were anxious for it not to spread throughout the company. We had to be firm regarding what the ill person touched while in the rehearsal room.

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<sup>254</sup> In my Master of Arts (Research) thesis, *Mouthful of Pins* (2009), I also talk about critical incidents and describe one in detail, where shame visited both director and actor, and how we solved it. As the saying goes, it’s not what happens to a company, it’s how the company handles it, and I find that with the values of RIC firmly in place, the odds are in our favour that things will work out even better than before.

We were pulled between insisting the person go home, or isolating them in the room, neither of which are neighbourly actions. The clashing of values disturbed me. Having only days till opening, still refining a shaky text, a sick member in the creative team, a delay in being able to use the set resulted in a division in the company with little time to address it. This is not an unusual happening in a rehearsal room, but a difficult one to solve. As co-Artistic Director of the company, I felt as though I should be able to deal with it fairly and efficiently. But I felt silenced (a gender issue discussed in *DREAM*), not wanting to offend, which resulted in me feeling perplexed. I had not set up a procedure to deal with this. McNamee (2007, p. 320) has assured that:

One can only be disorganised and undisciplined against the backdrop of a correct structure or correct set of knowledge. Being responsive to those I am working with, on the other hand, requires movement through our conversation in ways that create opportunities for our transformation.

So rather than thinking I needed a set of criteria to solve this, what I really needed to do was set up the opportunity to move through the design and illness conversations in ways that could help us grow. I was unable to see this at the time because of the time and performance pressures. The tension was uncomfortable but finally passed once we had opened. The wrapping of the chairs did get finished with enormous effort from the designers, but not without difficulty. We learned to ensure our designer would, in future, be allotted more time than she believed she needed: her ideas were hugely transformative and we wanted to honour her process. Regarding illness, we put in place hygienic practices such as our mugs being labelled with our names, ample tissues, a bowl of oranges or mandarins, and antibacterial gel when necessary.

We also realised that due to time limitations, our check-ins were not as detailed as we wanted them to be. To address this, I changed the name “check in” to “bridging in,” which seemed to give us more air around our opening ritual. It gave us permission to consider the metaphor of the bridge: Where

have we been and where we are going? The term check-in brought with it an efficiency that was satisfying on one level but quickly fell into a pattern, such as “I’m fine. I’m a 7.5,” which is not much information to build relationship on. To bridge-in required a commitment to move from Point A to Point B, a more active way to sum up our sense of self at the beginning of rehearsal. As a group, we were required to listen and reflect on what was being said in our attempts to understand each other:

A person can never fully understand another person...The process of understanding is relational and dialogical; it is a two-way joint activity...the process of understanding is the process of immersing ourselves in the other’s horizon...it is through this action of immersion—this quest for understanding the other person’s meaning, this quest to make sense of the familiar and unfamiliar—that the horizons are fused. (Anderson, 2007, p. 14)

## **“HOME-ING”**

The RIC Process endeavours to provide an embodied way of perceiving and appreciating each other’s strengths. Through relational and dialogical means, our goal is to not only understand each other (through body and voice), but with a perceived understanding, and empathic knowing, grow each other’s creativity and joy. In so doing, we endeavour to develop a strong sense of belonging, immersing ourselves in each other’s horizon as we complete our home-ing quest.

## APPENDIX 5:

### *COMING HOME*

#### QUEENSLAND ACADEMIES OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES 2015

*Coming Home* was a performance that I co-created with QACI's Year 10 drama students, based on *The Belonging Trilogy*. This appendix comprises the post that I wrote on the 4change blog (Ash Brown, 2015) to sum up what we did and how we did it.

*Coming Home*, a performance that was described as beautiful, heart-aching, whimsical and light-hearted, has come to an end. Simon Tate, the head drama teacher at Queensland Academies of Creative Industries (QACI), where we were artists in residence, made the following Facebook post at the time:

I'm just going to come out and say it—all my theatre friends should come and see *Coming Home*. I just love it so much I want to share it with people that will appreciate the storytelling, the simplicity and the empowerment of 21 young artists who are completely present—because they want to be, rather than because they are trying to prove something, or are suffering to be intense, or any other pretence. They just want to tell the stories they now own as a means of writing their own. Well played Margi Brown Ash—you can now fart, drop the mic and walk off stage to thunderous applause. (Simon Tate, Facebook post, November 16, 2015)

I love the irreverence that we all embraced while creating this show: we broke what rules we could break safely, we swore like troopers (just joking), laughed, cried, yelled, danced and meditated. We reflected, we dreamed, we evoked the Muse of Theatre to come and visit us, we met and engaged with our entelechy. Dr. Jean Houston, my mentor from Ashland, Oregon, teaches how our entelechy can enrich our process: just as the oak tree is the acorn's entelechy, our entelechy can be evoked to help us achieve our potential and possibility.

Six weeks of working in class time and two or three afternoons a week, we created a collage of texts from *The Belonging Trilogy*, including. We adapted the performance so that 21 beautifully passionate

15-year-olds could work the stage. They moved as one, stepping into role, and stepping out again. We began with a list of scenes that the young folk really liked: we read the scripts and chose the scenes that resonated with us. The selected scenes did not dramaturgically belong next to each other, but our team (including Ben Knapton and Travis Ash) had faith that there was an underlying connector, all we had to do was wait for it to present itself. It took five weeks to find the path to re-map the core of all three plays. The core of the play, or the spine of the play, finally became:

How do we deal with, or how do we re-story long term grief and loss so that we can move on in our lives?

Depressing theme for teenagers? Not in the least. The joyful exuberance that the young folk brought to the stage ensured that we did not tip into melancholy. The intense dramatics of the theme of death and dying also matched the drama that sat within these potent, emerging artists.

I learn so much from young actors: they remind me why I have stayed in the theatre profession for over 40 years. They remind me of the importance of schools such as QACI, a performing arts senior high school that embraces creativity and accomplishment. They remind me of the power of relationship, the power of story.

So, after four performances, the show has closed to rousing applause. And there was a big 'take-away'. At the same time as we rehearsed the chosen scenes, we also learned processes to keep the actor safe and healthy. Why? Because acting is the only art form whereby the artists' instrument is their body and their emotions. The brain does not distinguish between make-believe and reality. Sadness is sadness. Anger is anger. The actor has to learn ways of de-role-ing after a show so that they can return to their world clear and lively, not weighed down the psychology of the character or the limitations of the world of the play.

How do we stay safe as performers? One way is embracing Relational Impulse Cultural Process (RIC). I devised the foundational training as an outcome of my research Master's, followed by a more in-depth development in my PhD dissertation. This postmodern training is based on collaborative therapy principles, focusing on relationships, the space between, the multiplicity of selves and the multiplicity of stories. This is where the magic lies. We are relational beings and as such are altered by what is happening between and among each other. There is never just one story. There are multiple interpretations of everything that happens. For the young person to gain an understanding that their story is not necessarily THE truth, just A truth, will stand them in good stead.

The acting training also includes frameworks such as “The Four Agreements” by Miguel Ruiz, four ways of being in the world:

### **THE FOUR AGREEMENTS BY MIGUEL RUIZ (1997)**

#### **ADAPTED FOR QACI YEAR 10**

1. Don't take things personally: there are always multiple perspectives and multiple ways of interpreting.
2. Do not assume anything: stay curious, ask questions, stay alive to other interpretations outside of your own.
3. Use impeccable language: for us that meant we needed to be positive and affirmative when talking about others, always with the thought that they could overhear what we are saying and not get upset.
4. Always do our best and keep connected to the space between me and my fellow actor.

Simple principles that make a whole lot of sense... the actors leave the whole theatre making process with a deep understanding of self and others and how they fit into the scheme of things:

1. They leave with a knowledge of ritual and its importance within the creative cycle. They understand the creative cycle, the ebbs and flows, the “I am drowning/I am waving” syndrome ... one second, it feels like you are drowning and the next second it feels like you are rejoicing, the highs and lows of the creative process...
2. They leave with a very fine experience of what it is to be an ensemble. There are difficult times, difficult relationships, difficult decisions to be made. But, when the young actor looks into the eyes of her/his fellow ensemble member, they see themselves:

“I am only as strong as the smallest and frailest within the ensemble, so it is my responsibility, my duty to help my fellow actors achieve their potential”. Only then will my ensemble thrive.

Our FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE team is hoping that this experience is the basis of a prototype that could be taken into senior schools as an Artist in Residence model, where students choose passages from the *Belonging Trilogy* and create a new story about grief, loss, re-dreaming their own stories, while at the same time recognising their own resilience, joy, healing and friendship without the judgement that we so often witness in our culture.

The ensemble did thrive. They understood connectedness. They understood what it was like when they stepped out on their front foot, rather than leaning back waiting for things to happen. They understood the need to listen, to remain curious, and to leave judgement at the door. They understood the need to avoid what I label “car park gossip,” the talking about someone behind their back ... a most damaging cultural practice that needs to be modified.

As an outcome of our experiences together, the QACI students created a book called *Book of Myths*, which consisted of beautiful personal stories about transformation, re-generation, learning, and love and connection.

Here are just some extracts, the ones that will make sense in isolation. Things our ensemble learned from the *Coming Home* experience. Sometimes I have changed pronouns so that it reads more easily.

1. "To believe in myself."
2. "To be generous with our performance."
3. "To be generous with our voice."
4. "We have so much potential, we are so much bigger than we thought we were, both on and off the stage."
5. "This experience has completely altered my existence and my views on everything."
6. Our ensemble is "stuck together with superglue, spirit and brilliance."
7. "I made a promise to myself ... that I would put all of my ideas forward so that I could grow as a theatre practitioner, and as a person, an individual."
8. "...permission to be alive and real in this space."
9. "Accepting constant change means it is far more difficult to hold onto the things that hold us back."
10. "I am a multi-faceted individual with tens of thousands of stories to tell."
11. "This is where I belong."
12. "The arrows are not what I thought they were, they are really seeds growing out of me."
13. "It was such a beautiful experience seeing everyone become a big and happy family and be able to show people our passion towards art."
14. "Car park gossip is damaging."

So, another show closes, but the resonances and reflections continue on and on, because



Aren't we a work in progress?  
Aren't we every story we've ever heard,  
every place and time we've ever been,  
every person we've ever met,  
every myth we've ever dreamed?  
Our lives, my darlings, are huge.  
Who shall tell the stories?  
What stories shall we tell?  
(*Home*, 2015 draft)

I have included the introduction to the students' *Book of Myths* because it summed up the effect that this sort of work can have on young minds, and possibly not-so-young minds. This way of working changes people, makes them think, makes them dream more deeply. They used many of the lines from *Eve* and changed them to express their gratitude, which is one of the values that we cherish at 4change.

They wrote:

Once upon a time, a long long time ago, thousands of years ago and only Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015 9am, there were 22 teenagers in a black box, little did they know just how much their worlds were about to be shaken.

When a woman with crazy hair and brilliant overalls, short and stocky, little white arms, a huge head-filled with fantastical stories. Small face. Large heart. Little brown eyes; that contain the secrets to millions and millions of stories, entered the room.

Because you're not the child sitting by the fire  
Reading every book in the shire library.  
Because for us you were the fire, you are the fire.  
You are the golden girl.  
And you have shown us so much,  
you have prepared us for things we didn't even know existed.  
Thank you for everything you have done for us and have given us.

Thank you so much Margi,  
Love QACI Grade 10's.

And then they all wrote a myth, their own personal myth, and with tender hands, bound the document with string, and presented it to me.

## APPENDIX 6:

### REVIEWS OF *THE BELONGING TRILOGY*

#### PART 1: REVIEWS OF *HOME*

PART 1 includes excerpts from *Home* reviews of the creative developments and the independent production at La Boite, July 2012, followed by quotes from the 2015 season. For more extensive *Home* reviews see Appendix 2.

*Home* reviews included the following:

- Margi Brown Ash has proved Thomas Wolfe wrong – you can go home again, because home is here and now, wherever love is... (Cotes, 2012)
- We literally hold hands with the performer and the message is powerful. (Burton, 2012)
- A rare and refreshing theatrical work...Not to be missed. (Peters, 2012)
- And we are launched into this warm, astounding, deeply idiosyncratic semi-autobiographical and un-pigeonholeable performance piece, swept up in the storytelling as though we are in fact sharing a magic carpet with Scheherazade...The personal and the political are entwined here. Each of us has our own story and we are all interconnected, the piece seems to be telling us. Every family has its own mythology, and the public exchanging of these intimate revelations constitutes acts of bravery, acts of vulnerability and exposure that remind us how human and eternal we are...It's hard to do this entrancing work justice in a short review—the exposure to the way Brown Ash's brain works (beautifully in tandem with director and longtime collaborator Leah Mercer) is a richly rewarding experience. I wanted to share this experience with loved ones—my son, my mother. Margi Brown Ash is something of a state treasure and it is terrific to see experimental, thoughtful, interrogative and elaborately textured work like this sneaking into the QTC ancillary program. (Carlton, 2014, p. 41)
- 'The map of memory has its own continuity', states one of the quotes that appear scattered around the stage and it is this notion that proves integral to the show's premise and structure...There's is an energy that some theatrical works have that is immediately engaging and "Home" has it in abundance. It is difficult not to be unmoved or untouched by its heart. It is life and it is art in the form of a charming, deeply-moving experience that will continue with you in contemplation of the extraordinariness of ordinary life laid bare, long after you leave. (Blue Curtains, 2015)
- HOME... a unique and special experience that connects artist and audience; past, present and future, and the many homes that we inhabit throughout our lives. The true power of HOME lays in its ability to awaken individual stories so that it is almost impossible to talk about this performance without talking about one's own sense of home. (Panagiris, 2015)

- Sometimes the Brisbane theatre community treats us to something more than just pure entertainment. It treats us to something experiential, profound and life changing; something that speaks to our souls. In those moments, we're reminded of why we're alive and we're struck by the importance of living life to the fullest, of creating our own stories that are worth telling. *Home*, created by and starring one of the most gifted performers in Brisbane Margi Brown Ash, is all of that and more. Some of the most gentle and unthreatening audience interaction I've witnessed saw Margi coax individuals out of their seats to play pivotal characters from her life. It was joyous and magical, and would ensure that no two performances of *Home* would ever be alike. "The way she literally takes an audience by the hand and walks them through her journey, her narrative, her story," QTC Artistic Director Wesley Enoch said of the star of the show, "It's a very generous way of working and a very generous way of making work. Watching (her) performance work is one of those things that will stay with me forever." (McCauley, 2015)

## PART 2: REVIEWS OF *EVE*

MAY 2012, OCTOBER 2012, JULY 2017

*Eve* had three seasons, something that rarely happens with independent shows. *Eve* was strongly supported by Metro Arts (Brisbane) in 2012, the Blue Room (Perth) at the end of 2012, and then five years later at the Brisbane Powerhouse. By doing the season three times, a deep understanding of what belonging could mean emerged. Reviews included the following:

- ... the play contains dramatic and thought-provoking monologues, some laced with satire and often accompanied by the wonderful music Travis makes with his piano and piano accordion. (Dyer, 2017)
- ... Margi, in the eponymous role, is a formidable force on stage...Nuanced, committed and exciting to watch, she is beautifully supported onstage by Travis Ash. He delivers sensitive and lovingly honed performances both when acting and also when performing musically... Lovers of writing, literature and rebellious poets will relate strongly to the work and enjoy how linguistically beautiful the resulting text sounds. *Eve* is inspirational, tragic and wonderful to watch. (McCauley, 2017)
- *EVE*: one of the best 1 hours of theatre I have seen in a very long time. Exquisitely performed with passion, and a dynamic rare in many live performances. In total command, and vocally controlled and contained and explosive and riven by passion. It has been my pleasure to give myself over and place myself at her command.... someone who knows the stage and owns it. I would go to the edges of insanity and back with her. Impressed???? Hell yes ... and Travis Ash (as the name suggests ... her son ... peas in a pod) is so beautiful in his performance ... and wrote and performed the music as well...I know I came to this piece to [sic] late ... last performance of the double bill ... if you saw it, you know ... if you missed it, you are just a little poorer of spirit and soul for having done so.... (Tony Preece Facebook post, July 2017)
- Ms Brown Ash's collaboration with director Leah Mercer has obviously been a fruitful one. It is an absolute pleasure to see a highly trained and experienced actor on stage. Margi's voice is a marvel. She crafts moments of beautiful intimacy in a near-whisper, and blows the audience away with a guttural screaming. No word is ever lost or confused. Actors, go and see this as an example of what the human theatrical voice should be. (Burton, 2012)
- *EVE*...A rare show, it induces more than most, the magic of genuinely mixed emotions and a sense of bewilderment. Margi Brown Ash, who plays *Eve* as if she were never anybody other than she, is a tour de force. This is a show not to be missed. In particular, there is something so bold and fearless about Margi's performance as *Eve* Langley that it almost defies description. But there it is. She is bold and fearless, powerful and vulnerable, passionate and selfish, determined and defiant and absolutely bloody marvellous. (Coward, 2012)

- Margi Brown Ash plays Eve and is riveting to watch. The play's prose drips from her tongue, every movement and breath is enthralling. Margi holds the audience's gaze commandingly and with a delicacy superb to watch. She embodies Eve and manages to magically summon the souls of literary giants and the heavens themselves into the theatre...a strong and compelling piece...It is a sublime, evocative, rich, disturbing and tightly woven piece that will leave you intellectually reeling and profoundly inspired by its complexity and the beautiful, mad brilliance that manifested in the life and work of Eve Langley. (Rodgers, 2012)
- Margi Brown Ash does not perform but rather evokes Langley to the stage and for the entire duration of the piece does not once break the momentum or give a glimpse at the actor beneath the surface. It truly is a stunning performance and perhaps more than that, proof of Margi's fascination and empathy for a misunderstood woman who was "ahead of her time". (Clarke, 2012)
- Displaying an astounding emotional range, Margi Brown Ash plays an Eve full of joyous energy, with a twinkle in her eye and a mischievous grin, making it impossible not to sympathize... Eve is a deeply considered, richly constructed celebration of a determinedly extravagant life, and questions our perceptions of degrees of madness, eccentricity, and the creative spirit. (Dickonson, 2012)
- ...Margi Brown Ash's tour de force of writing and performance... a poetic, combustible interior monologue of reminiscence, longing and heartache. It's thrilling, gorgeously imaginative and physically potent. She gives a performance to match... she captures the rapture of Eve's communion with her muses, the beautiful minds she worships and emulates in her writing and inside her head. Ash crams so much into the hour-plus play and yet it seemed to go by in a flash. I recall, years ago, jumping to my feet to applaud Peter Carroll and Ron Blair's *The Christian Brother*. I did it again, for many of the same reasons, for Margi Brown Ash and Eve. (Zampatti, 2012)

## PART 3

### REVIEWS OF *HE DREAMED A TRAIN*

#### 2014 & 2017

*He Dreamed a Train* was awarded two seasons, the first as part of the inaugural SWEET program at Brisbane Powerhouse in 2014 and, due to its success, a return season three years later in 2017. The following are some published reviews in magazines and newspapers:

- Introducing the plays [DOUBLE BILL] Margi gave the provocation, “What if this is where you belong?” Even as her characters struggled to find if they belong, both her and Travis’ brilliant and difficult performances made us feel welcome in the theatre. What does belong are ‘He Dreamed a Train’ and ‘Eve’; two incredible productions that deserve to reach the heights their characters dream of. TIM BYRNES SCENESTR. Margi Brown ash Double Bill at Brisbane Powerhouse Review. Retrieved from <https://scenestr.com.au/item/9344-margi-brown-ash-double-bill-brisbane-powerhouse-review-20170704> July 2017
- He Dreamed a Train is chockfull of dramatic monologues, wonderful music performed by Travis and some startlingly graphic special effects. . . . It is a wonderful piece of gripping drama. . . . Margi Brown Ash and Travis Ash have an understandably outstanding on-stage trust and rapport...peppered with amazing moments of joy and positivity. The writing is nostalgic, poetic and very relatable. . . . This show could be in GoMA because it’s a work of modern art. . . . this show is amazing. I wish there were more like it. This is theatre. He Dreamed a Train is life on stage, revealed in all its truth, depicted as a stunning piece of modern art by highly skilled professionals. It’s a show Brisbane should be proud to have on our stage. . . . Margi has this energy and passion you feel is almost punk or jazz in its risk taking and unpredictability. Yet once she does or says something, you’re utterly convinced by her. (Dyer, 2017)
- A threnody is not quite a dirge or a requiem, but a literary work created to commemorate the dead, to transform ordinary mourning into a work of art, and it can contain a comic element as well. As befits the form, this is a short play . . .and yet it seems timeless as we are drawn into a hypnotic world where fantasy and reality are blurred. It begins simply enough. Ash, the darling of Brisbane’s theatrical intelligentsia, enters a relatively messy living room in a house in the country. It pushes the boundaries, creates a new kind of experience, a multi-media performance in which actors and technicians play with and off each other in a mind-blowing interdependency. (Cotes, 2014)
- ‘He Dreamed a Train’ is a masterful production in all aspects: the writing, acting, direction and design combine to create a highly engaging performance that simultaneously challenges what theatre can be. ‘He Dreamed a Train’ pushes boundaries in its incorporation of technology, however at the core of the performance is good, old-fashioned storytelling...Incorporating the “new” and the “old”, this production is both accessible and

radical, and above all a reminder that as we move forward and extend the possibilities of theatre, we must not lose sight of the timeless act of storytelling. (*Je Saurai*, 2014)

- The energy & momentum of the storytelling, its ebb and flow, the naturalness and grandeur of delivery, the rich vocal work and dramatic images cast by the actors' physical states and their connection with each other, as well as the tech wizardry, make for a fascinating insight into the mind and heart of Margi Brown Ash, a true theatrical treasure. He Dreamed A Train is one of the most challenging and entirely engrossing new works you'll see this year. When there are magical, beautiful, inspiring and life-changing tales such as this to be told, there had better be a bloody good reason to endure anything less intelligent, or less lovely in life. (Coward, 2014)

## APPENDIX 7:

### AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO *HOME*

We collected audience responses for *Home* throughout each season, with ribbons of cloth books hanging in the foyer, ready to record a comment or reflection on what the work did for them. We did not do this for the next two plays. *Home* was such a participatory experience, where audience members came up on stage and became part of the play. We wanted to hear what viewers thought and felt about this. *Eve* was a more traditional piece of theatre, as was *He Dreamed a Train*, and we thought it best to rely more on responses through social media for those two shows. (See next Appendix.)

- Margi, I am a closed soul. My emotions remain my own. Tears don't come often for me. I cried. The tears were full and free. You made me free. My heart and soul will never forget you. Thank you.
- The ghost of Gran got to me. It's too beautiful to see. Thank you.
- Margi and Leah, your show is delightful. You had me in tears at every turn. In laughter and otherwise. Thank you for your generosity and your beautiful stories. All my love.
- Thank you so much for sharing such an honest, heart-warming performance. It made me all gooey inside to see the amazing way you invited us into your head. Heart and life. I love the work you do, and I can't wait to see what your brilliant life filled brain does next. Much love and warmth.
- Dear Margi and Travis, thank you for sharing such an open, genuine, and gentle creation. The warmth of it will hold me close for a long time. The poignancy of loss will resonate.
- If that doesn't get a return season, the world is mad.
- From the first moment I was swept away. Such a rich mix of emotion and experience, love, laughter and everything in between I found myself relating to parts and simply appreciating other parts. I will take this with me for a long while, digesting it slowly and savouring it dearly. Thank you.
- Margi Brown Ash, thank you. Your performance was beautiful and inspiring. Your successfully showed me the extraordinary in the everyday and made me appreciate everyone's unique experiences.
- Brilliantly inspirational. Lives are worth living and telling the stories both internally and externally are the stuff of human evolution of spirit. Wonderful.



- Your mum was totes the best bit. Reminds me of mine and my grandma. Makes you think a little bit more than usual on a Friday night.
- Margi, what a journey. Words are inadequate to fully describe what you have given to me. Loved it.
- When are you going to publish your story, which is my story and every bodies [*sic*] story? Home is where people trust, connect and love. Thank you....
- I want to laugh cry and just sit with this feeling forever. This is why I love the theatre your show made my little heart sing. Thank you.
- Thank you for a wonderful experience. You have given me much to ponder. I'm going home to ring my mum and share her stories.
- Home pushed and pulled at my heart and my relationship with my home and where I now call home. It made me remember some of the fond and not so fond memories of family, friends and the relationship with the most trivial of objects. A journaling session after wards would hit the nail on the head. Laughter. Lightness. Peace.
- Thank you [for] your voice, your truth for your spirit. This was a beautiful story we can all connect to...please do workshops and ask critical questions of your audience to create their own questions of home.
- This show was incredibly moving and absolutely lovely. The experience was cathartic and left me with a wonderful feeling. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us. It was incredibly thought provoking and admirably honest. A true emotional journey that I not only felt I was taking with you but also with my fellow audience members as we cried and laughed and trusted each other when participating as well as watching. Truly a beautiful piece of theatre. I'm so happy that I could have the honour of experiencing it thank you again so very much.
- Home is a breath. Ohm. I ran away from home. It chased me. With you I turned around. Glad it caught me.
- Thank you for the magical experience. You made our hearts sing. One of the most beautiful shows I've ever experienced.
- Unlike anything I've seen. You projected and animated colour and life into a space that was dull plain and created breath. Sometimes you see art and think "my god, the universe is listening" and it is exactly what you need.
- In the middle of your story ours and my story, I found the tears for my mother's death and ears for a larger story all together.
- I finally got what I came for. Thank you for making me feel connect and engage. I know it means something deep in my heart but I can't put it into words yet. Thank you for your vulnerability.

- Your heart and sweat build us all a bridge: we fill the space and build what I hope is a deeper bliss. Thank you. There is no disconnection.
- You scared me out of my wits. But I felt so comfortable in your home and got a huge buzz out of being on stage. A very clever thought provoking and beautifully structured play made special by having a very talented mother and son performing.
- Margi was having such a fun time on stage that as an audience member I was relaxed. Nothing could go wrong because it just became part of the script. Very worthwhile way to spend my time. Fun and refreshing. Thanks for the Devonshire tea!
- Layers of narrative fabric and place and belonging, relational power moments and Australian voices. Thanks so much.
- I've never been to any play that has made me feel so much and so happy.
- Thank you for this red thread this story for to lead me to the next story that is everyone's story. To remember to forget so that we can make sense of what seems not to make sense. Loved it.
- Stunning and emotive. What a clever way you have of creating stories. Use of Perspex as memories that seem to fade as they come in and out of the light (life).
- Thank you. So, clever the way you shared your stories to become our stories. Wonderful sets delightful evening.
- You have inspired me as an artist. And as a person. Your show and yourself have filled me with joy and excitement for life. Thank you.
- Home/safe/tear/warm/love/understand/truth/perspective/  
alive/bold/able/special/truthful/real/the heart/more questions/sealed/ fly/
- You are a game changer. An inspiration to kick start the first day of the rest of my amazing life. You are beautiful. I will remember these stories as I craft mine. Love.
- I was in awe from start to finish. It was insightful, brilliant and absolutely captured the struggle to and value of belonging.
- I have trouble finding the words. It was spiritual for me. Thank you.
- My mother has been unwell for a very long time. Tonight made and invited me to remember and celebrate the joy of our time together and the challenge of my own time as mother, lover, daughter, artist and friend.
- I remember being 7 and my father going to Vietnam for the first time. I cried when the plane lifted from our homeland. My mother told me not to cry. I denied that I cried because he was leaving. I told her my ears were hurting from the noise of the plane. Still today I am afraid to cry in front of people.

- There's a bit of my story just emerging. Thank you, Margi for the impetus.
- Margi, you beautiful, beautiful soul. I have been moved and changed by this experience. Thank you so, so much for allowing me on board. Thank you for your hospitality and kindness. What you give you your audience I feel as though I have always known you and will never forget this. Thank you for awakening me. So much love.
- Thank you so much for the gift of your performance. I want to share that I was also an AFS student when I was 15. I remember my experience, excitement, thanks to your performance and it made me think about my mother and how she might have felt when I left to Thailand as a young girl. I had never thought of that and I wanted to thank you for making me realise that my mother was also a part of me.
- That was amazingly and simultaneously heartbreaking and touching I was uplifted and touched in a very personal way. I look forward to building and implementing something like this in my classroom.
- Thank you for sharing your world with us and allowing us to be a part of it, even for a second. it was beautiful and I can't wait to implement this kind of idea in my own theatre and English high school classes.
- Hey Margi, your ability to turn a simple story into a wonderland is masterful. Congrats on your transference of enthusiasm joy and essence.
- It was like I was invited into Margi's place for dinner. Very touching and I do want to visit her house.
- Muchas gractas [*sic*]. So inspirational. Home. Beautiful. Loved your performance and the stories portrayed throughout. I was you in many moments. Again thank you.
- You know what? You reminded me how important it is to know where you home is (exactly) where your heart is). Thank you, beautiful Margi.
- So powerful and so helpful to see in preparation to present my piece tomorrow. Seed the spirit Gen Y. we're exploring such similar forms. Thank you for your openness your willingness to be vulnerable. I agree with the idea of a workshop the next day. "what are your stories of home" or some other question that captures the essence of what you desire your piece to achieve. Home, really for me, hit home.
- For the first time in my life I experienced the barrier between audience and actors simply...dissolve.
- Watching your work was like reading a really good book, I could have slowed down each word, just to stay in your world, your story (that does feel like mine) for as long as possible.
- So much fun both in watching and participating. A unique show that inspired beautiful emotions.
- Truly moving. Thank you for reminding me of the importance of excruciating vulnerability. Your story, our stories are magical if only we look. Thank you.

- The most delectable insight into a marvellous, exquisite, ordinary life. As I said, you soothed my soul, encouraged me to retrace my memories and discover my own delicious ‘ordinary’ self. This show is an effervescent gift from a woman of deep connectedness using the efforts of those most dear.
- Thank you for sharing your home with us. You have re-emphasised the beauty and importance of stories and their universal gift. Everyone who has experienced this work has been given a gift of varying shape and content; but undoubtably [*sic*] a gift filled with love. Endless gratitude to everyone involved.
- A worthy production. Good content, accomplished performance and successful and imaginative use of audience members (and I came with no idea about what I was going to see).
- A wonderful performance. You brought us all home.
- Your story is our story, is my story is their story. You wove your story into my heart, touching the connections and spaces between my life and yours. You were my mirror and my shadow, and you inspired me to grasp life a little more strongly, obtusely and uniquely. Thank you, Margi.
- Thank you for the reminder of the power of vulnerability and that the path of life is not set in stone.
- Thank you for the performance of home: Margi drew us into our own shared stories, made us laugh and cry, connected us as human beings. Such a joy to be part of as an audience.
- This is my story and everyone’s story I loved it. Margi is amazing I want, need to see this again.
- Extremely engaging. Margi’s talent for effortlessly including the audience into her production is creative and insightful [*sic*] loved it.
- The art on stage made me dream and imagine scenes from my own story. Wonderful work.
- Tears of joy. Tears of sadness. Tears of empathy tears of understanding. The beauty of your words touched deep inside me your story is partly my story thank you for the inspiration.
- Where art is life, and life is art people are braver than they think and stories are luminous and dark and small and enormous all at once. There is Margi. And with her we are welcomed home.
- The process of watching is as involved as performing. Thank you for showing me the beauty and brilliance of excruciating vulnerability. I dream one day my stories will be as enticing and playful as yours are.
- Dear Margi, thank you kindly for having us today. Your performance made me feel happy and validated with the world. Stay fresh.

- Home is one of the most special shows/art-type-things I have ever encountered. I am going to find you and hug you.
- So beautiful Margi. You welcomed us into your home and embraced us with your heart. Transforming and transfixing.
- Margi, wonderful show. I loved how you were so loving and generous with the audience participants. Use of space and movement was seamless. The mother transforming into Isis was so true. All power to you and the show.

## **APPENDIX 8:**

### **AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO *EVE***

On the final week of the *Eve* season in Perth, we handed out an audience feedback sheet. The feedback was voluntary and anonymous, and the audience members were aware that this was for ongoing research and creative development.

#### **EVE**

*Audience Feedback November 2012 at*

*The Blue Room Theatre*

*As part of our ongoing research and creative development*

*The Nest Ensemble*

*is interested in your response to*

*EVE*

*WE invite you to write your responses to the following questions:*

1. What will you remember most about *Eve* after you walk away from this performance?

Audience Member 1: The extraordinary talent of the lead actor. She was exceptional. That was not an easy text to perform and she made it meaningful, resonant and engaging.

Audience Member 2: The violin.

Audience Member 3: The energy and commitment of the performance. The daring nature and beautiful direction.

Audience Member 4: There are very specific images that I will take away; a combination of astonishing performances and thoughtful, simple design.

Audience Member 5: Margi. The sense of wonder, beauty and infinite imagination somehow grounded in very real and devastating emotions.

Audience Member 6: I found this show profoundly moving. I could really relate to this whole confused sense of identity and how we formulate assessments of the self through “success’ and “rejection.”

Audience Member 7: The start of the play. The violin accompaniment. The fantastic actress.

Audience Member 8: The violin pieces. Great set.

Audience Member 9: The images created through lights and staging. Some very nice visual moments.

Audience Member 10: The artist's interpretation of Virginia Woolf and her struggle to survive in a man's world dominated by the norms and protocol.

Audience Member 11: Perhaps a kind of madness that is close to many of us. I will remember always ...

Audience Member 12: The tragedy and brilliance of Langley

Audience Member 13: Don't sit in front row. Very thought provoking.

Audience Member 14: Margi Brown Ash's performance

Audience Member 15: performance +++++

Audience Member 16: The amazing set and awe-inspiring performance by Margi. Her intelligence and focus brought a tear to my eye. She was all there.

Audience Member 17: Incredible acting performances of all 3. Extreme pain and sadness and passion.

Audience Member 18: Everything on stage was an immaculate performance. It wasn't just the incredible acting of the lead; her entire environment came alive with her. Excellent design in lighting score and mise-en-scene.

Audience Member 19: The performance of the lead.

Audience Member 20: I hated it. Dialogue was weak and boring. No change in the mood. The script was shocking.

Audience Member 21: The depiction of the scream. The complete presence on stage.

Audience Member 22: I'll remember the struggles of Eve, played so amazingly by Margi. An exceptional performance—the best I've seen ever. She took my breath away.

Audience Member 23: The wonderful performance of Eve.

Audience Member 24: Her energy and passion.

Audience Member 25: Energy and intensity of performance.

Audience Member 26: Outstanding performance, brilliant use of stage. Quality of writing.

2. Now that you've seen *Eve*, is there anything you would like to know more about?

Audience member 1: Eve Langley! And Flaubert!

Audience member 2: Her relationship with the children.

Audience member 3: How it was developed.

Audience member 4: The process of creating and developing the production. Where did it begin? What as the inspiration? How was it developed?

Audience member 5: The artists involved. Emily Dickinson. Oscar Wilde and fucking Flaubert. Nijinsky.

Audience member 6: This EVE person I had not heard of.

Audience member 7: Other productions.

Audience member 8: Literature.

Audience member 9: The writing/creating/devising process. The end result was so interesting.

Audience member 10: I would definitely like to know more about Virginia Woolf and her life's work.

Audience member 11: ... [crosses out] I can't even write...I have been profoundly affected by 'Eve'.

Audience member 12: I would like to know more about Langley's works.

Audience member 13: Story.

Audience member 14: Yes, her and to read her books.

Audience member 15: Life story.

Audience member 16: I would like to know more about Eve and early life and relationship. with her personalities. I will definitely research more about her.

Audience member 17: I'd like to read one of her books.

Audience member 18: How accurate it was to Eve Langley's life and if there are any other biographies. Also, going home to take *Pea Pickers* off my shelf and finally read it. Was Eve happy?

Audience member 19: I would love to know more about the story, the meaning, its inception. Everything!

Audience member 20: No!

Audience member 21: N/A

Audience member 22: I'd like to read her books and to know her creations given she struggled on so many levels.

Audience member 23: Literature. Eve's life and her acceptance of what must have been...

Audience member 24: Her writings.

Audience member 25: The underlying themes of Eve's life of which we caught glimpses.

Audience member 26: Eve's work.

3. After watching *Eve*, what stories are awoken from your life/ have Eve's stories impacted you in any way?

Audience Member 1: It made me think about my mother, and the way there is no valued place in society for middle-aged women: not commercially beautiful, no longer raising babies, left to feel redundant. Or perhaps there is...

Audience Member 2: Watching *Eve* made me think of the 'tortured artists' in my life.

Audience Member 3: My creativity is inspired. This is the perfect way to introduce somebody to this style/genre of play.



Audience Member 4: Not particular stories, but rather the emotional experiences we witness in the character's journey; the feeling of abandonment, hopelessness, deep sadness, but also moments of inspiration and hopefulness.

Audience Member 5: Inspired me as a theatre maker and audience member.

Audience Member 6: I loved the use of the same object as many things. The use of lighting and movement to create a sense of place also was very impressive.

Audience Member 7: N/A

Audience Member 8: Torment of failure.

Audience Member 9: I think this question will take a little more thought. However, it does make me reflect on how hard life as an artist will be.

Audience Member 10: The personal conflict of trying to balance life, ambition and responsibilities.

Audience Member 11: N/A

Audience Member 12: Good theatre always impacts/changes. I will no doubt think of this performance often.

Audience Member 13: Artistic insanity (my own).

Audience Member 14: The inhibitions of being female, particularly in those days.

Audience Member 15: Amazing depiction of a creative mind on the edge of reality.

Audience Member 16: Yes. I am currently writing a play and could relate to Eve's struggle. Her failed relationship with her husband hit me and mine with my boyfriend. Eve has inspired me.

Audience Member 17: N/A

Audience Member 18: The relationship between the brilliance and madness and the tipping point from which there is no return. What drives people's creativity is also their greatest impediment. Very inspiring prose, the whole play a work of art.

Audience Member 19: I still haven't had enough time to ingest and digest Eve.

Audience Member 20: Excellent acting by main actress. She was great working with a bad script. The fiddle player was great. The set was good too.

Audience Member 21: I wasn't completely following Eve's story intellectually. I felt more like I picked up on each emotion she was feeling. I learned about a woman's isolation than Eve's chronological life.

Audience Member 22: Yes, most definitely. My family has struggled with mental health and this performance was visceral for me.

Audience Member 23: Many: fantastic.

Audience Member 24: Importance of relationships.

Audience Member 25: When you are alone, only you know what you experience. Life is short.

Audience Member 26: Representation of Australian loneliness. Writers—especially women in that period—still resonates today.

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