

The Form of Possibilities:

The Body Remembered and Remembering in the Built Environment



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Abstract

The Form of Possibilities: The Body Remembered and Remembering in the Built Environment is a practice-based research project. I have set out, in this work, to explore in writing and performance a potentially fractious collage of views that make up the stories invoked through recollection. I note that after I have *experienced*, and the moment has passed and gone, a whole hinterland remains in the realm of memory, where the geography – the choreography of the experience – continues on in my body and the environments that my body inhabits. One of the key premises underpinning this research is that performance is both informed and infected by this largely invisible play of energy through the mind and the body, and in the environments through which that play takes place.

To explore this proposition imaginatively, in text and built forms, I have engaged with the Generative Writing Workshops of Theatre Director and Writer Jenny Kemp, who employs words and images as 'dislocators' to erode habitual patterns of expression and expectation in acts of writing, reading, and imagining. Written narratives have emerged out of this engagement. I use images in conjunction with words, as propositions, in an attempt to remove a layer of complexity imposed by the 'burden of meaning', as I see it, which is attached to formal language alone.

I have used the imaginative process of Ideokinesis, as an embodied and performed methodology, where my work is in direct dialogue with a unique system of movement and postural training developed by Mabel Todd, Barbara Clark, and Lulu Sweigard. Its functioning is not with 'actual' movement but with virtual and imagined movement – it thus calls on memory and imagining. These processes have resulted in two outcomes: a sequence of narratives arranged as Acts of remembering – a saturation in words, images, and imaginings – and the creation of a theatrical performance, which engages with what language and ideas actually feel like. How they feel and how they look depend not only upon the nature of my own embodied experience but on the remanent embodied experiences of those who view the artefact.

In addition to this component, in performance, I preference text and environmental sounds over music, in recognition of the residual effect that language and experience have on the workings of the physical body and on the environments that bodies inhabit. I see this interest as different from professional and scholarly engagement with Performance because it aspires to the condition of poetry, where form and content are inseparable.

This research draws upon memory and narrative in ways that attempt to illuminate an otherwise mysterious process of imagining through the body. The realm of my imagination is interrogated in a way that I hope will offer new insights into how a performer's subtle, embodied experience can reveal itself to an audience; how our experience of our environments and ourselves is played out within our bodies and their haptic fields, and by so doing is re-examined.

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration:

"I, Trevor Patrick, declare that the PhD thesis entitled
The Form of Possibilities:
The Body Remembered and Remembering in the Built Environment
is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures,
appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes.
This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the
award of any other academic degree or diploma.
Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work."

Signature

Date

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To Betty and Ron



2. Ron and Betty

List of Publications, Exhibitions and Awards

Publications

- Patrick, T. "Some Thoughts On Working", *Brolga* 33 – An Australian journal about dance. Ausdance, Ed. Amanda Card, ACT. 2010 pp 34-37
- Patrick, T. "Small Dance Catastrophe – I could pretend the sky is water: Performance Text", *Writings on Dance* 24, Ed. Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner, Melbourne. 2008 pp 5-11
- Thompson, A. "The strange in Dance: Continental Drift", *Broadsheet* Vol 29, Ed. Linda Marie Walker, Michael Newall, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia. Inc., Adelaide. 2000 pp 10-11
- Patrick, T. "Subtle Bodies" MAP Movement and Performance Symposium Papers, Ed. Erin Brannigan, Ausdance Inc., Canberra. 1999 pp 31-34
- Gardner, S. Making Microdance: Trevor Patrick interview: *Writings on Dance* 17, Ed. Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner, Melbourne. 1997-98 pp 32-45
- Patrick, T. "Achy Breaky Heart - Paris 1991: Performance Text", *Writings on Dance* 10, Ed. Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner, Melbourne, 1994 pp 4-11

Exhibitions

Nine Cauldrons - Member of the 'Microdance' Project for ABC Television (1997).
Nominated Best Dance Film - 1999 Australian Dance Awards

- 2000 New Moves - new territories - Festival - Glasgow
- 1999 Australian Dance Festival - Sydney
Festival Internazionale di videodanza - Naples
- 1998 Dance on Screen Festival - London
Le Biennale Internationale du film sur l'art - Centre Georges Pompidou - Paris
Changma Arts Festival - Seoul, Korea
Chicken or the Egg - Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne
Edge of the World Film Festival - Hobart
- 1997 STEPS - The Performance Space - Sydney
Perth Institute of Contemporary Art - Perth
Reel Art - Gorman House Arts Centre – ACT, Canberra

Awards

- 2011 Performance Project Grant – Australia Council for the Arts
- 2006 Australian Postgraduate Award – Victoria University, Melbourne
- 2002 Project Funding - Arts Victoria
- 2001 Research Fellowship - Australia Council for the Arts
Green Room Award - Best Male Dancer (The Ends of Things)
- 2000 Performance Project Grant - New Work - Australia Council for the Arts
Seed funding (Behind the Scenes) - Melbourne International Arts Festival
Green Room Award - Outstanding Creative Collaboration (Delirium)
Vice-Chancellor's Citation for Excellence in Research - Victoria University

- 1998 Creative Development Grant - New Work - Australia Council for the Arts
Choreographic Fellowship (with Peter Trotman) - Canberra Choreographic Centre
Green Room Award - Best Ensemble Performance (Heavy)
- 1997 Gordon Van Praagh Prize for Choreography (Continental Drift) - Green Mill Project
Performance Project Grant (with Sally Gardner) - Australia Council for the Arts
Green Room Award - Best Direction (Descansos)
- 1996 Microdance Project - Australia Council/ABC/Australian Film Commission
- 1995 Creative Development Grant - Australia Council for the Arts
Creative Development Grant - Arts Victoria
- 1991 Paris Studio Residency - Australia Council for the Arts
- 1990 Creative Development Grant (with Julie-Anne Long) - Australia Council for the Arts
- 1987 Travel Grant (study in New York) - Australia Council for the Arts

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¹ Trevor Patrick has created all images unless otherwise indicated.

² Kock, M. & O. Reith.(1894) *Der Akt*. Berlin: p.63

³ Unknown.(1997) www.google.com.au/search?q=Thredbo+disaster

⁴ Unknown.(1945) www.google.com.au/search?q=Atomic+Dome+Hiroshima

⁵ Hart, B. Bluebottle3 (2011) *I could pretend the sky is water*. Technical Drawings (for Trevor Patrick). Melbourne.

⁶ Hawkes, P. (2011) *I could pretend the sky is water*. Performance Photos (for Trevor Patrick). Arts House: Dance Massive. Melbourne.

⁷ Hinkley, R. (2011). *I could pretend the sky is water*. Performance DVD (for Trevor Patrick). Arts House. Dance Massive. Melbourne.

Pretext

Setting:

It is 1933.

The place: Claridge's Hotel, London, England.

The scene: A speech at The Canadian Authors' Association Dinner.

Enter a gentleman by the name of Jean Pijon, who has, some years earlier, constructed a frame house for writer Rudyard Kipling.

Pijon turns to his employer and says, 'Everything which the tree she have experienced in the forest she take with her into that 'ouse.'

Kipling faces his audience and explains, "For it is with us as it is with timber. Every nut and shake in a board reveals some disease or injury that overtook the log while it was growing. That is the law for us all, each in his or her own land."⁸

These men were speaking poetically of the way that the sediment of our experiences, as well as our understandings of those architectures that we inhabit, are laid down over time, settle, and continue to resonate within us and in our built environments. Kipling's comments speak to many of the themes and concerns of my work, as they call upon a sense of the imagination that is fundamental in its way of experiencing the world, which, having integrated past and present, glistens with the possibilities of subsequent events still yet to be known.

The form of possibilities: the body remembered and remembering in the built environment addresses intangible dimensions of dance and architecture, and their relationships to memory, experience, imagination and space, through the processes of storytelling and performance. With the search for personal identity the process of constructing narrative begins, a sense of belonging is experienced, and a sense of meaning is distilled. Specifically the project, as an artwork, has led me to a consideration of the connection between memory, embodied experience, and space in my built environment - how the articulate/literate body, moving through space, time, and an environment that is constructed, becomes energised in ways that can be viewed or read, and imagined.

To my mind, Kipling might just as easily have said: 'the rooms of my body continue to resonate with every event of significance that has ever happened inside it/them.' But what is significant and how is that determined?

A murder perhaps. A party? A murder or a party? A murder at a party! Dead people having a party! People having a party a long time ago but the people have since died! Been murdered? So it's an old house then? Yes. A crowded house (but not a New Zealand pop group). And the body has lasted 54 years.

For as long as I have moved with any sense of mindfulness I have been drawn to the connection between memories, embodied experience, and the use of space in the built environment. As an artist working with performance I am continually being led to contemplate

⁸ Quotations from Rudyard Kipling, recorded 1933, reproduced in *The Spoken Word: Writers*, London, UK: British Library Sound Archive (1993).

the action of my mind at play on the architecture of my body. Not that you'd know, under normal circumstances. Necessarily.

I woke remembering a dream of a corridor passing beneath and around me. And overhead. The doors passed. The doors then one – the doors. Then two – and one on either side. Then two. Then one to the right. The door was shut on the room but open to the room. It moved to me and around me. A fire crackled in its place. Too much eucalyptus and the need of a guard to catch the sparks flying out. Small bursts of laughter and song. And candle light. No, lamplight. I had spotted the piano, not so grand but upright. Enough. It was good enough. At last.

I try on words and images and sensations again and again, until they feel right, until I am comforted and comfortable. The repetition is soothing and sometimes productive. I persist with the writing of words as a medium through which dance may move, and be seen to move the body, because it is liberating for me to believe that my own experiences are not lost to me in the ether of unreliable recollection, but are somehow embedded in my physical body and in the fabrics of the architectural structures that bodies construct and inhabit.

At last a fallen paper flower from the wall of gold and green. Gold leaf on green. Wallpaper leaves shimmering in the burnished golden firelight. Golden petal shadows wore me like an old coat I'd been meaning to give away. Unworn for so many years but still. Still attached. Still borne. Fallen open and down. Drawn silently into the fabric of the walls. The forest of shimmering golden leaf.

I woke into the wallpaper and cried for no apparent reason. 54 years. The newspaper clippings. Whole pages of tiny print having lay down under linoleum, and history walked upon. 100 years.

Still marching on, underfoot. Under lino. I wished I were a soldier. For a moment. Then not. And furthermore and further still the stillborn fell. Apparent yet. I stormed from the room without leaving my place. I shimmered on the golden leafed wallpaper as it shook to sounds of clapping hands and clapping thunder and feet clapped firmly on the floor, in dancing to the voice of an upright piano.

I think of ideokinesis⁹, as it is insinuated into 'physical memory', as giving me greater access to my experience of my environment and my self, through a process of structured imagining. This process has led me directly to the development of narratives that explore one of the key premises underpinning my work: that performance is affected by a largely invisible play of energy through the mind and the body, and in the environments through which that play takes place.

I cried for no apparent reason as I stood at the foot of the mountain of old furniture, a sleeping buffalo¹⁰ and cardboard boxes. The floral carpet was unrolled and flat beneath the pile. Flat to protect the wood, I thought, from the entire goings on. The work going on. The works that could and would be going on when the walls were lined again and the work was ongoing.

⁹ A body-alignment practice that uses mental imagery to change messages sent to the nervous system.

¹⁰ Explorers Hume and Hovell named Mt. Buffalo in 1824 for its resemblance to a sleeping buffalo.

During the process of re-lining the rooms of the old house the wall cavities had given up plum seeds, coins, an earring, and fragments of crockery, toys, pins, a playing card, termite castings, a shopping list written on the back of a betting slip, the skeletal remains of vermin, a sheep's neck, dust, a child's slipper, and a newspaper cutting:

In loving remembrance of our dearly beloved mother, Margaret Millar, who died 28th June 1905, at her daughter's residence, Mrs. D. Murdock, Brookside; aged 99 years.

No matter how we pine, dear mother,
No matter how we call,
There is nothing left to answer
But the photo on the wall.¹¹

I had found a small child's slipper under the upright piano when they moved it out. A curious dog uncovered a small child's leg bone in the yard, under the house in the town nearby, where his grieving mother once lived. A slipper. A playing card. A shopping list written on the back of a betting slip. A tiny clipping of an obituary from the newspaper. 'In loving remembrance of...' 100 years or so. The head of a porcelain doll. The boy child. Threepence.

I am continually brought back to the interplay of these physical and mental realities and how they determine my experience of performance, my physical world, as well as the structures that I inhabit. I see this interest as different from professional and scholarly engagement with theatre because it aspires to the condition of poetry, where form and content are inseparable. I respond emotionally and intuitively to the sounds, images and sensations of movement, and the melody of language. In doing so the work is unashamedly subjective and impressionistic in style.

The Masonite that had lined the walls has been taken down. It now covers the floors of other rooms, to protect the floorboards from damage from the further work that is going on or could have been going on if it had been ongoing. On.

I look at the walls, now just a framework, and think of the old wallpaper on Hessian that was uncovered when the Masonite was first brought down. 100 years and still in tact. Mostly. Some. A few sections I have kept and rolled carefully and placed in another room. I'll deal with that later, I imagine. This is just the beginning. Though 10 years into it really and I am just starting. I hated pulling it down. The wallpaper. The thought of things. Off the walls. Falling. Dropping to the floor. It had lasted 100 years after all. And I have lasted 54.

The colours had browned with time and open fires and the beating sun that scorched through the roof in summer. No insulation. I look up at the beams. The visible forms of beams bruised into the old Murray pine boards that line the ceiling. A strangely greying white wash of old paint. Grey matter. What do they call it now when they distress it on purpose - to furniture - on TV lifestyle shows? The 'crackle effect?' My mind has been carefully affected, by crackle. Judiciously crackled, for effect. Still, 12 feet up (but not a dead insect), and too much work to imagine stripping it back to the raw wood. Distilled to one clear and beautifully articulated idea. Best to insulate and paint the ceiling properly I think. Or leave it. A memory of its old self. I continued to will myself into the future. What next?

¹¹ Newspaper cutting (1905) found in the wall cavity of Buffalo Creek Homestead (2010).

I practice imagining because of its power as a tool - the currency it holds within a real understanding of the body's anatomical structure - and even though its methodology is creative and imagistic, those images, as they are used in ideokinesis, are seeded with body-based properties that speak directly to their neuromusculoskeletal target.

I imagine the space between my joints, the precarious balance of my skeletal structure, and in my imagining I locate dynamic paths of movement within a landscape of bones, organs and fluids.

The skirting boards that once held my thoughts together have been carefully removed. Careful not to split the wood. So I have split the wood, not on purpose and now lent against the mound of stuff in the centre of myself. Now I stand near the door. My back to it. Looking in at the pile and imagining it somewhere else. Anywhere else. Just gone from that particular place.

I have just finished my pre-breakfast miso soup, my chanting/droning groaning meditation, another breakfast (rice porridge), a cup of coffee (flat white, 1 sugar), 3 loads of washing because I can and it's a sunny day and the clothes may even dry on the line. I've given Bella her Tuesday morning Reichi¹² and put the girls down for their pre-rest nap because, as an old dog, you can never have too much sleep, and I am about to drive into town to do the day's shop so that I can get back here and get some work done.

My mind is a foreign country and I appear to be stranded. Grounded by a cloud of volcanic ash. It takes so much effort to communicate and the exchange rate is appalling. And I never know what to wear. The gumboots? Or the thongs?

I wake every morning at 4am, afraid:

Afraid that I will.

Afraid that I won't.

Afraid that I can.

Afraid that I can't.

To manifest the experience of working creatively with the body/mind is to internalise fluid metaphors and transform them into realities. And still:

'He is left high and dry.'

'We must suspend disbelief.'

'The question is left hanging in the air.'

'She is like a fish out of water.'

'He is behaving like a caged bird.'

'The answer is floating in the wind.'

And yet the nets of metaphor lay, like so many 'holes held together by string', and still the author unknown.¹³

My life, like so many bobbing bottles in the surf. Each one containing a message that may or may not make it to shore.

¹² A Japanese healing technique applied by touch.

¹³ Most often attributed to ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu.

Bobbing bottled propositions trapped inside glass containers.
So many corks saving them from deteriorating while at the same time keeping them bottled up
with promise, and promised.

As I stand on the veranda, my thin and insubstantial self surrenders in and of itself. My eyes
blur. I allow them to, as I fall softly in upon myself.

To start again. I was standing on the veranda, sinking into feeling.

I thought. Not nothing but very near the deepest point of the darkest valley. That precipitous
drop. I was opening down and in, up and out. Expanding from the inside out and outside in.
How can that be? You had to be there.

"How do I look? This dissolving, expanding fullness." Imagining me as me. My ears opened
to the sound of the rain on the shed roof, and on the outhouse roof, letting the water run off its
corrugated iron when it is not thinking of itself as an energy efficient showerhead, and
remembering to let it pass through it when it is. And all the while I am falling backwards and
in. And the dull roar from the house roof above and behind me. Now gushing into me and
beyond. I am soaked through to the skin, chilled to the bone and to oblivion. My jaw has
softened open. My breath fallen into and out of me like air should, I think, and through
everything and me. I don't know how I am still standing.

I don't remember when I was first colonised by moving images. Who would have thought that
when Mabel Todd wrote her marvellous book, *The Thinking Body*, she actually believed it?
And now it is so much a part of the way I work and live that I can't imagine being without it, or
ever having read it.

How can I still be standing as everything that I see before me, and everything that follows falls
in on me softly? What am I now that the struggle has ended? For a moment. I was already
thinking of leaving and returning again to this place as I walked over and away to chop some
wood for the fire, piss into the long grass, and yell at the dogs to stop barking at passing cars.

Still standing, not sitting, not lying down.

Sitting, not lying down, not standing.

Lying down, not standing, not sitting.

Like rolling waves. Changing forms. Lapping at the edges and inching across the grass, the
threshold, the floorboards, the frontier of my floral carpet.

The tide comes in, slowly, across the coloured pile.

The light on the floor moves very slowly.

The figure moves.

The light moves. The figure moves. For a long time.

The light preceding the figure moves over the floor very slowly for a long time.

I have looked out of the old room through the old glass and into the older field. I have been
sucked out of myself by the view down the old valley. But the dusty smell has returned me. I
have breathed in deeply, the view, and been brought back to the room by the taste of musty
old floral carpet, damp and insistent at the back of my throat. I have cleared it and swallowed
and imagined what it was like to be an old Japanese pharmacist. Hemmed in by boxes of
almost rubbish. Not yet. And stacks of unused furniture. And old ideas half expressed and
hastily scribbled onto the backs of old envelopes, stored in cardboard boxes inside multiple
drawers behind mysterious doors in other old rooms.

I have looked into the old glass of the old cabinet and sifted through the past, old and unclear.
Lost to myself in water glass in the sliding panels of a 19th Century Japanese Pharmacist's
cabinet.¹⁴



3. Japanese Pharmacist's Cabinet

¹⁴ The Pretext is an expanded version of "Some Thoughts On Working" Patrick, T. (2010) Published in *Brolga* 33 – *An Australian journal about dance*. Ausdance, Ed. Amanda Card, ACT. pp 34-37

Foreword

Just as we think architecture with our bodies, we think our bodies through architecture.

*Marco Frascari*¹⁵

I began this research from within a performing arts framework by posing the question: how does one address intangible dimensions of dance and architecture, and examine the relationships that such ethereal forces have to memory, experience, imagination and space? Specifically this project asks: how might ideokinetic dance practice give one insights into the connective fabric of memory, experience, and the body in the built environment, such that imaginative processes may be seen to move the body?

As an artist/researcher I have engaged with that largely invisible play of energy through my mind and my body, and I have reflected on the effect that play has on the contexts in which that play takes place. An ongoing enquiry into the interplay of these physical and mental realities through ideokinetic practice, supported by current neurological research, has determined my experience of art and performance, as well as of the environments that I inhabit. My approach to teaching, writing, and performance making has also been shaped by this search for a direct causal link between the functioning of the body and the imagination. This work is fundamental to my research and is supported by the work carried out by Todd and Sweigard in their development of Ideokinesis. This is also reflected in the writing of Lakoff and Johnson when observing that “the architecture of [our] brain’s neural networks determines what concepts [we] have and hence the kind of reasoning [we] can do.”¹⁶ I am attempting to show how the environments that I have shaped for myself, and the tools that I have used to fashion them, determines how I function within those environments. As well I seek to provide some insight into how this undertaking inspires the expression of the human form and may continue to shape an aesthetic.

My method here is to examine through dance performance and a particular creative writing strategy, the possible link between the expression of the physical form in performance and the imaginary dimensions at play in both bodily and built constructions. Parallel to this concern is my interest in the kinaesthetic understanding of the audience/reader who is led away from a linear, chronological sense of time and into a contemplative, meditative, desire-filled space.

My hope for the work is that the use of finely tuned descriptions of idiosyncratic actions, both in the word and in the body, will serve to magnify particular physical memories. These can then be observed in the context in which they arise, in movement, as well as out of context, in writing. I am attempting to orchestrate this through the overt use of the writing and performing technique as a predictive statement, allowing particular physical memories to arise, as we read and re-read, observe and see again, and remember.

¹⁵ Frascari, M. (1991) *Monsters of Architecture: Anthropomorphism in Architectural Theory*, Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, p.1.

¹⁶ Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York, NY, USA: Basic Books, p.16.

Intangible content in architecture and performance

When writing about building, which is also an art born of memory and the illusory, Amos Chang comments that, “[i]ntangible content in architectural composition can be said to exist as a general binder of the non-being and the being of any visual entity.”¹⁷ Chang’s essay ‘The Tao of Architecture’ espouses the philosophy of Lao-tzu as a filter through which we might re-examine principles of modern Western architecture. It is not my intention here to wade into the extensive philosophical content of Western architecture, but to draw upon elements of it that resonate with how I experience my own imaginative and constructed environment. In Chang’s view the architect must have a profound understanding of the structural elements of any building’s ‘body’, of its spatial determinants and possibilities, together with a capacity to imagine space and volume ‘rewritten’ in other ways. Not unlike the architecture of the built environment, where possibility exists in the body of its hollowness (between walls and floor and ceiling), the human body too is resonant with potential space. I experience my body as like a framework - a laminate of different and varied cultural experiences. It is as if it were a vessel through which invisible activities of thought can influence the appearance of the outer form.

Finnish architect, and architectural theorist, Juhani Pallasmaa, writing in defence of a collaboration of the senses in the experience of architecture, has also noted that

“during the design process, the architect gradually internalises the landscape, the entire context, and the functional requirements as well as his/her conceived building: movement, balance and scale are felt unconsciously through the body as tensions in the muscular system and in the positions of the skeleton and inner organs. Consequently, architecture is communication from the body of the architect directly to the body of the person who encounters the work, perhaps centuries later.”¹⁸

Pallasmaa has further observed that traditional dwellings in so-called primitive societies, particularly African, appear as large clay jars rather than as buildings as we have come to think of them. So it is, “in the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the clay pot lies.”¹⁹ Chang states that to satisfy a client’s needs most efficiently is to know what they don’t want, as much as what they do want. Thus *absence* is the telling ingredient here – in light, space and composition. The reality of a building is not in the structure of the walls, nor in the roof that it supports, but is inherent in the space within; just as one might envision the substance of lace as a collection of holes held together by thread, and its utility as inherent in such an arrangement of voids. Thus physical, postural, or bodily equilibrium and visual, spatial, architectural equilibrium may both be achieved with the help of elements that remain imaginary, illusive, or indeed absent.

American installation artist James Turrell, though not an architect or a designer for theatre in the conventional sense, refers to himself as a ‘painter of light’. He creates highly architectural, yet apparently objectless forms that appear to be constructed of solid light. The substance of his work, being illusory, is technically not there as he works primarily with materials of light, space, and perception. Renowned lighting designer Jennifer Tipton also engages closely with this process. Elizabeth Stone, writing for the New York Times, observed that Tipton, while

¹⁷ Chang, A.I.T. (1981) *The Tao of Architecture*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.69.

¹⁸ Pallasmaa, J. (2010) *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (7th Ed.) Sussex, UK. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 66-67.

¹⁹ Lao-tzu. (Mair, V.H. Translation: 1990) *Tao Te Ching*. New York, NY. USA. Bantam Books, p.121.

working through lighting concepts, avoids the use of words altogether: "She will simply not discuss it", lest describing her process in words (filling her space with all of the limitations that come with language that has a lineal trajectory) might preclude other, three-dimensional possibilities - that text might immobilize her imagination. Tipton here is navigating her way, by instinct, across the difficult terrain of an otherwise mysterious creative landscape. She is privileging the felt experience over the often more insistent and linear forces of reason.²⁰

So it is that choreographers and architects, as well as the designers that they collaborate with, may be seen to interact with invisible content as well as attend to the tangible form of their work: the space to be lived or performed in, and the negative or intangible space.

As this research project is performance/practice based the process of addressing core questions has been driven by my art practice. It is within this context that I have explored the proposition that my experience and my memories reveal themselves through the body, in the environment that that body inhabits. I have examined this proposal imaginatively, using written narratives, and performance, within a built environment. For me, content exists in memories and imaginings of the spatial history of the environment in which my writing and the performance take place.

I have included narrative texts, built forms, and my body in motion in the presentation of my research, in recognition and response to the evanescent quality of live performance, that is to say, the 'actual' dance does not exist beyond the moment of its making and in its performance - in the moment for which it was made. My performance contained the time of its own formation, but now that it has been made, and shown, it is gone. Commonly in performing arts practice, after the event, there is no solid, 3-dimensional artefact. Nothing remains to show that something has taken place, save an impression of the moment of it recorded in writing, in photographic records, on digital video disc, or in the physical memory of it embodied by the performer and the audience. Having investigated these interrelationships through processes of performance making and creative writing I have used written text, embedded in the body of the performance, to establish a context for the use of imagery and to allude to other possibilities and other meanings. As the filigree of stories unravel, the journey becomes more and more about what has happened, what has not happened, and what may yet happen. The written trace of the event in stories – the material as well as the immaterial substance of the performance - is my way of honouring the influence of the imaginary in my work.

My writing and my performance, by nature, are deliberately ambiguous. My interests as the maker and the performer, as well as those expectations of the audience, intersect the work - and these interests may be contradictory. I have included performance texts and architectural elements in the performance work to form a biographical narrative - a bridge that connects the past to the present. These elements are recalled in memory and, further, they serve as an aid to comprehension by directing the viewer's eye and by communicating specific intent and meaning, or the lack of it. However, as primarily an embodied and creative project, the thrust of this research remains with the task of representing experience. I have sought to present *understandings* that are recorded in the tissues of my body in relationship to the fabric of the 'set' (the built environment of the performance) in ways that can be apprehended by an audience.

²⁰ Stone, E. (1991) www.nytimes.com/1991/04/14/theater/theater-through-the-lens-brightly-with-jennifer-tipton. Accessed June 2011, p.4.

In the beginnings of my making of the performance a number of colleagues questioned my attachment to the tubular steel construction (the Set) in which the movement was placed. One or two even tried to dissuade me from my use of what seemed to them to be a harsh, hard-edged and incongruous form, at the heart of such an ethereal work. At the time I couldn't explain to them why the articulation of a void was so important to me. Why is a Shaker chair just right? What is it about the framing of a Japanese cabinet that makes its proportions so pleasing? I couldn't say at the time, apart from observing that both of these examples may be seen as frameworks and containers. Then, at a recent NGV²¹ exhibition titled: Vienna: Art and Design, an unknown caption writer described simply the use of such a shape as the "main unit to define solid form and blank space", and I felt a reassuring sense of understanding. They went on to observe how, as a frame, "the square flattens and separates figure from ground; as a decorative wall border it eliminates weight and mass. [Gustav] Klimt too, employed square motifs to flatten his paintings and eliminate mimesis and corporeal mass."²²

I am certainly not comparing myself to Klimt but I do share his fascination with the power of the frame to focus attention on specific locations. One of my key objectives in using this approach to performance making is to entice curiosity and intimacy. The caption continued to describe how, when manipulated, "the square becomes an instrument of infinite, quasi-spiritual mystery. Formal clarity begets spatial ambiguity, static geometry creates movement, and the impersonal grid-like matrix of a dress pattern or wallpaper builds a disturbing, subjective presence."²³ As I thought about this approach to design I realised how often I use the frame as a window into my own work; as a lens that attempts to capture more than just an image; as a portal into an invisible world that lies beneath the subtle play of breath under fabric over skin. Both artists [Joseph Hoffmann and Gustav Klimt] recognised this regenerative property [of organic structures], and sought through design to integrate it with daily life.

Ideokinesis

Given my fascination for the actions of memory and the imagination on the body, it seemed inevitable that my main approach to these creative and imagistic curiosities was through the application of ideokinesis: a powerful and well-recognised system of movement and postural training that began in the 1930s with the work of Mabel Todd, Barbara Clark, and Lulu Sweigard, and was further articulated and developed by dance scholars, dancers, and movement therapists.²⁴ This is the language in which I have chosen to conduct this research. It is first spoken in the imagination, as a dialogue between my body in a constructed environment, and in the human mind.

²¹ National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Australia.

²² Unknown (2011) Exhibition caption introducing *Vienna: Art and Design – Klimt/Schiele/Hoffmann/Loos*. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Todd, M. (1972 [1937]) *The Thinking Body: A Study of the Balancing Forces of Dynamic Man*, with a Preface by Lulu E. Sweigard. New York, NY: Dance Horizons, Inc.; Matt, P. (1993) *Kinesthetic Legacy: The Life and Works of Barbara Clark*. Tempe, AZ: CMT Press; Sweigard, L. (1974) *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Co; Dempster, E. (1985) "Imagery, Ideokinesis and Improvisation," *Writings on Dance* 1, pp.18–22; Dempster, E (1993) "Revisioning the Body: Ideokinesis, Feminism and the New Dance," *Writings on Dance* 9, pp.10–21.

Ideokinesis works with *virtual* and *imagined* movement, in order to effect 'actual' movement – it thus calls on memory and the imagination. Grinfeld writes about ideokinesis as a somatic approach to kinesthetic re-education that “brings the body into more efficient alignment by bringing the imagination and the body into a working relationship”.²⁵ Fitt notes that this is achieved by giving us “bodily based access to the whole [neurological] system and its interactive patterns.”²⁶

I have used the practice of ideokinesis as an embodied and performed methodology during this research period. Specifically, this practice, as it is applied through 'physical memory', has given me greater access to my experience of my environment and my self, leading me directly to the development of texts. I use the same processes of imagining, that ideokinesis employs, to interrogate my memories and apply my imagination to my body. From this intense focus there has emerged both a physical vocabulary of movements, and a collection of written narratives. Instead of presenting a conventional thesis I put forward these writings as a *paratext* accompanying the main body of the work - a theatrical performance comprising elements of dance, text, and a built construction developed over the life of the project.

By focusing on the paradox, that such an intangible thing as imagination can have so profound an effect, I am drawing attention to one of the key premises underpinning this work: that theatre performance is affected by a largely invisible play of energy through the mind and the body, and in the environments through which that play takes place. To some extent this energetic link is described in the bodies and minds of the people who view the 'artefact', and in the cyclic relationship that they have with both their architectural and natural environments. I am proposing that the interplay of these physical and mental realities determines how we experience performance, our physical world, as well as the structures that we inhabit.

In the context of ideokinesis my use of images in conjunction with words, as propositions, embroiders upon the already complex levels of meaning attached to formal language. However, as primarily an embodied and creative project, the thrust of this research remains with the task of representing experience, here told in stories emerging out of the tissues of my body, in relationship to the fabric of my built and natural environments. In order to ask questions of my body not only must my mind unscramble the chatter of multiple physical sensations, mining the layers of physical noise through concentration and directed awareness, but my body too must decipher/make sense of the images being presented to it.

For example:

I imagine the space between my joints, the precarious balance of my skeletal structure, and in my imagining I locate dynamic paths of movement within a landscape of bones, organs and fluids. To manifest the experience of working creatively with the body/mind is to internalise fluid metaphors and turn them into realities. Therefore: *I could pretend the sky is water.*

Writer Jenny Kemp refers to an Aboriginal concept of the *eternal now*, as “vertical time...where the past continues to exist in the present, [where] any moment is absolutely full.”²⁷ This is a place where 'history' is alive at any suspended moment in time. In my writing and my performing I am attempting to produce a sensation, and in my imagining I look to the

²⁵ Grinfeld, J. (2002) *The Idea of Ideokinesis*. www.gse.harvard.edu/grinfeld_julie_ideokinesis.htm Accessed September 2004. p.5.

²⁶ Fitt, S. (1996) *Dance Kinesiology* (2nd Ed.). New York: Schirmer Books, p.304

²⁷ Minchinton, M (1998). "Landscape of the Psyche: the Dream Theatre of Jenny Kemp" in *Performance Research* 3(2), Routledge.

spaces between structures as sites of maximum possibility, where these moments in time may be recalled.

Residual space is one such location. The sites of residual spaces are taken to mean those places, usually in urban settings and contexts, which are neither here nor there: vacant blocks, unproductive railway sidings, patches of ground that were once deemed 'useful' but are now disused, abandoned and redundant. These spaces are ripe for bringing back to life, to be reactivated in creative and productive ways. What I propose in this document is that all such space is prescient, in the sense that it has had a past that continues to resonate with the events that have occurred within it, while still anticipating the uses to which it is yet to be put. Experiences that are embedded in an historical narrative, and embodied therein with memories of these events, are my resource: the taste of something that remains after the greater part or quantity is no longer apparent; the remanent thing that has endured and remains; a fragrance perhaps. A form that possibilities may take.

While engaged in the practice of performance, where my intention is to display a range of feeling/sensing experiences, I understand that I am communicating directly with what has been referred to in the Eastern esoteric traditions as our 'subtle bodies', through what Phillipa Rothfield, writing within the Western phenomenological tradition, has called a "kinetic scintillation".²⁸ I have observed that these feeling/sensing communications occur in much the same way in my experience of my built environment; I respond instinctively to this 'scintillation' and with a curious sense of nostalgia, as performed images, like a collection of remembered architectural features, are woven together by the trace of energy that has given rise to them.

This seems to me a very ordinary concern, and as I savour my interest in what I experience as the necessary 'mundanity' - the monotony - of my subject, I am drawn back again and again to the delicate task of locating the precarious balance between what is often a fragile, felt experience and the naming of it here in this essay. I am mindful that any activity that I undertake here, as the writer and the performer, must not so emphasize as to draw undue attention, and in so doing destabilize the balance of the whole work. "Don't be too interesting!" was a common 'note' to performers, in our formative years, as we struggled to balance multiple elements of content and energy, all vying for appropriate attention within a complex performative framework. In moving towards the naming of a relation between the actual and the virtual worlds that I inhabit I have looked towards a poetic juxtaposition of the written word with my body in action, as one way of addressing this concern.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson are just two of the many philosophers who have argued convincingly the case for recognising that our understanding and experience of the world is 'tied to the body'. They have used empirical research to explore how the embodied mind works as it structures experience through neural cognition, how our reasoning and understanding are shaped by our embodiment and how this underpins our experience of reality and determines our understanding of what we believe to be real.²⁹ But I just want to know what it 'feels' like.

By insinuating a series of pedestrian and seemingly innocuous narratives into a performative-based artefact I have attempted to show what the embodiment of my research may 'look and

²⁸ Rothfield 1989, p.62; see also Lama 1994; Levine 1982, 1989; Trungpa 1993.

²⁹ Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York, NY, USA: Basic Books, p.16.

feel like'. I have eschewed the customary form, which is to undertake an extensive conceptual analysis of the 'evidence' supporting an hypothesis and present those findings as a rational argument. As an artist-researcher whose concern is with the 'artefactual', my interest lies with how this work is first imagined: how it looks and how it feels, dependent not only upon the nature of my own embodied experience but on the remanent embodied experiences of those who view the artefact.

To this end, when observed in performance, I am aware that the/my body in motion lends itself to poetic evaluation. It is with this in mind, therefore, that as an artist/performer facing an audience I embrace that expectation. I must meet that hope of meaning that accompanies any act of looking, as the eyes of an audience go in search of revelation, for a sort of poetic grace. In our desire to understand, to find meaning, we seek to harmonise and unify the performer's being with their doing, exploring the tension between the performance and the performed, between the 'show' and what is shown, between the present moment revealed and the memories it invokes.³⁰ And the same may be said of one's interaction with the written word.

I observe each act and recollection of experiences as systemic, as anatomical visions in action, as Cindi Katz writes, "insisting on memory as infrastructure"³¹. That is, that the heart and mind of the body are no less important to its survival than the anatomical systems that maintain it. The remembering body looks for ways to circumvent time and space "as if it were animate, so that the journey is alive to its pasts as much as to the resonances and shifting stakes of its present: hearing its stories, reading its signs, finding its connections to elsewhere."³² The unlikely topic of urban restoration, as described by Katz, presented me with surprising insights into how we organize the production and exchanges of knowledge within built environments.

My writing of stories here exists as a framework to support and stimulate the act of remembering. I have engaged with this process of recollection in order to examine the process itself, that it might serve to frame the physical 'acts' of this drama. To this end I am exploring concepts that are usually considered opposites – the imagination and matter, the written word and the physical body. I experience the word and the body here as a palimpsest, where the layering of successive stories, one on top of the other, has a cumulative effect whereby, at various points throughout the work, windows open through these successive additions of language, onto the co-existence of the other, and our understanding is infected by memory. By laying the stories down in this way I am attempting to reveal the possibility of the interplay of multiple truths.

It is my hope that sections of the writing will resonate directly with the performance such that, in memory, they appear to have been both written and spoken before. Here, my research into the resonance of the ideokinetic, as having a direct relationship between language, the physical image and the imagination, is revealed. I have endeavoured to develop an approach to storytelling that speaks (through the written and then the spoken word) and moves (through the 'act' of performing and the sounds within which those movements are embedded) to

³⁰ These ideas are informed by the writing of Berger, J. and J. Mohr. (1995[1982]) *Another Way of Telling*. New York, Vintage Books, p.129.

³¹ Katz, C. (2011) "Trace, Memory, Erasure: The Geographical Imagination of Restoration in Detroit, New Orleans, and the Bronx." www.uws.edu.au/ccr/seminarseries

³² *ibid.*

become synthesized. In my imagining I see these locations interconnecting. In doing so I am attempting to enrich the sensing experiences of an audience by taking advantage of this very human need that we have to find meaning.

From within the phenomenological tradition of Merleau-Ponty Paul R. Olson observes, between the external world of sensible phenomena that surrounds and sustains us, and the internal world of our ideas, desires, and sentiments, no one can draw a sharp line of distinction or say to what extent we belong to the world or the world belongs to us.³³ In discussing the novels of Unamuno Olson describes a world where structures nest in other structures in apparent endless series, where the space in which we operate can be observed as an enormous system of embedded and embedding forms.

Philosopher Jeff Malpas embellishes this observation when he claims that, To have a sense of the past is...to have a sense of the way in which present and future conditions are embedded within a complex 'history' that is articulated only with respect to particular individuals and concrete objects as they interact within specific spaces and with respect to particular locations³⁴

This dependence on locations, for our understanding of the past is reflected in Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body, his articulation of the primacy of embodiment, where the body is 'the' site of one's knowing of the world. Our understanding, Malpas continues, can be recognised in "the way in which the past, even time itself, can be seen as taking on an embodied, spatialised form in features of the surrounding environment"³⁵ such that time, therefore, appears to assume the form of space. Malpas observes that both memory and our sense of the past are attached to our connection to place. Consequently, as I attempt to make sense of my senses through language, I observe a parallel connection, a connection between place and narrative.

In the classical 'method of loci' as it developed amongst the Greeks and Romans - a system claimed to be first devised by Simonides and later described by Cicero - we are instructed that "[p]ersons desiring to train this faculty [of memory] must select localities and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, so that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the things."³⁶ In my practice, of writing, dancing, and performance making, I return constantly to my body as the 'locality' where felt practices are generated, and through which creative images ebb and flow.

What could be more reliable? I wonder. Our bodies are registered in our surroundings in many ways, for example: the ways that buildings are proportioned; the ways that landscapes have been manipulated; the ways that climate has been changed; the way that our sense of time has been altered by our development of industry and technology. Being surrounded by such an overwhelming emphasis on the centrality of an embodied self it would be easy to believe it. In fact I did believe that when I reached a certain stage in my life, when I had begun to display qualities gained by development and experience, I would find myself in a place that was reliable. But on the examination table or, in my case in performance, hanging within a tubular steel construction, my body is suspended in space and I experience a dislocation in terms of

³³ Olson, P.R. (2003) *The Great Chiasmus: Word and Flesh in the Novels of Unamuno*. West Lafayette, USA: Purdue University Press, p.13.

³⁴ Malpas, J.E. (1999) *Place & Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, p. 180.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. p.106.

its position in the context of the world. I find that nothing is reliable. Not the mind. Not the body. Not the natural or the built world. The one thing that is certain (to repeat a popular dictum) is uncertainty, while the things that are familiar are memory and sensation.

In an effort to create work that is poetic, which at its ideokinetic core is to do with feeling and sensation, I take particular comfort from the writing of Deleuze and Guattari on this subject. Their concern is with what artwork does, rather than with asking the question 'what does it mean?'³⁷ Massumi has also written eloquently on the neglected importance of movement and sensation, building upon and extending the work of Deleuze.³⁸ This question continues to be relevant today because readers, and viewers of art for that matter, persist with the expectation that artworks be representational, rather than being composed of sensation, as Deleuze contends.³⁹

The real work appears to be in that action that occurs between the art and the person who views it, and the artwork is created within a context where every compositional element depends upon its interaction with every other. Just as the same mind whose eyes are met by pixels of yellow and blue, placed side by side, suspends disbelief, sees green and imagines the whole picture, connects the dots, hums the missing notes, finds some overall sense in a collection of words half remembered, and imagined experiences left unfulfilled. However unreliable the process, the development of my work depends on this practice. And as the journey continues, along a path mapped out through the imagination, the stories become more and more about my uncertain recollections and the futures undetermined.

The key proposition here is that what transpires in the world is embedded in this world and in the architectural forms that are contained by those environments inside that world. In this document language is chosen as much for its sonority as its meaning. I am writing from a glimpse of something, and when it finally comes to the surface it is mysterious or lucid, worse or better than what I imagined. My hope is that from a place of total immersion I can look to the foreshore and glimpse myself playing at the edges of this great expanse of fluidness. And from that vantage point, I may be able to achieve an insight into a world where internalised fluid metaphors have indeed become realities.

³⁷ Clay, J. (2010) *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze: Transformative Intensities* London, Continuum International Publishing Group, p.8.

³⁸ Massumi, B. (2002) *Parables For The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. USA, Duke University Press

³⁹ Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?* New York, Columbia University Press, p.165.

The Performance

The completed performance work had multiple layers of structure in which the act of suspension (both physical and metaphorical) was supported by highly integrated video, stage, lighting and costume design:⁴⁰

A sound score was designed to envelope sections of movement within a climate of verbal and environmental sound in which themes of liquidity and suspension, in time and place, were an insistent motif. The recorded words and environmental sounds acted as a medium through which the dance moved and the 'story' unfolded.

The 'Set' (a built form) was designed to be open sided and open ended, although it was still containing and confining within its tubular steel construction; at once the holder of a topography and a vehicle that displaces it as it transports the floating body, as if through water. While framing the body in movement the 'vessel' also alluded to the domestic architectural structures in which I live.

As part of my attempt to reproduce the look of sensation I worked closely with the practice of ideokinesis within an imaginative framework, towards the development of a vocabulary of languid movements that spoke to themes of water and air.

Light and filmic projections formed an ethereal structure, in an illusory and imaginative precinct. My aim was for the body to be revealed within a haunting and other worldly environment where internalised fluid metaphors could be seen to become realities.

A finely fabricated costume gave the body the amphibious form of a diver and further supported a theme of liquidity, and the paradoxical notion that to conceal is to reveal. Within a costume that explored the understanding that neither the masculinities nor femininities in the body can be identified exclusively through biological demarcation, in terms of man or woman, I could aspire to be neither, or both, or any one at any particular moment in time.

The Narratives

The sequence of narratives as they unfold are arranged as Acts, in chronological order, because they each relate an act of remembering, and that is the order in which I remember them in time. The collection of stories have emerged out of my engagement with the Generative Writing Workshops of Theatre Director and Writer Jenny Kemp who, in turn, acknowledges the influence of the writing exercises of Cuban-American avant garde playwright, director, and renowned teacher, Maria Irene Fornes.

Both Kemp and Fornes ascribe to a method of writing which is not so much plot-driven as "a carefully crafted extra-literary spectacle of the human body, light, music, colour and space. [Their] method of playwriting is visual."⁴¹ This method, in which text appears to be built rather than written, has found fertile ground in my own approach to performance making where I rely on the distinctive experiences of an audience to contribute to the process of making the work meaningful.

⁴⁰ The development of successful collaborative relationships within a creative team - Livia Ruzic (Sound), Eferpi Soropos (Light and Design), Rhian Hinkley (Film Production), Peter Allan (Costume), and Blair Hart - Bluebottle3 (Production) - were very important to attaining the final look of the performance.

⁴¹ Rahman, A NuMuse: Introduction. www.brown.edu/Departments/Literary_Arts/NuMuse/intro00.html Accessed February 2012.

I place a list of 'stimuli' (usually six, as designed by Jenny Kemp) at the beginning of each Act. These are:

- Two questions or statements, or one question and one statement
- Two tasks
- Two objects.

Their function is to dislocate, that is, to provoke or to corrupt my sense of control, as the writer, and to foretell the unfolding of events, for the reader. Therefore they may be seen both as a poetic device, to intrigue the reader with a prediction of what may be to come, and as a corrosive element that may erode habitual habits of expression and expectation in both acts of writing or reading. I found that even the act of writing them down, in the context of another narrative entirely, had a dislocating influence. In her writing workshops and her plays Jenny Kemp "sets up a space for the spectators to wander around in with their minds, to roam in, amble through, fantasize about, get lost in, to daydream in."⁴² As in real life, an intrusion of the unexpected leads us to view the unfolding of events in different ways, and 'fact' often proves to be stranger than fiction.

The sections of narrative that I highlight in blue are also pre-emptive: they anticipate events, in the body of each narrative, before they unfold.

The sequence of events, as they are listed or described, is arranged in Scenes that follow each act of remembering. They are there to elaborate on those memories and inventions in either the context where they took place or where I would like them to have occurred, being largely topographical in nature, according to my own inclination at the time of writing.

This decision to assemble the writing so is largely based on a process of *structured imagining*: There is a plan, but I am happy to allow the form of the equation to find its shape in the minds of the beholder, as relationships between ingredients reveal themselves. The overall effect that I am aiming for is the gradual unravelling of understanding and meaning through immersion in narrative, that is, a saturation in words, images, and imaginings.

The collection of narratives that I present in this work has grown out of my long-term fascination with how experience is embodied – how stories reside in the body and within the environments that bodies inhabit. I think of the total writing as an architecture – there is an element of the built environment in each of the stories told. There is a physicality embedded in, and embodied by, the framing of the prose.

The purpose of each scene, story, or method of telling it, may not be immediately apparent. This is deliberate. The words form a texture whose pattern is revealed over time as elements of scenes develop, refer to, and infect one another as a reflection of the nature of my/our recollection of them.

Throughout the narrative, when I refer to 'she' or 'he' I may be addressing objects or places, or people or animals of either or indeterminate gender. I do this to blur the significance of sexuality as necessarily a determining factor in the behaviour, appearance, or function of beings and things.

⁴² Tait, Peta *et al.* (1994) *Converging Realities: Feminism in Australian Theatre*, Sydney: Currency Press in conjunction with Artmoves.

Consider:

a. The pictorial images that accompany the narratives are at once an embodiment of the scenes as they are written down, and a trigger to stimulate the process of imagining. They are expansive in their meanings, in ways that can diminish their wordy and sometimes reductive companions.

b. The words that accompany the pictorial images, being lists and descriptions of places, people, events, and things that may or may not have occurred, are at once an embodiment of the places shown in photographs, and a trigger to stimulate the process of imagining. They are expansive in their meanings, in ways that can diminish their illustrative and sometimes reductive companions.

The imaginary world is full of apparent contradictions that are nonetheless powerful and compelling within our, often fragile, understanding of our place in the world, inside a creative process that Theatre Director Neil Armfield describes as “living the dream of possibility”.

The act of remembering is a key player in my work. It is a function that I ascribe as much to places and objects as I do to beings. For example, in the early years of photography the tripod, by ‘remembering’ the photographer’s last move, allowed for the possibility of accurate recall in terms of the framing of scenes. The camera could be left in situ while photographers considered their options.

Likewise, each time that I take a seat I rely on the chair’s *memory* of what it is to support a body in a seated position. I depend on a doorway’s unflinching regard for my need to pass through it, unobstructed. I accept that the tin above my head will not leak, when it is a roof, and will when it is a showerhead. Similarly, the surface of a floor remembers to support the weight of my body differently, as I walk across it, than does the water in a pool when I swim through it, than does the mattress on my bed as I lay on it. These are just some of the things that I have considered in the writing of this work.

When Elaine Scarry alludes to ‘the making and unmaking of the world’, in her groundbreaking *The Body in Pain* she holds a spotlight to the existence of an ideokinetic life within the body. The contemplation of even the most humble of one’s possessions, of clothes, objects, books, or even friends, and memories, may be experienced as limbs of the body – a psychic prosthesis perhaps:

[Experiences and objects that are] actually ‘felt’ to be located inside the boundaries of one’s own skin where one is in immediate contact with an elaborate constellation of interior cultural fragments that seem to have displaced the dense molecules of physical matter.⁴³

Objects of experience appear to be introjected into the innermost self, to become part of our body. But beyond our physical borders, Scarry’s clarity on processes of embodiment has prompted me to refresh my own concerns, as an artist/performer, with notions of the body in action, where the body and the self are viewed from both within and beyond the physical margins of skin and flesh and biological organs.

⁴³ Scarry, E (1985) *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York, Oxford University Press, p256.

The performance occurred in a space that has been the site of many performances. There is not much that is new about that, and whatever newness there was took its place in residual space: between walls resonant with what had come before, across a floor on which reconstituted corporeal vigour was palpable. Having been a Town Hall, this space had seen a lot of traffic over the years, and the new movements overlapped the old ones.

The performance resonated in our minds and in our bodies with all of the dancing, or words, that we have ever seen or done, written or read about. These are my terms of reference. This work holds some of those memories, all overlapping and intertwined. What a story that would be!

"What I put into words is no longer my possession. Possibility has opened. The future will forget, erase, or recollect..."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Howe, S. (1985) *My Emily Dickenson*, Berkeley, North Atlantic, p.13.

THE
FORM OF POSSIBILITIES

THE STORIES – THIRTEEN ACTS OF REMEMBRANCE

THE FIRST ACT

Remembering Tumbarumba



4. Tumbarumba Hut

SCENE 1. The Town Hall

Betty sits on one of three upright chairs in her son's apartment, and remembers Tumberumba. There is a tree in the corner of the room. It is not quite a tree. Isn't exactly the corner either. She sits at the other end of the room on the straight-backed solid chair. There are three of them. Straight-backed solid chairs. She is not in the comfy chair. There are three of them also. She is reading the newspaper through her glasses. Or knitting from a pattern. Her feet don't reach the floor as she sits. Her ankles are crossed.

Enter a group of women, a group of men, a group of kids in pyjamas, and a band leader

He's lost his nerve.

I feel a little claustrophobic. Where is the window, do you know?

To leave the kitchen.

To take a leap.

A knife.

A cup of tea.

She is back in the hall. She is eight months gone and still it doesn't show. Most are surprised to hear of the birth, just three weeks later. Some of them danced with her on the night. Had no idea. Well, that's how the story goes.

She is with some friends now, unpacking cake tins and picnic baskets and plates of white bread sandwiches and all sorts of sweet things, and biscuits. Someone's watching the boiler on the stove.

There is a little group of kids in pyjamas hanging around the first table to be laid. They get a biscuit each and are moved along. There are a group of men standing in a corner between the keg and the kitchen. Every now and then they throw their heads back, laughing fit to burst, and they slap each other over the back. She throws another cotton sheet over a trestle table and starts cutting a cream sponge.

Three or four boys are running back and forth behind the seats, playing some sort of tiggly game that seems to annoy the band leader. He has no children of his own and won't put up with anyone else's.

Her husband plays the drums, on weekends. He winks at her whenever their eyes meet. They'll have a waltz later, when the band has a break and they put on a 45.

Couples move around the dance floor, and other kids run and slide and run and slide and run and fall. And there's another little upset and one of the mothers sticks her head 'round the kitchen door and, wiping her creamy hands on an apron, lures them out of more mischief with promises of jelly and Portello.

She thought about opening a window, but a few of them took their cuppas outside instead. They stood around the back step and talked about all the things that concerned them, which was everything.

Occasionally men would call out to them from the hall, and one by one they all disappeared back inside to make more tea and cut more cake and dance the foxtrot with men. She finished her cuppa and smelt the warm piny smell of warm pines.

SCENE 2. Wagga Road

She is wearing a navy blue skirt, a light bluish softly patterned blouse and a grey cardigan. She concentrates on the newspaper or the knitting, or the newspaper becoming less and less like words on newsprint and more and more like stitches of wool hanging together off needles. Not pure wool. Maybe 30%.

Enter a man, his neighbour Wal, a woman, five children, and a transportable home

Carrying a house on his back. Restless sleep – dreaming and remembering. He and Wal had taken the truck to Khancoban. The Snowy Mountain prefabs were up for grabs. They were to pick two. One for Wal and his mob, and one for himself and his. That was simple enough.

In his restless sleep he just walked into that joint. He put his money on the table, and he went straight out there and picked one of those buggers up. Yea. Just locked his big mechanics arms around it and pulled the bastard right off its foundations and onto his back. He was off. He was outa there. All those years in huts and fibro cement lean-tos with dirt floors. He could see the love tears in her eyes as he rounded the bend, and over the railway line to where road became track. He could hear those screaming, laughing kids, and see the delight in their faces. Feel them tugging at his trousers as he walked the last hundred yards to the block.

They arrived back in the truck about dusk. Wal's prefab was tied securely on the back. She'd been waiting. They'd all bathed, though it wasn't bath night. The kids, as clean as new pennies were scrambling about in the scrub. She let them go. She just stood there, glistening in the yellow light. As soon as he saw the welcome he knew he'd blown it. This house was Wal's. Not theirs, not his, not hers. She called after the kids, calmed them as best she could, and put them quietly to bed. She pushed silently through the screen door at the side of the hut, and walked up the slope to the chicken coup. There she wept her hot, wet tears for all of those promised homes, now lost.

He waited. When she got back it wouldn't change things but the waiting gave him something to do for the next few minutes. He thought of going after her. It was no use. They both knew. Tears were something she had. He washed his face and hands in the trough under the tank and went to bed. To dream it differently.

Just as he crossed the ramp he slipped and fell and the whole bloody lot came down on his back. But the house didn't break. 'Leave me here' he thought. For a moment he saw himself as the foundation of a happy fatherless family. He wasn't completely satisfied with this outcome, got to his feet, climbed across the bits and pieces of flooring and joists that had survived the journey and the drop, out of the doorless doorway, and into the arms of glistening yellow light.

He knew she wasn't asleep. She knew he wasn't asleep. They just lay there. That old chestnut again. That paralysis. Split straight down the middle and repelled from both attracted forces. It'd pass. She'd recover like she had before.

She went grey overnight when a fire at Wal's, up the track, ignited the dynamite he was keeping safe and dry under the house. Yep. Went grey overnight, he'd say, as he squeezed her hand and she squeezed it back and remembered.
Well, that's how the story goes.

Enter two men, and a picturesque Edwardian cottage

He was so upset he vomited
I find you very attractive
A truck
A children's book
To change location
To die

They found the house in the Weekly Times. I don't mean literally in the weekly times. Like in the special fold out section. That would be very odd. Like one of those pop up structures which rise out of children's books when you open the page. No, not one of them. So and so in Gippsland somewhere owned houses and they were advertised for sale in the Weekly Times. No land attached. Just houses. Picturesque Edwardian cottage for sale. \$14,000. To Kevin, who had lived in the city for most of his life and was use to coveting \$500,000 family homes with established gardens, a tennis court and an in-ground swimming pool, this sounded very attractive.

He went with some friends
He bought it
They loaded it onto the back of the truck
They transported it to his chance-in-a-lifetime bush block just this side of Batlow.

It had already been agreed that the house would be unloaded at the edge of the property and Kevin and Jerry would make their own arrangements about getting it the extra mile or so to the site. Kevin decided to save time and further discussion by carrying the house to the site himself. Jerry was taking the truck back and dropping the boys off. It was no hassle. The cottage sat squarely on Kevin's shoulders. Folded in on itself like a children's book. He wore it like a mortarboard but with a hole for his head. It slipped easily down over his ears. But the sound was tremendous. All that creaking and groaning wood brushing through bush and breaking branches, like some great wooden ship breaking through ice. The weight of the thing wasn't a problem. Kevin had been lifting weights for years. This was the first practical use it had been to him since he moved house for some friends a few years before. Best to get other people out of the way though. People have opinions. It's natural. Kevin loathed collaboration. He'd rather die some other slow and painful death than be in a room full of people all positioning themselves to get their own way.

SCENE 3. The Shed

From the place where the windows face west. The day is 'getting on' and the light pushes into the room and up the wall. Her feet still don't quite reach the scratchy institution carpet. As she sits. Greyish. The carpet.

Enter a wood shed, a man with glasses, and three dead crows

*I'd like a roast beef sandwich
If you can imagine something you can do it
An aspirin
A man with glasses on
To examine something in detail
To be bold*

The woodshed was a place. The planks of untreated hardwood that made the walls of it, four and a door, no window, no floor, were flat. They invited things to be placed against them. Nails to be driven in. Things to be hung up and out of the way. They invited being seen as one is drawn to look a little closer at anything in a frame. A manageable expanse of grey/brown hardwood framed in blue and green. Sky and lawn. Or not lawn if the grass had not been mown for some time and it had returned to scrub. Clouds, the shadows thereof played across the wooden uprights, then on.

Flashing on and off with the light, once revealed then concealed behind a moving mass. The hide of a Wallaby was stretched taut over the pulsating walls. Momentarily. For just a moment. Just an instant. Instantaneous.

A man with glasses on, now off, now on, sat in a suit on a couch. His right leg was bent at the knee. His thigh against his chest. His hands clasped together underneath. Momentarily. The vertical uprights of the shed walls were horizontal blades of Venetian, blind. Blind and hung lifeless behind him. Framing his head and shoulders.

'Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.' Slipped sideways, like Goethe through the frame, as light from the headlights of passing cars squinted at him through the Venetians.

The flamboyant bodies of 3 dead crows hang by their feet against the shed wall. Upside down, their feathered ness fanned outwards in crazy shapes not meant for passing effortlessly through air. They were there. For an instant. For several instants, strung together. Some moments. Instantaneous. Momentary. Momentous.

A suited figure slipped through. Quickly through. Half a smile slipping quickly through on a couch. His right leg bent up at the knee, towards his chest. His hands clasped underneath. Cracks in hardwood boards appeared suddenly and disappeared just as quickly. The texture of weather beaten planks of wood washed grey. A wallpaper changing with the clouds. The surfaces flashing on and off like someone taking photos at night.

Wind whipped up the lifeless legs and feathers of 3 fastened crows. Festooned.

Enter a suited figure wearing glasses, and a small boy

The suited figure slipped again into view and in and out of focus. Once half smiling, now irritated by a continuing state of not being. Never quite defined fully or sharply focused. Always at the mercy of the larger aperture opening and the decreasing depth of field. He felt sickened. He'd refused the roast beef sandwich offered only minutes ago. There was no place for food in his life. His state.

He experienced no appetite for food. He had no earthly desires except to be clear and precise and sharply defined. It wasn't regret that moved him in and out of focus and transformed him into shapes and shades of colours over which he had no control. Regret implies some sort of nostalgia for what is no more. It wasn't emotional what he experienced. 'He was a big man with no heart...' and again his fading, shifting image bled away and into the cracks of the ruby black sap red, and into the vertical planks of wood that made the walls of the woodshed.

As a small boy he may once have loitered amongst the carefully stacked blocks of red gum and pine and mountain ash. He may have cut kindling on a chopping block too large to carry. The boy had once imagined himself in a suit and tie on a couch on the shifting, sliding, fading wall of the wood shed with his right leg bent at the knee, his body bent forward against his thigh. His hands clasped together underneath. He had once imagined himself sharing the wall with 3 dead crows. Hung urgent and ungainly, upside down like a trio of lifeless black umbrellas. Brought again into the world by a cutting north wind and the flashing fleeting shadows cast by clouds racing over the weathered wood.

Once half smiling, now irritated by his continuing state of not yet being. Not quite yet. Not defined fully or sharply focused. Not quite himself. Yet. The grey wooden suited, once bespectacled figure, once half smiling now bleeding into splitting river red gum planks flew sideways at speed to the sound of crow call – conversation.

Enter a man as a woman in old blue overalls, and 3 other women in hospital gowns

He was wearing his old blue overalls. They were torn here and there where a nail in the shed had caught him. They were spattered with paint from painting the house. He had decided to ignore the nails in the old timbers torn from the old house. But the timbers were still too good to throw away. It wasn't until one of the beams he was using to stabilise the shed roof while he worked under it, fell and punctured his back, that he decided to rid the wood of all protruding nails. The sledgehammer had been a good investment. He had struck the beam until it was tightly wedged between the floor and rotting roof.

She was wearing her old blue overalls. They were torn here and there where she'd been caught brushing past nails in the wood stored in the shed. She had ignored the nails until one of the beams fell once, and punctured her back. Then she decided to rid the wood of all protruding nails. The sledgehammer had been a worthwhile investment. She had struck the beam until it was firmly wedged between the floor and the unstable roof.

Myra turned up one day with two friends. They had walked the 5 k from the hospital where Myra had been visiting her husband. The two friends were also patients there and they were

still dressed in hospital gowns tied loosely up the back. Myra's husband had already been in hospital for a fortnight. He was still recovering from the incident with a crow bar. She had meant to kill him.

THE SECOND ACT
Remembering Corryong



5. Corryong House

SCENE 1. Hamilton Crescent

Betty sits...and remembers Corryong. There is a stain on the carpet where her son had dropped a glass of carrot juice. I say 'glass' but it wasn't a glass. It was a coffee mug, though he didn't drink coffee. One has these things. The stain was hidden by the coffee table that he had pulled across to cover it. Though he didn't drink coffee. One has these things.

Enter through a low, wooden, black-tarred gate

I always wonder what's above the roof. Behind closed doors.

You don't frighten me!

An umbrella.

Dropping something.

To be clear of something.

Pushing forward on his stomach. No. Lots of things. He didn't want to get too dirty, too soon. Through the low wooden black-tarred gate. Damp dirt. Spider webs. Voices from the kitchen pushed at the fly screen door, walked the wooden slatted veranda. Step by step down, on the apple box covered in Hessian bag. Veranda. Box. Cement. Grass. Looking for the noise. The window was broken. A louvre above the toilet.

He'd braved the scratchy, grassy flowering thing to climb the white metal pipe outside the loo. Up the pipe to the roof. Not like a rat up a drainpipe. He was a good boy.

Swinging his leg over the eve was the hard bit, and grabbing the pipe again as it stuck through the corrugated iron roof. Up and over. Getting away and above and beyond the voices indifferent to him. Something in him. Anyway, he was up there now and the whole scene was another world. This one was slippery and undulating and on an angle not quite comfortable. There were chimneys and a T.V. antennae and the tops of flowering trees that he helped plant too close to the house. And the ventilation pipe from the loo, that he'd just climbed. Tip toeing precariously on corrugated iron on an angle not quite comfortable.

He wanted to jump down safely to the green lawn. He wanted to break the frozen solid, on-the-edge-of-the-guttering-then-nothing feeling. He imagined the umbrella. It worked off the shed roof. Just. But that wasn't quite as high. No. Just sit at the height of the pitch and look over the town to the blue mountain.

A few deep breaths 'cause that's what you do with air when you think the moment's special enough. He had little bits of thoughts about getting down the same way he'd gotten up. Tackling the eve to find the pipe again. That was the most scary bit of all, on the way down. But as long as he had hold of the pipe that pushed through the corrugated iron to the roof he'd be fine.

He could always change his mind and stay up there a bit longer. Calm down then climb down. Stop the pounding heart and tight knot in the pit of his stomach.

A few more deep breaths, 'cause that's what you do with air when you're in a bit of a spot and you need to clear your head.

Shit! Didn't it break? It broke. He stood on one of the toilet louvres reaching down over the eave with his foot, into the nothing. Touched, fell, broke on the ground. The voices in the kitchen stopped. He was down that pipe like a shot, through the wood heap and under the house. What was that?

Enter a small boy. A spotted dog. A woman in an apron

It was a regular event with his small spotted dog. His little foxy. A familiar game they would play, that Kevin would pretend he was still asleep and Patch would jump up onto the bed and carefully sniff around the covers pulled up around and over his little master's head. The game went sniff, sniff, nudge, grab, yelp in surprise, bark, scamper off the bed and run to the door. And scamper back again; his little paws making fiddly little scratching sounds over the yellow linoleum. Yap, yap, yap.
Kevin was pretending to sleep again.

It was Sunday morning. He could wait. He and his brother had finally weened their mother off the idea of Sunday school. It took several years but it was worth the wait.

He pretended to doze. Patch sniffed around the hand hung limply from under the striped flannelette sheet. He jumped up again. This time Patch was caught and frightened again and he released a series of little yelps and yaps. This time Kevin's mother came to the door, still wiping her hands with the hem of her apron, from the kitchen. 'What's going on in here?' Somehow an innocent little romp on the bed with the dog had become very suspicious indeed. All three looked at each other. Traitor dog raised its wet doey eyes to Kevin's mum, still touched by fear and looking for all the world like he'd just been assaulted. Kevin's mum looked down at her suspicious son in the ravaged bed and tried her best to say 'You mustn't fuck the dog' without really saying it. What Kevin really longed for was a quiet little animal, or person, that nuzzled and licked and lay quietly to let itself be patted. His yappy little foxy jumped off the bed and pranced out of the room at the heels of his mother. They both looked back from the door, with disdain. She closed the door behind them. Kevin rolled over, pulled the covers up over his head and felt a bit sick and angry without knowing why. He thought about religious instruction, briefly.

SCENE 2. The Reunion

From sitting she remembered. Was he there? If he was there he might see that the light from the west, through the windows, was harsh. He might have seen that she was squinting into the stitches that were hanging from grey needles. Loosely held collections of words in phrases, in sentences on regular lines, forming paragraphs of not pure new wool. If he was there he may have offered to close the blinds and put on the lamp that sat just to her right, on the third of the straight-backed chairs. She didn't mind. She didn't mind but she wouldn't have said no to a cup of tea.

Enter along a Boulevard of broken dreams

Once bitten, twice shy. I didn't recognise you.

I would like to reach the imaginary world.

A juicy steak.

A photograph.

To celebrate something.

To entertain. Oneself or another.

Tables and chairs and blue and gold balloons on long gold strings, floating off blue crepe paper-covered-bricks on tables. Varnished wooden plaques with names of sporting heroes and clubs and significant games or events. Blue. Red. Green. Yellow. Mitta. Murray. Jeremal. Elliot.

The school Houses and their colours hanging in corners. Brown brick walls. Wooden floor. Just to the right, another table. The school photos. And the faces of Terry and Chook who died in cars.

Daryl looks into his gin and tonic. He'll have two and leave it at that. Eddy shouldn't be there yet. He'll arrive later with his wife. But for now he's around to the right, looking at photos. Looking for images of himself from twenty years ago. Vicki nearly didn't come. She'd put on weight, and anyway, it was 'the Boulevard of broken dreams' she said. Oh god! Running into, and having to face all of those childhood fantasies and ex-boyfriends. The memory of furtive gropings in dark corners that comfort in moments of need. And him, and his lovely wife. Thank god for name tags.

So good to see you after all this time. Twenty years! I didn't recognise you. You haven't changed a bit. It's been so long. And you haven't changed a bit. The photos. You look fantastic. How we've all changed. But Vicki hasn't changed a bit.

The band starts, and the hundred or so who've come from all over are yelling at each other across the years, to be heard above 'Eat My Pants', or was it Shorts? Anyway it's local. Albury I think. They're okay, they're local, but loud, and it's not the time or place. The hundred or so just want to remind each other of that other time and the laughs they all had. No one's dancing. There's food. And drink. It's the sports and recreation centre afterall. The wives and husbands. They're all here.

Hardly a juicy steak. Silverside more like. They file passed the boiled potatoes and sour cream. The rice salad. The coleslaw. Not the coleslaw! The two vegetarians get pasta with

tomato sauce. "Where did you get that? I should have gone vego." Food and drink and name tags. Singles and husbands and wives. "Where're Boardy and Gassa?" Well. Boardy 'came out' and it didn't go down well with the family. Now he lifts weights in mirrored rooms and resents this place. This place.

Enter old friends. Young children. Old dogs. A BBQ

He stood with his back against one of uprights of the pergola. He held his young daughter to him where she stood at his feet. Her back fitted into his legs just as his met the pole behind him. And her blond distracted head fidgeted around the softness of his groin. She watched her friends playing on bikes and roller blades across the park, but stayed with the belonging here for as long as the moment lasted.

We remind each other of events from twenty years ago. He looked out through watery blue eyes. Searching the park for other children from our past. Smelling the sizzling snags on the Barbie nearby. Watching and waiting while absentmindedly fingering the straw blond hair at his groin.

Big hands. They all have big beautiful hands. Dry and cracked and strong. Men and women alike. From working the farm and doing what had to be done. Now touching the young things that dart in and out from between their legs. Receding hair and teeth and time. 'Has it happened to me as it's happened to you?'
The pergola over the BBQ

Catches wafts of smoke from coals and scorching meat. Trees and grass and kids and dogs. Old fat dogs push through legs. "Don't you hurt my dog!" Catriona gave it a kick as it sidled up to piss against the large just-in-case container of coleslaw. Do you remember?

He holds his daughter closer as we try to find ourselves from twenty years ago, through watering, laughing eyes and recollections of timeless time on tractors on farms. On bikes and horses on tracks. In creeks in paddocks. I don't know what I expected and I wonder if he hears the need in my voice, to find some sameness behind the change.

We look for other faces, other moments. Tiny fissures in each other's attention. To slip through and out of and away, for another cup of coffee and a rissole between two lightly buttered white bread slices. Sauce?

Someone has arrived with photos and the web holding the small groupings of young and old, holding them together and apart, quietly gives way to allow for other formations. A cluster around the photos. Another by the urn, and the loo, and the seats and under the trees. And all the while the kids on wheels and old fat dogs with kind faces. The whole scene wobbles like jello being carried from one place to another. Every smile was just as surely a grimace over parched out-door skin. We all wonder what has happened and where it all went.

Enter a man. A woman. A sick child. A handful of shells

*That storm really ripped me apart.
Do you think I'm a fool?
A sea gull.
Spitting.
To keep an eye on the time.*

He stood on the sand. The beach. He looked out to the grey bay. Grey sky, and down again to the grey sand. He thought there'd be some shells, like those ones you buy in tourist shops. This was after all the sea. This was the beach. He wanted something substantial to take back to the kid. He wondered how he'd describe this barren and disappointing scene to his sick son.

She was nearby, searching too for something interesting or pretty or both, that he could keep by his bed that would conjure up some sunny scene by the water. They rarely saw the water. Not like this, that just goes out and on and on forever. The young lad had been in the Royal Children's for six months now. Leukaemia. And they'd been with him here, in the city, in shifts, for six months. Sleep?
He looked out again across the water and into the salty spray. There was a storm coming in over Williamstown.

Karen was sitting now, on her coat, on the wet sand. She sat with a little pile of little, ordinary shells beside her. Colourless as the day and the sand and the water that went on and on and on. The wind was whipping the sand around her ankles. It was cold but they were lost in it. They needed this time. They needed the water. The sky had begun to spit with it. They didn't notice.

The screaming gulls reminded him of the time a flock had settled on the school oval. Now that was sand. He hadn't thought it before. All those years of skinned knees on that hard packed, sandy playing field. But seagulls in the Snowy Mountains? It caused some consternation at the time. They stayed half a day. He supposed that was long enough to know that there would be no tide, except for the bubbling froth of small children that came in and broke in noisy waves over the barren hard-packed sand.

They looked across at each other. Needed to keep an eye on the time. He felt like a stranger in a foreign place. They were on a grey bit of dirt somewhere grey. Hawaii couldn't be like this, he imagined. Or that other place, closer. Bali was it? They had friends who'd been to Bali. Reckoned it was cheaper than going to Perth. They looked into each other's tired faces. Sleep?

Enter four men. A horse

*Imagine a three-headed horse coming out of a snail's shell.
You make me feel like an animal.
To cry.
A radiator.
The back room.*

The horse was tied to one of the uprights of the shed. It was a clear crisp night. Cool out. There'd be a frost in the morning. There was a green canvas blanket over its back, fastened loosely below its flanks. The boys were nearby, in the yard. The three men. The Biggara boys. But it was dark, there was a chill in the air, and they were there in the yard. They seemed agitated about something, pacing around each other in little circles. They scuffed their working boots against the clods of upturned earth.

I didn't know why they were there. And I'd been asking myself for some time why I was there also. At any rate it was dark and I wasn't cold, but I knew I could be, so I placed myself in the back room of the house, by the window, where I could keep an eye on the three-headed animal out the back. My hide was one of those afterthought rooms that get tacked onto the back of housing commission homes in country towns. And patios. It had a decent-sized window that looked out over the yard. I wasn't going out there to observe at closer quarters the goings on between the three. They all should have gone home with their wives and children in the afternoon. I should have caught the XPC from Sydney and left Albury for Melbourne at 3.30 pm. But I was there, sitting on a radiator, with them out there fidgeting around, caught somewhere and cautious between 16 and 40.

The horse was asleep. Well, maybe not. I've never actually seen a sleeping horse and I have my doubts that they sleep at all.

Hoggy and Maurie and Tex were in the yard. In the yard of the house on the quarter acre block in the street of the town. Harris Street. It was Bill Kidd's place. He's dead now. I mean 'of late'. There wasn't a body lying around, or anything morbid like that.

Just these three boys/men from twenty years ago, now. Agitating in little circles in the yard, under stars so crisp and bright and clear it takes your breath away every time. Yes, there'll certainly be some ice in the morning.

Just a swirling mess of things left unsaid twenty years ago, and still waiting just shy of understanding, behind glassy blue eyes. Too afraid to name the things, to tell a lie, to tell the truth, to break a trust, or cry, as it is written. As an action. They did it with big hands. They left their childhood. They grew into other bodies.

[Enter the schoolroom](#)

We all filed in. The last room on the tour. It was never like this when I was here, twenty years ago. Well, it was really. There's something about metalwork schoolrooms that never changes. Even if it's only the sump oil smell and the rows of tools mounted on back walls. The numbers of saws and hammers and pliers and rulers and others, their shapes picked out in black paint on pegboard, in neat rows against the back wall.

He is waiting for us to settle before he launches into another spiel about the joys of soldering. There are nine welding booths along another wall. And machinery for tool making. There is a great pile of red plastic baskets, like picnic hampers. He did say how many there were, and how long they stayed with the school before being shipped off to the next one. He did say, but I can't remember. There's a two-stroke engine in each one. An engine and everything a kid would need to work on an engine.

It is cold in here. All of this metal I think.

He's now saying something about the pre-fabs on this site. There was flooding in the district when they were installed. No sooner were they off the trucks than they sank into the ground. Should've known, I thought, smiling back at those dark wet afternoons on the lower hockey field. One well-aimed swipe with the stick and half the team was covered in mud. Didn't seem to matter which team. To hell with the puck. Hockey one, hockey two. Guess whose mum's got a Whirlpool? I was still smiling when I came back and looked again around the room. All those strange, changed faces. He's started addressing his talk to me. I seem to be the only one smiling back at him, I suppose.

We all gasp at the facilities and the continuing talk of the facilities, pretending to be interested. The kids can dismantle cars and build them again. They can weld the frames of buildings together, and make furniture and pottery and other art objects. They can do silver service in the new colour coded facilities, and they're on the Internet.

I imagine coming back to do some woodwork. Maybe teaching. I could turn this place into performance art – a living mandala – radiating love and hope in Man from Snowy River country. Singing and swaying and all holding hands. Hmm. I think not. He's on his podium again.

I look across the room and just catch him looking away. I wonder if he remembers.

Enter the night before

We've all seen this scene before. Or at least there's something familiar about the whole event. The trestle tables, the balloons, the colourful spread, and the community hall. He's sitting opposite Linda. Like the rest of us they're looking around at the once familiar faces, now receding with time, in time, without hair or teeth of their own, talking to the most familiar of the now unfamiliar faces. Holding drinks and smiling, laughing and looking. Do you remember? Remembering. Living again and again and again and again and again.....

Following him out with her eyes. Looking. Watching. Examining this new, old thing, which has appeared to replace his youth. Lost in the mind. Returned to the world of photos. There are a few on the table. Terry and Chook who died in cars, I'm surprised that's all. The rows of faces and hands holding glasses and loved ones. And the ones that didn't show up. They'll remain at sweet sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Oh shit! I'll never know if it's really Vicki's boulevard of broken dreams. What a sad thought. I'm desperate for some sort of connection with this dream at least.

It makes your heart pump.

I'd love a beer.

An aeroplane. A teacup.

To change the mood.

Someone to leave.

Someone to arrive.

Three men in a sunroom.

Two men on a couch.

One man in an easy chair.

They were sitting in the sunroom.

They weren't in the kitchen.
Nor were they on the veranda or shuffling about somewhere in the yard.
They weren't drinking beer.
They had tea. There were three cups of tea. It wasn't coffee.
They talked about the state of things.
There was weather in there. There were cars and tractors and real estate.

They didn't talk about their 'selves'.
They didn't discuss their 'selves'.
After the hand shaking they didn't hug.
They didn't cuddle or kiss at all. Not a peck on the cheek for the other men they had spent the first eighteen years of their lives with.
They didn't throw their arms around each other or sit there, quite still, holding each other's hands, with tears in their eyes.

They didn't lean over and kiss each other on the neck and say 'how I loved you when you won the eight hundred metres freestyle'.
They didn't slip out of their shoes and push them to one side, under the coffee table, and let their big men's feet touch as they sipped their tea.
They didn't throw their heads back in gales of laughter and rest their heads on shoulder, on knee, in lap.

Feet touching, hands reaching out, holding, comforting. Heads resting together.
They didn't.
They didn't trail their fingers idly through each other's hair, and count the grey in jest, or whisper obscenities so close that they could feel the soft down of each other's ears against their lips.
They didn't hear the timer go in the kitchen and then return with a piping hot cake straight out of the oven.

They didn't talk about curtains or offer to pop over sometime with the machine to run something up.
They didn't.

He was sitting up in one of the two easy chairs.
He was sitting next to him on the two-seater sofa, which could have become a sofa bed if it wanted to.
He held his cup of tea in two hands, resting his elbows on the arms of the easy chair.
He sat to the left of him, on the sofa, holding his cup by the handle, resting his forearm on the arm of the sofa, which wasn't designed to support a cup of tea.
He sat at the other end of the lounge, which would be a sofa bed, looking down at the steam rising from the hot cup on the newspaper, on the coffee table.

He looked across the room at a watercolour of a gum tree in a bright orange frame.
He transferred his cup from the arm of the lounge to both hands in his lap, and looked across the room and into the kitchen.
He reached down and lifted his tea off the paper.
He removed the newspaper from under his tea and scanned the front page for something else.

Enter the night out

*You're intimidating me.
That's broken my dream
Being spectacular.
To take a skeleton out of the closet.
A cup of coffee.
Someone making conversation.*

Heat. Smoke. Radiating heat. Radiant heat from the open fire in the old washing machine bowl. Now a beacon in the centre of the courtyard. Brick-paved. Enclosed on all sides. I was young once. A potato peeler. We whispered behind our hands. A tortoise shell. The fire from the brazier cast shadows around the courtyard. It began to rain. We all huddled under the lean-to and in, inside the little grotto on the edge of the courtyard. Standing in puddles. Wafts of smoke from the fiery urn. Shuffling gradually back into the open until the next shower. I wondered how far the moon. She said we must get together for dinner. Hello darling. I watched as they drank and talked. I drank and talked. I think I shared a light beer with someone very dear to my heart. We laughed a lot, and we were interested in everything Brian had to say. My back ached with the standing on brick and cement. I thought of another time. There was another time. A time other than now. A passed time. I wanted to leave. I wanted to stay. The fire burned in the brazier. The smoke wafted in the direction of the most attractive and they enjoyed the attention. I began again to talk about the things that mattered to me. The matter of fact and fiction and slight exaggeration. Is he? Is she? Are they? Where is she in the damp of her expensive shoes in the collected rain of the courtyard? On the puddled ground over bricks and cement? I thought to take shelter in the grotto. Thought. I stood in the drizzle. Feet protected by thicker soles than some. An open drain fed by down pipes from the roof. She'd stood the test of time. The time it took to move among the beer bottles and glasses of white wine. And the people holding them. I longed to sit but not on the damp benches. The grotto called to me but I was already taken. Someone stretched out on the couch. Then gone. A leather jacket was left draped over the back of a chair. Where is she? Brian moved from group to group and some that he didn't even know but no matter. There was plenty to say. And he had the words to say it. Spectacular. The night-lights shone down from the brick wall and firelight shone up and back in response. My back ached to be stood up on brick and rock hard cement. There it goes. She came and went. And between the times it took to be here and there. She was neither here nor there. I laughed a lot and drank a little. The coffee was good. I suppose. I don't know. I know what I like and I was told that the coffee was good.

THE THIRD ACT

Remembering Carlton



6. Carlton Apartment Block

SCENE. The Apartment

Betty sits...remembering. Although she usually stays at The Victoria. It's easier for her to get to and from the station, she says. And she's right. And it's close to everything, and she can come and go as she pleases. And Carlton is nearby. She likes that.

Enter a middle-aged man, his mother, and the light from the west

I do mind what you think. That's what you realise.

I like to entertain.

A radio.

Some knitting. Some chairs.

To take control.

There is a tree in the corner of the room. It is not quite a tree. Isn't exactly the corner either. And the elderly woman sits at the other end of the room on the straight-backed solid chair. There are three of them. Straight-backed solid chairs. She is not in the comfy chair. There are three of them also.

She is reading the paper through her glasses. Or knitting from a pattern. Her feet don't reach the floor as she sits. Her ankles are crossed. Her purse is nearby on the second of the straight-backed solid chairs. Her other glasses are in that. Her purse. She is just visiting. She doesn't live here. This is my flat. My lounge room. There is a Bakelite radio crackling quietly in the background.

She is wearing a navy blue skirt, a light bluish softly patterned blouse and a grey cardigan. She concentrates on the newspaper or the knitting, or the newspaper becoming less and less like words on newsprint and more and more like stitches of wool hanging together off needles. Not pure wool. Maybe 30%.

The windows face west. The day is 'getting on' and the light pushes into the room and up the wall. Her feet still don't quite reach the scratchy institution carpet. As she sits. Greyish. The carpet. There's a stain where I dropped a glass of carrot juice. I say 'glass' but it wasn't a glass. It was a coffee mug, though I don't drink coffee. One has these things. The stain is hidden by the coffee table that I pulled across to cover it. Though I don't drink coffee. One has these things. She might suspect the stain though she can't see it. Or she can see but pretends that she can't – the edge of it just showing from beneath the leg of the coffee table pulled across to cover it.

Am I there? If I was there I might see that the light from the west, through the windows, is harsh. I might see that she was squinting into the stitches that were hanging from grey needles. Loosely held collections of words in phrases, in sentences on regular lines, forming paragraphs of not pure new wool. If I was there I may offer to close the blinds and put on the lamp that sat just to her right, on the third of the straight-backed chairs. She doesn't mind. She doesn't mind but she wouldn't say no to a cup of tea. I imagine the kitchen cupboard to see if I have 'real' tea. She likes the real thing. I have. Organic. I won't tell her that. But she wouldn't mind. She says she doesn't mind.

She usually stays at The Victoria. It's easier for her to get to and from the station she says. And she's right. And it's close to everything, and she can come and go as she pleases. She likes that.

If I was there I might have brought her back to my flat, to my lounge room, to have a cup of my tea and a sit and a chat before going out to a show. Not a film. Something live. I may have offered to cook for her. Something simple. Not spicy. Or we could pop down to Lygon St. for a quick bite. We'd both enjoy that. If I was there watching her and thinking about this and seeing us enjoy a lovely meal, something cheap but not 'cheap', when we had finished eating she would reach for her purse and quickly take out some notes. Only she and I would see, and she'd carefully and secretly slip them into my hand under the table, like I was my father, and no one could see that she had the money in her purse before he had got it from his wallet. It makes me smile, but I don't, and I get in first so there's no arguing about it. I've got a credit card and I'm not afraid to use it. It's all about control. It's all under control. There's nothing to worry about. She would enjoy that.

Enter three men. A pot of tea. A simmering resentment

He who buries a treasure buries himself with it.

Have you ever thought of changing your life?

To dance.

To shift location.

A stack of books. A notebook.

The door into the small room is shut. While they're here it's Gary and Alan's bedroom. It was the other person's study/spare room. All of his books still line one wall. But the door is shut now, and it's theirs while they're here. It is 9 pm.

Gary is lying down, reading a book. Possibly it's one belonging to the other person. He is possessive of his books. The other person. Gary makes some notes. He considers each point carefully. Alan is on the floor, ironing a shirt, perhaps two. Perhaps shirts for two and one or two pairs of trousers or jeans. Gary wears trousers. Alan wears jeans. The other person, their friend who has this flat, doesn't own an ironing board. And he didn't have an iron either, until Alan and Gary arrived and found one in a local thrift shop. It became the ideal gift. A Christmas present. Only they use it.

The room is small. It's not easy to iron on the floor once the beds have been pushed together and made up. They stick to their room and try to keep out of the way.

The wind howls around outside. Straight up the walls of the tower block. One window won't stay down and the other one won't stay up. A length of wood stops the opening window from opening. But not quite. A draft enters from the outside, pushing passed the boys and under the closed door.

The other person will cook tonight. It's already late and later still they will all go out dancing. He'll make them a cup of tea and take it in, just to see them in his study/spare room. They'll chat briefly and laugh about something ironic as he looks down at Alan's ironing on the floor and across at Gary's note taking on the bed. He'll leave them alone again. Dinner won't be long.

The phone rings. One of them can get it. He's busy in the kitchen. It's probably for them anyway. He's at a delicate age. One of his friends often says that about himself, and he's adopted it. It appeals to him to think of himself as vulnerable, if only in order to think his way out of it again. It was Ian on the phone. He'll pick them up in an hour. He'll call first and they can meet him downstairs. It saves time. The other person would have liked to speak to him himself. He was feeling resentful again.

He considered changing his life. He'd seen it written down somewhere and the idea appealed to him. Like being of a delicate age. Perhaps another time and place and he wouldn't be so needy. Another time. Another place. He moved pots and pans around and washed one while things still cooked in another. It saves time. Things were stirring in the small room. There was disagreement about the itinerary again.

Enter an afternoon nap, and a *Monstera Deliciosa* called Julio

He had taken to having a little nap during the day.
Now there were several choices of venue and they were all convenient.

1. In the lounge room. There were three 50's lounge chairs which, when pushed together, as they often were, made a very decent little couch. But, as a couch, they weren't quite long enough. Today's nap needed a bit more leg room so he decided against the lounge.
2. Now the room next to the lounge had two of those fabulous pine-framed single beds, which sat neatly, one on top of the other, forming a day-bed-cum-settee arrangement. This was very convenient and was ordinarily the preferred option.
Who was on the train?
Nothing is more crime producing than desirable things.
A scream is heard.
An armchair. A ball.

However, he was in the process of moving house and this room was full of boxes and the musty smells one associates with cardboard packing crates. All of those damp clothes and mothballs.

3. The bedroom was the only other site. The choice here was between the futon, or 'root-on', as Tracy liked to call it, folded up as a settee or laying down as a bed. As it was already happening as a settee and he was feeling more and more weary by the second, he decided to go with that.

That was several minutes ago and having already grabbed a pillow and the doona he was 'out to it'. He'd set the bedside clock to wake him up in an hour and a half, and he ignored the scream coming from the flat next door.

It was a council flat and he'd come to expect the occasional murder, suicide, drug deal. Thankfully they had stopped pissing in the lift.
He dreamed about the new place.
He could feel his ears being licked clean as he lay sleeping on the futon rolled into a couch. He thought about not stealing or acquiring in some other mysterious way a whole range of very desirable things.

For the new place.
He imagined, and as he did his ears felt the thrill of a cold wet nose and the screaming was licked away.

*I'm going to test you.
I think I'll just clean up.
The dream surfaces.
To be provocative.
A car. A bottle of Champagne.*

Ninth floor up. Up. Up-down. Up.
Curtains.
Blinds.
Fly wire.
Potted plants on window sills.

Julio was a *Monstera Deliciosa* that liked living there so much that he had become enormous. Holes had to be drilled into the cement ceiling to hold hooks, to hold strings, to hold Julio.

From the street he could be seen standing under the plant's huge leaves, looking out as far as Macedon to the right and the You-Yangs to the left.

He was standing next to Julio, drinking a cup of some soothing herbal beverage.

'I think I'll just have a bit of a clean.'

'I think I'll just make a few telephone calls.'

'I think I'll just pop down to the shop.'

'I think I'll just finish this cuppa and have a bit of a lay down, is what I really feel like.'

'I think I'll just clean this room. And I'll do the rest tomorrow. No, the weekend would be better. There'd be more time and I'd do a better job.'

He stood there, drinking his lemon Zinger.

He would rather have sat at the window, in a comfy chair, to look out on Macedon to the right and You-Yangs to the left.

Standing, he could see the West Gate Bridge.

He would rather have sat.

But whoever designed these cement boxes was concerned that people who happened to be sitting by their windows in comfortable chairs might lean forward to take a closer look at Hanging Rock or the You-Yangs, or the West Gate Bridge on a fine day.

They might just lean forward, to take a closer look, and tumble out of their comfy chairs and out of their windows, causing great damage to themselves and any unfortunate passer by who happened to be passing by, below.

So the aluminium-framed windows were closer to the ceiling than to the floor.

Very thoughtful!

He glanced sideways at Julio and wondered if he would fit in the lift.

His eyes returned to the great expanse of blue.

Up and out.

He breathed deeply as he held his head off to one side. Just slightly off centre. Just enough for the memory of a cold damp nose and lapping tongue to occupy his neck and ear. He smiled at the pleasure and the peak hour traffic below.

Enter as She, and cardboard boxes

Over a period of weeks she would call into bottle shops and ask for boxes. She knew that four was as many as she could manage at any one time and that Wednesdays and Sundays were best, box-wise. Wednesdays were good because it was a delivery day, and Sunday, she imagined, was popular because of weekend consumption – there must be an opera in there somewhere. Over time she'd packed books. Many books. And files and papers and all of those bits and pieces that one has.

She was wearing overalls for this task, for the purpose of packing books and files and papers and the bits and pieces that she had. Despite the weight of the course cotton coverall her arms would still float up occasionally. Up and away from her sides in a blissful exclamation of 'up'. All feeling from the falling up of those limbs seemed somehow to drain back down her spine. Serpentine. Pouring of weight. One by one and sequentially her vertebrae opened out and away from each other, like a pack of cards – to hip. Hip-hip, pause, sort, stack, pack, lean-hip, pause, hip. Over a period of weeks this ritual continued. Time was important in the shift to a more comfortable position. To relocate. To start again. Pause.

Enter two men in a bed

The struggle was to name this feeling. It had been there before. It was familiar. It was completely whole. It was a complete feeling. There was bigness about it. There was roundness. It was a real something. It had movement and motion. It was not alone, but it was a complete thing that moved in relationship to something else. This feeling is known. It is a remembered sensation and there is completeness about how it is. There is fluid around this feeling. The feeling displaces fluid, as it is now, in the space that it occupies. It is framed within a space in the mind, yet the sensation felt is totally physical and complete. It tastes, this feeling.

He rolled onto his side and stuck his leg out from beneath the sheet, into the night air. He woke up to the smell of his mate's perfume in the pillow. He hated the smell. He loved his mate. He hated the smell of synthetic sweetness. Is that what it is? But he loved his mate and any smell at all was alright by him. He wasn't going to say 'I don't like your scent'. Maybe he did like the smell. Maybe this was an excellent opportunity to smell that smell without ever putting it on himself. He would never choose that smell, but that smell had been chosen and it was alright by him. He rolled onto his back and stuck his arm out from beneath the sheet, into the cooler night air.

Enter a man and his two friends. An old dog. A warm chicken salad

Love me like a new coffee making machine
Being demolished with the building
Inhaling the wall, the debris of years falling over me like dust.

Michael sitting in a chair ironing pillowslips and work shirts and T-shirts.
Ian washing salad mix (supermarket) in the sink
Molly standing in the doorway looking in but not seeing anything
T. sitting on the couch half watching television and having multiple conversations

They'd invited him over for warm chicken salad. He was grateful for not having to cook or forage for a meal somewhere else. How many fish and chips can one eat in a week? As he walked into the room the blinds were not yet closed. He'd usually been there at night but it was dusk, still light, and he could see the shrubs growing outside of the window, through the open Venetian blinds. Michael was sitting on a chair near the television. Though it was a small flat and a smaller room, so nowhere was far from the TV. The ironing board was set unusually low so that he could sit comfortably in a kitchen chair as he ironed. A shirt for work. A T-shirt and a couple of pillowcases. T. who didn't own anything that needed to be ironed. Or chose not to iron anything, was always fascinated to watch how people dragged the hot iron across their clothes. They commented on things as they arose on the TV but otherwise kept a close eye on the decreasing of garments.

Ian had something to say about the washing of lettuce as he stood at the sink washing half a packet of Coles salad mix. The last batch had foreign bodies – a little dig at Michael's choice not to wash the salad the last time they had it. They all laughed. T. had taken off his watch and emptied his pockets of wallet and mobile phone. It was his habit to do this as soon as ever he entered a room where he was bound to relax. He placed the pile of artefacts on the arm of the couch where he sat and continued the chat. Howard, pillow cases, the treasurer (whose name escapes me for the moment), work shirts, Howard and the treasurer, T-shirts and Coles salad mix. It was a jolly moment.

Behind the couch and out of T's sight. Molly was standing in the doorway looking into the room. She could smell warm chicken in Teriyaki sauce but couldn't see much of anything. It's that age. Ian ordered her firmly back to bed. She looked up to the sound of his voice unseeing and barely hearing. Love me like a new coffee making machine she thought but said nothing. Again she was ordered away. She turned and left the room.

THE FOURTH ACT
Remembering Fitzroy



7. Fitzroy Mission

SCENE 1. The Bathroom

She sat on the tatty brown couch and remembered. It wasn't always a brown couch. Once bone coloured brocade. Quite smart really, and antique, but after years of dirty feet, work clothes and neglect it was a shabby thing. She sat still on the shabby thing. She was comfortable enough and unmoving as her eyes wandered slowly about the room. Occasionally she stared into the doorway that led to the hall. She looked there calmly as if towards a familiar face, full of hope for the thing, as yet unknown. She looked for it in the way the furniture was arranged.

Enter in the 'Home Beautiful' sense

I call that offensive.

I've lost track.

Something from childhood.

To command attention.

A clock.

Spitting.

Hippy hippy shake

Odd bathroom

Hot pants. Lycra mid-drift top

Ruddy cheeks

Ahh! From out of the newly placed old Huon pine floorboards.

Nothing.

Just the tracks once made by woodworm. They were riddled with them. Now full of and sealed beneath layers of estapol.

Once sanded, once coated, twice sanded and coated again, and again in the process of renewal.

She appeared, as always. Seven feet of ruddy skin and generous flesh in little Lycra hot pants and mid-drift top.

I don't think we call them hot-pants anymore.

They were short shorts that fitted as close as skin and rode up and into all of the places where skin goes.

She walked into the bathroom.

She didn't just walk into the bathroom – space, time, walk. Do the thing then go.

There was always that rhythm with it – hip, walk, step-step, hip, arms, hip, walk-walk, and lean. Brush the teeth.

One of those old cast-iron bathtubs was fitted, rather too snugly, into the end of the room.

It wasn't really 'fitted' in the 'Home Beautiful' sense.

It was 'free-standing' on solid, gold-painted little lion's feet supporting Federation green.

The builder had surrounded it with white tiles.

'Not bad' he thought.

I thought that too – not bad.

I wondered about the shower curtain. How to hang a shower curtain in a freestanding bath. I chose not to mention it but hoped he had something a bit special planned for ablutions. She watched herself in the vanity mirror. Well, from the chin down. I would have felt persecuted by such an obvious planning blunder. Not she – hip, hip, lean-hip, hip, spit.

The room was odd. Definitely. But I can't dwell on that. It's done now. What was I saying? Oh yes! The floor. The beautiful wooden floor. I wanted to make rules about walking on it. I wondered if it was possible not to walk on it at all, so that beautiful glossy finish would never wear. I may have placed her vertically on the wall. There was plenty of room. Fourteen foot ceiling. Proportionally it could have worked very well. Attachment is the problem. Some sort of secure mountain climbing contraption. That would have done it – giving support at the hips – hip, hip, hip-hip, and the freedom to do all of those other things that she likes to do. Her arms could still float up and away from her body. Just hang there, in the air. Her head again would tilt ever so slightly to the left. She might catch her reflection in the kitchen window. From the chin down. This is another oversight, but I'm not too fussed about it. I'm certainly not going to shift the window. That's not something the builder would want either. I could mount a mirror above the window so that it caught the free-floating arms and the area above the chin. Apparatus allowing, she could roll to her side and lay her cheek against the cool vertical surface.

But did she confess?
She didn't understand why she looked so tired.
She felt a wave of happiness.
She longed to say something uncharacteristic.
She thought of a bar of chocolate. A pair of shoes.

She was standing quite still in the small room.
The bathroom.
Though she wasn't about to take a bath or engage her attention in anyway with the cast-iron tub in the corner of the room.
She wasn't about to clean her teeth or wash her hands in the white porcelain basin or interact in any way with the vanity unit or its mirror.
She hadn't just risen from the white plastic seat over the toilet bowl, below and off to her right. There was no indication that she had or hadn't turned, only moments before, from the window overlooking the corrugated iron roof of the hall in the yard.
She was standing quite still.
Her skin glowed golden brown and was finely sewn with an acre of glistening hair.
It appeared like a field that had been licked in swirls of changing directions.

Her long limbs hung loosely, so it seemed, from the floor up.
A clear satin finish on the surface of pine boards reflected softly the light, up, through and around the solid trunks of her legs.
She breathed.

She didn't appear to breathe.
The nails of her fingers and toes glanced through the still air like shards of mother of pearl.
There was distance between her brows.
She hadn't bathed or brushed, sat or stared silently out of the window and into the furrows of corrugated iron on the roof of the hall in the yard.

She was standing quite still.
Her eyes looked out at nothing in particular but everything in detail that lay beyond the shiny new tiles across the walls of the small room.
Her eyes were open beyond all immediate understanding.
Her ears heard.
They listened past the proximity of dripping taps and sighing cistern. Passed the fine, licked clean down that coated them, she heard beyond the confines of bricks and plasterboard.
Her barely still, silently twitching skin felt in fields of golden grass, the movement of thinking, breezes.
Her searching eyes were met by sights beyond her still self.

SCENE 2. The Kitchen

Enter needing a few more moments

*But I thought you were very political.
Inside I'm a mess.
Dropping something.
To have an inspiration.
A plate of food. A diary.*

She moved about the kitchen.
The soft pad of bare feet over polished boards followed. Each step was met by golden pine and each peeling away left a shallow ripple of sound. She liked the new wood and was surprised by the newness of each meeting that occurred with her not-so-new feet. She continued to return to the window and the bench where the object sat.

Her diary lay open at the coming week. They looked backwards and forwards at each other over an anticipated length of time, each event circled, the distance in time decreasing.

Her soft pattering feet continued their coming and going, to and from the window, the bench, the diary and the object.
Her attention was all that remained fixed.
The skin-soft footsteps returned to the object and its mandala of numbers.
She quickly checked for something at the front of the diary. Then at the back. Then she imagined the black cover of her address book on the desk upstairs.
It was all still new so she didn't mind any excuse to climb to her study on the floor above. She had never lived with stairs before and so expected, with time, that her level of fitness would improve and she'd become a better person overall.
She found the number she was looking for, somewhere between back and front, as far as address books go.

She looked down at the object and imagined some sort of communication taking place.
She needed a few more moments, there had been so many already.
She needed just a few more in order to imagine the proposed communication going smoothly.

There was half a plate of food on the sink.
She just wasn't in the mood but felt wasteful when it came to disposing of leftovers.
All of those starving children.
Just a thought.
She eased herself across to the sink and scraped the scraps into a little plastic bucket, for the worm farm.
The object rang.

Enter as a man

It was all quite new.
He couldn't help himself. He touched things.
He ran his hands along the new bench top.
He looked in the cupboard for Marveer and Jiff and Chux Super Wipes.
He looked in the drawer for old undies or T-shirts to use on the shiny new surfaces.
He worked solidly for a good hour, cleaning and polishing the already clean and polished surfaces.
He looked at the window. Clean and shiny glass. Still, he thought, it could do with a quick wipe over.
He looked in the cupboard for Windex and in the drawer for more old undies.
He noted, mentally, a convenient time for buying underwear.

He'd been working on the new glass for.....I don't know how long. Let's just say he'd been polishing away at it for some time before he noticed his own sharp edged reflection. Clear-cut as crystal. He pushed back his hair with old undies and polished his reflected forehead, now beaded with sweat. He hardly ever sweated. Must be the heating he thought, and went off to turn it down. When he returned to the glass his face was still there, and there he was again, looking back from the old glass of the sash and cord window in the wall of the hall directly opposite. He squinted to see more or less clearly his two reflections looking back at him. He quite enjoyed the fact that the older of the two images, older by virtue of being caught in one hundred year-old glass. The older of the two appeared to be wearing a robe and pyjamas.

SCENE 3. The Antechamber

Enter as a woman

She noticed as she sat.
She noticed the corner of the small...
What is it? A vestibule? Had it ever been a church? It had certainly been a church hall.
And now she sat against the wall of the small...

What is it? An antechamber! A foyer?

She sat with her long spine pressed hard against the back of one of two severe clerical chairs in the...

What? A vestry?

She noticed as she sat.

She noticed the corner of the room where the new wood met the old wood.

She followed the line with her eyes. Every moment just a little further along in time than the last, but essentially the same.

She suddenly caught sight of herself, reflected in the old glass of the sash and cord window directly in front of her.

She saw herself again in the new glass of the window in the wall next door, directly opposite that.

She narrowed her gaze for a moment to catch her two selves caught in old and new glass, looking back at her from their slightly uncomfortable union.

She pulled her dressing gown around her legs and gathered it close, under her chin.

Her legs and feet hung loosely out of the cuffs of soft summer cotton pyjama pants.

Scruffy old winter slippers hugged at her toes but left her heels alone, hanging limply down.

She watched her reflections watching back.

She had to look away periodically, to see the sharp, clear edges of any one thing that was exactly what it appeared to be – just reassuring herself that there was nothing wrong with her eyes. She wasn't entirely reassured and noted, mentally, a convenient time to have them checked.

THE FIFTH ACT

Remembering Blackwood



8. The Doll's House

SCENE. The Doll's House

She sat, remembered, as I was looking in at her looking out. Framed tight and up close. Looking out beyond the looking in. Further away than the place. She was half lying down, half sitting, remembered. Looking up and out of a small black boat. Rectangular like a single bed. A seam ran across her shoulders and down the sides of her body like a line of fencing over rolling hills. Like rivers and creeks and streams. I jumped from cotton loam to calico as shadows veered away from floor to arm to splayed hand to where her tired fingers met the cold surface of the black. I took a number of pennies. I built a small, small house. A field. A distance that could be seen over my right shoulder and gazed upon.

Enter sunlight. Eucalyptus trees. A fly screen door

Relax

It's a beautiful day

Remembering something or someone

To take control

A lock

A spotted gum

As I approached the driveway. The driveway. The look of the house from the street. It was still there. It could be seen through the bush, the colour of blue and grey and eucalyptus green. I pulled into the drive, suddenly relaxed that it all appeared the same and no tree had fallen through the roof of the cottage. I turned the car into the drive and drove around the spotted gum, parking in the usual place between the bath house and the cottage.

Taking the keys from the front pouch of my backpack I went first to the bath house. I walked around the back to the water tank and turned the valve on. Then I continued on around the outside of the room and back to the door, and unlocked the 3 locks that held the door shut. The first, a regular old door lock with large silver key. The second, a padlock on a bolt, and the third a brass Lockwood lock. I had to put my shoulder to the door and lift, to get the door up and over the cracked and buckled cement, which made the floor of the bathroom.

I made a mental note to win Tattsлото and lift the whole thing up and away from the bugged floor, several feet into the air. Had a quick look around the half opened door. Spider webs, dead huntsman. Dead Bogong moths.

I left the door open and went back to the cottage. Fiddled through the numerous keys and opened the fly screen door. Made a mental note to fix the fly screen door so that at least it closed properly. But now open I unlocked the front door and went in. I expected to smell her rotting body at any moment. Really, I had expected to reel back from it, the stench, even as I approached the cottage. But nothing. I expected to find her on the divan. Leaking into the crocheted rug and the old mattress. Or at least floating above it. But nothing. All was as it should be. A few stray spider webs. Slight musky smell. I closed the front door behind me and reached up to turn the power switch on. I heard the distant but familiar hum of the water pump as it cranked into life in the bathroom.

It was 1930 and Dorothy was seated in her favourite chair in front of the fireplace. Though the fire wasn't lit. Her daughter Marjorie sat beside her, perched on the arm of the chair, holding her mother by the hand. Owney had taken a house in Hot Springs, Arkansas. His wife and Marjorie were not welcome; in fact he had got hitched a second time (to the post-master's daughter).

Enter a tree falling slowly across the driver's side of a
small Japanese car. A mosquito

In the dream:

The breathing gently sucking doors open and close. An open door then a fly-screen door. He stood looking out. Squinting to see better the strange light projection cast on the veranda wall, by the setting sun pushing amber light through the tops of eucalyptus trees. Still standing. Some fallen. Some cut. One fallen, it was said, gently and slowly across the drivers side of a small Japanese car. The gentle light, gently, gentle. At once beautiful and fluorescent and sinister, full and foreboding, like cells dividing.

Strangely erotic as the quivering and dividing cells crashed in waves against each other. Moved in currents toward and away. Folding into and out of. He stood alone. Desolate. His face pressed to the fly screen mesh separating him from the light/voice of the setting sun. Another door. He needed his glasses but couldn't leave this, standing still, not even for a moment. Perhaps the squinting through wet eyes was somehow preferable to the sharp, clean and clear lines of the everyday. Though this wasn't everyday. Breathing into the setting sun through the lacy canopy of eucalypt.

C'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon. Can't remember how this moment ended. Perhaps it didn't end but it certainly changed and other things distracted him. Things to be ordered and done. And how did the mosquitoes get through the screen door and into the small room? He made another list. He sprinkled lavender oil on the bedclothes and on the corner of his pillow. He killed what was most probably a harmless bug as it tried to scurry away under the bed. He turned the bedside lamp on and, taking it from the table, held it down to see what other dangers might be lurking, under the bed. He was surprised how dirty it was when he thought that there was no dust in the doll's house.

He pulled the card table closer and sat with the playing cards. Just one or 2 rounds of solitaire before he continued on. The new cards had a special plasticised surface coating, which was oddly reassuring. He didn't cheat at solitaire. He'd forgotten about the square of sunlight on the veranda wall that seemed projected, like a glimpse of another smaller world. A parallel universe? A view from the other side. A slide through a magnifier, and sexy at that. He imagined he was standing at the sink. He was standing in the centre of the room. He could see out of the kitchen window. He could feel the dark wood of the cupboard doors pressing against his thighs as he lent over the sink. He could feel the dark wood of the cupboard doors pressing against his arse and the backs of his legs as he lent away from them and over the sink. He could feel the edge of the divan pressing into the side of his right shin. It was pressing and insistent. He felt the cavity of the fireplace sucking his left hip towards the promise of a winter's day spent cosy, inside. He was steady on his feet and felt the years drain from his legs and into the dark wood of the polished floor. It's membrane rising through him like a rain gauge filling, but filling slowly despite torrential rain. He felt the crown of his

head pressed against the ribs of dark wood that held the plaster ceiling to the frame of the roof. And all the while he cut onion.

Having taken the very sharp knife from its drawer he drew it across the bulb. Even with the first moment of Sheffield against translucent flesh the juice spat back at him like an overripe fruit. It entered his eyes. It took the place of tears, which left their place and ran down his cheeks. The onion was moving in. His body was moving out. He looked up for a moment and blinked. He could see beyond this place. The sight and smell of that place beyond had moved in. The dark wood of the window frame pressed against his forehead. The old glass filtered the idea of in and out through still wet eyes and icy pain. Teary panes. Sharp pain and wet ice. Eyes. He looked down and continued once more at the very thing he was sure that he knew how to do very well indeed. If there was one thing he knew how to do well it was cutting onions. Oh god, and Sheffield steel.

He continued to pour his weight across the peeling wooden drip tray of the sink and into dark wood from every side. Slicing rings through damp stony surfaces and soft furnishings. Rings falling away, the years translucent in circles, away from the once whole. Accepted into the aggregate of him, the substance of the room.

Where does the cupboard lead? The sink, the fire place. Oh chimney. Oh window onto the outside world, he stood. He was standing, still. He was still standing in the centre of the very small room. He could reach out in any direction and touch the walls. The process of leaving had begun some time ago, in his body.

Time had passed. His mind had begun to fill with the contents of cupboards and drawers. His body was already, ready. All of it ready and gone. I'm not exaggerating. Every pore now soaked in the importance of being shabbily hanging drapes. Unhemmed and hanging over a length of brown lacquered dowel balanced on rusty nails. It was dull in the room. The light had soaked already into the fading cotton, the patterned fabric of his skin.

Days had passed in years. The river rock and aggregate walls accepted the parts of him that brushed against them. He was already drained into the soft furnishings. Having displaced what was essential about the coloured crocheted blanket when he chose to sit. His arse accepted all of the divan and the less than convincing thrust of tired, old springs pushed against and finally into him.

Draws opened noisily to the sound of jostling cutlery. Scissor fingers. Oh desert spoon for special occasions. I was once an onion ring, for a moment as the good knife sliced carefully through its flesh. It did enter me and find a place to stay.

He reached forward to meet the wooden sink. It reached back to him and entered through the furrows of his fingerprints. The corrugations of the drip tray. Paint had already worn thin. Worn itself thin. Was itself worn thin and worn away and into thinness. Oh the skin of my elbows and how the bridge of his nose would sometimes bleed a little when he scrubbed his face too hard in the shower. The water filtered through him, washing away the tears from onion rings, and with it filtered went the sting.

He was standing at the sink. To his right and the open door the strange light filtered, cast in by the out of the setting sun, now clearly framed by the dark wood of the fly-screen door. He squinted to see better the division of cells as the sun pushed amber light through the canopy

of eucalyptus trees. Not gone on a wing and a prayer but still crossed over, he moved through clusters of leaves away from the evening sky divided, and divided again by sharp leaves and sticky branches vibrating along rays of amber light. Pushed, passing, like through the strings of a musical instrument.

He cut onion at the wooden sink. He sailed away on vibrating strings of light seen by eyes still filled with tears. There was a time. Something about time passing. Something about being bled into the landscape but not being left empty by it. Out of the small cottage and into the real world he cast shadows of his former self. The body at the sink neared overflowing with spotted gums and lost love. Loves lost. Overflowing. Or so it seemed. More like he had become one of those trick schooners of beer, which, though apparently emptied, remains forever full. Soft furnishings. House and garden. People and places. Trains and boats and planes. Forever giving out and taking back. Bleeding into the cracks between dark wood floorboards. A blue steak. Pushing at the ceiling. Weighting with the feel of walls. There was a time when all that remained to him was the abiding memory of climbing through fences. I took to water like a duck...to custard.

Enter the child's bed

He lay on the child's bed in the doll's house. It was 2 in the morning and he was trying to sleep. He knew that it was 2 am because he turned on the lamp that sat on the bedside table, just to the left of the bed. He turned the lamp on and checked his watch. The little bed sagged in the middle and he felt as though it was trying to tip him out. It sagged in the middle despite him having reinforced the mesh base with slats of wood joined by upholsterer's tape. There was something fundamentally wrong. So, and nevertheless, he rolled, or fell, out of bed, having turned on the lamp, and checked the time.

He rolled out of bed, pissed into an old aluminium dipper that he had handy for that purpose, and stumbled into the dark of the next room to get a drink of water. He went back into the bedroom, thought again "must fix that bed", and returned to sleep, eventually. He lay for a while in the warm dark. He lay for quite a while in the stuffy little room, wondered how he might fix the bed, anticipated mosquito attack, and tried not to think of spiders. He lay on his back, half under the sheet and half under sheet and summer doona combined. He rolled onto his left side. He lay on his left side and pushed his pillow further under his head. Under and plumped up a bit. And he let his right arm hang out in the air. He listened for the sound of mosquitoes and waited for that fluttering sensation you get from their wings, just before they settle on a knuckle or prominent vein in the back of the hand, wrist or lower arm. He remembered having applied tropical strength Aerogard to his hands and arms and quickly returned to trying not to think about spiders. He rolled onto his back. When that didn't work either he rolled onto his right side, and lay there. Again he plumped up the pillow under his head and let his left arm hang out in the air. This is the side, he remembered, he lay on when he napped in the afternoon, at home, on the couch, with the dogs. That was also an uneven surface but it didn't seem to matter. It was a couch after all, and not pretending to be a bed. But still, it was a comforting thought and the next thing he knew it was dawn and time to get up, to brave the bitter outhouse and the tannin shower.

THE SIXTH ACT

Remembering Buffalo Creek



9. Buffalo Creek Farmhouse

SCENE 1. The Farmhouse

She reminded herself that it could have taken him a lifetime to build the small boat that would carry them sleeping across the paddocks of cotton drill. They moved around the framed print like the air in the air. They travelled through black at the speed of sight. They looked past the edges of each other. Beyond their destination. She cried out at the sound of magpies coming from trees and from old fence posts that couldn't be seen in the darkness. She looked into the black. She looked through the black. She was looking beyond the darkness that caught the valleys of her memory. Folding cotton fields.

Enter a kitchen. Nathaniel and Sue. Me and you. And Fred

Stop doing that.

It's an ill wind that blows not well.

To make a decision

To keep moving.

Something in decay.

A glass of wine.

Lengths of wood seem roughly hewn now but weren't always so. Seeing the light or the dark between now ill-fitting lengths. Grown together and apart with age. Old BBQ. Brick. Missing a few. Bricks. Grass. Cracked cement. Man in overalls. Nat and Sue. Sue in the kitchen by the open fire in one of the 2 comfortable chairs. It was dark inside. She was reading the paper. Where's the cat that hates men but loves Nat? Her bed is on the veranda by the kitchen door. There's a flap of old fabric sheet tacked on to keep off the draught. The ill wind. Nat and Sue moved slowly. Welcome to our home. The upright freezer in the kitchen is broken and has leaked water over the floor. The enamel at its base had begun to bubble from the rust trying to break through.

I caught sight and was taken by the feelings. We walked around the not yet empty rooms, on the carpet. Threadbare where larger objects had been placed against the walls or in the centre of the room or in front of the fireplace. Couldn't remember the doors until the second visit, or the extent of the rising damp until the third. Rising damp or borer or termite. I was told that the borers love the damp. I wished I knew. They waited in the kitchen with Fred. Just wanted to sit but felt compelled to keep moving. Can't decide on anything for sure, but a decision must be made. Oh dear. They were fond of beer it seemed from the bottles in the pantry. No sign of wine. I wondered about the neighbour's vineyard. Do they like a glass of wine? No dripping tap. No sound of birds just then. No traffic.

The scene began to peel back from the upper right hand corner from the 14' ceiling. Its living stillness continued as the truth of the moment began, and continued to peel back from itself, revealing the Buffalo Creek valley. Like the house, its substantial mass was really nothing in the scheme of things. The realness of each moment lifted off and away from where it nestled on the side of the hill in the hollow of the vale. Everything was real and remained so. Was unreal and continued to surprise and delight. The scars of the world on the skin of the land.

Enter She

She was the house. The house for sale on the rise and it peeled away from itself.

It is like peeling skin and as it peels away or is peeled, there is nothing completely new underneath. What is there is more skin. New for sure, for skin, but the structure underneath is the same old man, old woman. Old valley pinned together by Buffalo Creek Road and...whatever was the hill. Caught between the road and Whateverwasthe Hill, and seamed by Buffalo Creek.

As she peeled back from the mountain she was the fairly ordinary house built too close to other ordinary houses on either side. She was all of them as she peeled back and away from the mountain. It sounded like time passing. She thought of nothing but to fold away. But it was not a task. It was never completed. It continued as the Buffalo Creek ran. Down from the mountain, knowing and not knowing that it would ever run dry or be anything more for the fish that swam between its banks.

Everything was in constant change but not changing. The hours were days and weeks and months of grass and vineyards and ordinary houses built too close to each other on either side. What could be smelt of the change? There were no surprises if one wasn't prone to surprise as the new revealed itself at the expense of the old and became old itself as it draped over fields of golden grass.

I walked through her door and out onto the veranda as the house, as she, peeled back around me. She passed through me or I moved through her. The valley rose up and entered my eyes. She swept behind me as I walked out and into the garden. I wondered as I wandered – what had changed in the garden of unmade beds? The paths were overgrown but still the paths were there. She lifted away from the curve of the ground. Lifting away were the paths and flower beds now empty and flowerless. The cracks in her skin remained, even as the concrete peeled away.

She continued.

Enter entering. She and a large old farmhouse

There were 2 front doors. The one she entered led through to an open corridor. At the end of the corridor. Was a room. The corridor was flanked by bedrooms. At the end of the corridor and to the right was the dining room. The fireplace. Was set into the right wall of the room as she entered it. She faced the second front door. The floor was uneven beneath the old carpet. The level of the floorboards had dropped below the hearth. Something would have to be done.

The second front door was surrounded by coloured glass. As she entered the house through the front door, there were 2. She decided on the first of the front doors. It was a large, old, farmhouse. The first front door led to an open corridor flanked by bedrooms. The doors were shut. She continued along the corridor, turning the lights on as she went, until she came to the dining room. As she entered it she was faced by the second front door. She noticed the floor, uneven under the carpet as she crossed the room. To her right a fireplace was set into the wall. The floor had dropped below the level of the hearth.

Something would have to be done about that. She could hear the sound of voices coming from the kitchen. She continued to look about the room.

As she peeled back from the garden she opened out as the front door and the corridor of the old farmhouse. She peeled through, up and away as the door, the hall, the closed bedroom doors. The walls and ceiling. She lifted up from the carpet over uneven floor. She passed through it like smoke in a fireplace from which the hearth had dropped away. She rose like steam. Like rising damp. She peeled away as the old house that was now and would remain.

Enter a blowfly at a flyscreen door

She is the world that she inhabits. She is the valley where she has lived for 50 years. It's her whole being and even the thinking memory of it washes through her. She passes through walls like they don't exist. She is the skin of it peeling back from the curve, the shape, of the earth. The fields of grass. Even they are not settled on the frame of the valley. She inhabits entirely the form of her world. Where is she?

Sue chatted to me about nothing in particular but all of it in detail that was the house where she and Nat had lived their entire married life. I don't remember a word of it. There was a blowfly at the screen door of the kitchen. We stopped for a moment and watched the parrots feeding on seeds outside the kitchen window. The phone rang. I watched her like she was an open fire as she talked on the phone. She made tea. She moved unevenly across the carpet, between fireplace and sink and door.

She was ready to leave. Her and Nat would settle in town. Their son had bought a house and they were ready to retire into it.

I thought about my mother.

The house continued to play through my mind. She washed over me like it was lightly raining and the water remained unmoved between the ridges on corrugated iron. Again I wandered through the house and the place wandered through me. I checked the floor and walls for damp. It settled in behind my eyes to see if I could last the distance.

As I walked the corridor she peeled through me. The wallpaper over Hessian dissolved into the spaces of each room. She passed through me as it passed through her. She dissolved into herself as the space she was and the time she took to be. I moved on against my will to be still, drunk with the thought of her.

The scenes of the house peeled away from the up and the down and the side to side, from the vertical and the horizontal and all of the plains in between. Each layer was the same as the one before. Thick white buttered slices around pickle and roast beef. There followed only the ticking of time and the telling of the same story.

He looked up at the mountain at the end of the valley. Too steep for trees, its sides shone from the sun and the rocky surfaces glistened from the rain. He was told to expect snow in winter. He turned and walked back under the veranda to the other side of the house. He looked down the valley. There were vineyards in the distance. He saw the roofs of houses shining in the sun and their corrugated iron surfaces glistening from the rain.

He wondered if the creek ever flooded. Perhaps it would wash them all away. He had yet to meet his new neighbours but expected they were from hell; as neighbours are occasionally wont to be. Nat had attempted to modernise the old homestead in the late sixties and had ripped out a couple of the original Victorian windows and replaced them with the far more efficient aluminium-framed sliding ones. Thankfully the money ran out so that they just had to put up with rose glass and the century old timber detailing that they had painted over.

He wondered how to begin. Where to start. Restumping. Rewiring, replumbing. Re-everything. He had lived somewhere once. The dark ages. A truly frightening year that he longed to forget. But he remembered the French doors into the garden. They worked. Is that what all of that was for? All of this? French doors? And the neighbours from hell or thereabouts?

The roof needed some work.

Enter dissolving into something thick and substantial

As he stood on the veranda, every joint of his body opening to the air around him, he thought of nothing but the feeling of standing. Not overwhelming but very near the top of that mountain. His body was dissolving into the thinness of fresh air around him. Inside of him. His joints opening into the air.

His thick and substantial self surrendered into itself, outside of itself. His eyes blurred. He allowed them to, as he fell softly in upon himself. To start again. He was standing on the veranda, sinking into feeling.

He thought. Not nothing but very near the deepest point of that valley. He was opening down and in, up and out. Expanding from the inside out and outside in. How can that be? But it was true.

"How do I look? This dissolving, expanding fullness." His ears opened to the sound of the rain on the shed roof and on the outhouse roof. And on the corrugated iron above his head. Falling backwards and in. And the dull roar from the house roof above and behind him. It trickled down the gutters like a creek. Gushing into him and beyond. He was soaked through to the skin and to oblivion. His jaw had softened open. His breath fell into and out of him like air should, he thought, but doesn't, just pass through everything. Now it was passing through him. He didn't know how he was still standing.

"How can I still be standing as everything that I see before me, and everything that follows falls in on me softly? What am I now that the struggle has ended? For a moment. I want this feeling to stay. He was already thinking of leaving and returning again to this place. It wasn't so much the being there. It was the being swallowed. It was going there. Already he wanted to start again and feel the slow dissolve as he stood on the veranda and thought of nothing save the feeling. Not overwhelming but very near the centre of everything he could imagine. His desire to describe it and know it in words that could relate it to others entered him, cut through the still thin air around him like a shark.

He walked over and away to chop some wood for the fire and yell at the dog.

Enter twelve months later

The centre of the room was a mound of boxes. A pile of furniture. Bits and pieces. Magazines. All carefully stacked, more or less carefully, in the centre of the room. They had been placed there, in the room, so that renovations could be carried out in the other rooms of the house. Placed there. In the centre, so that work could be carried out around them in this particular room. A desk. A Japanese pharmacist's cabinet. Tool boxes. Cardboard boxes full of bits and pieces. Videos. Old papers. Broken things, too good to be thrown out but not good enough to be useful, for the moment.

The skirting boards that once held the walls out had been carefully removed, careful not to split the wood, now lent against the mound of stuff in the centre of the room. He stood near the door. His back to it. Looking in at the pile and imagining it somewhere else. Anywhere else. Just gone from that room.

The Masonite that had lined the walls had been taken down. It now covered the floors of other rooms, to protect the floorboards from damage from the further work that was going on or could have been going on if it had been ongoing. On.

He looked at the walls, now just a framework, and thought of the old wallpaper on Hessian that he uncovered when the Masonite was first brought down. 100 years and still in tact. Mostly. Some. A few sections he kept and rolled carefully and placed in another room. I'll deal with that later, he imagined. This was just the beginning. Though 5 years into it really. I'm just starting. He hated pulling it down. The wallpaper. Off the walls. Falling. Dropping to the floor. It had lasted 100 years after all. The colours had browned with time and open fires and the heat that scorched through the ceiling in summer. No insulation. He looked up at the beams. The forms of beams bruised into the old Murray pine boards that lined the ceiling. A strangely greying white wash of old paint. What do they call it now when they do it on purpose to furniture on TV lifestyle shows? The 'crackle effect?' Still, 12 feet up and too much work to be imagining stripping it back to the raw wood. Best to insulate and paint the ceiling properly he thought. Or leave it. A reminder of its old self. He continued to will himself into the future. What next?

He looked out of the room through the old glass and into the yard. Sucked out of himself by the view down the valley. But the dust smell brought him back. He'd breathed in deeply to sniff the view but was brought back to the room by the taste of musty floral carpet, insistent at the back of his throat. He cleared it and swallowed and imagined what it was like to be a Japanese pharmacist. Hemmed in by boxes of almost rubbish. Not yet. And stacks of unused furniture. He looked into the old glass of the old cabinet and saw the past unclear, as if looking into old glass in the sliding panels of a Japanese Pharmacist's cabinet.

Enter 100 years before.
One sitting at an upright piano
Two poking at the fireplace

A week later it was a winter's night in 1906. One was hammering out a tune on the upright piano against the wall between the windows. Two sang along, after a fashion, as he poked away at the logs in the fireplace. Trying to get a good blaze going. The carpet had already been rolled back, pushed and laying against the skirting boards under a row of ordinary bentwood chairs against the east wall of the room.

The already warm room was full of the sounds of conversation and song. The upright against the wall was slightly out of tune, as all upright pianos thumping out the strains of 'Wait 'till the sun shines Nelly' are. Two continued to meddle with the fire in the open hearth. 'He' returned to listen and watch alternately. His thoughts mingling with the conversations. His voice moving seamlessly between the news of the day and Nelly, still waiting for the sun to shine.

Small explosions of laughter went off like incendiaries around the room. All held together by a force unspoken in so many words, and the smell of freshly scrubbed skin, cheap perfume, and burning eucalyptus wood which was still not stoked enough for two's liking. He was soon called away to fetch something from another room.

The singing could lift the roof and probably did. The ceiling glowed golden in the lamplight as shadows danced across the Murray pine. And below. Feet skipped over Baltic floorboards.

I reluctantly revisit the past. I reluctantly swell in the present. I prefer to worry about the future, he thought as he put his glass of beer on the small table beside the piano and clapped his hands together, almost in time with 'We will come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaths.' The sun, apparently, had already set on Nelly.
"A toast!"

Enter as a woman remembering a dream

She woke to the memory of a dream of the corridor passing beneath and around her. Overhead. The doors passed. The doors then one – the doors. Then two – and one on either side. Then two. Then one to the right. The door was shut on the room but open to the room. It moved to her and around her. The fire crackled. Too much eucalyptus and the need of a guard to catch the sparks flying out. Small bursts of laughter and song. And candle light. No, lamplight. He spotted the piano not so grand but enough. It was good enough. At last.

At last a fallen paper flower from the wall of gold and green. Gold leaf on green. Green leaves shimmering in the golden firelight. Golden petals catching mercurial light. The shadows wore me like an old coat I'd been meaning to give away. Unworn for so many years but still. Still attached. Still born. It fell down.

'I never knew that.' And for a moment. Interrupted. For a moment the lightning flashed through. The light glanced at the crowd gathered in the open room. And soon a clap of thunder rattled the windows in their frames and the lamplight danced quickly around itself. Stilled for a moment the rousing chorus and the flow of states of affairs. Terrible states of

affairs. Drawn silently into the fabric of the walls. The forest of shimmering gold leaf. She woke into the wallpaper and cried for no apparent reason. 100 years. From whence 100 years or so! The newspaper clippings. Whole pages of tiny print laid down under linoleum, and history walked upon.

Still marching on, underfoot. Under lino. She wished she was a soldier. For a moment. Then not. I never knew that. Well you do now, and furthermore the stillborn fell. Apparent yet. She stormed from the room without leaving her place beside the upright piano and a rousing chorus of ...what? She shimmered on the golden leafed wallpaper as it shook to sounds of clapping hands and clapping thunder and feet clapped firmly on the floor, in dancing.

I cried for no apparent reason as I stood at the foot of the mountain of old furniture, a sleeping buffalo and cardboard boxes. The floral carpet was unrolled and flat beneath the pile. Flat to protect the wood, he said, from the entire goings on. The work going on. The works that could and would be going on when the walls were lined again and the work was ongoing.

During the process of re-lining the rooms of the old house the walls would give up plum seeds, coins, an earring, and fragments of crockery, toys, pins, a playing card, termite damage, a shopping list written on the back of a betting slip, the skeletal remains of vermin, a sheep's neck, dust, a child's slipper, and a newspaper cutting:

IN MEMORIUM

MILLAR – In loving remembrance of our dearly beloved mother, Margaret Millar, who died 28th June 1905, at her daughter's residence, Mrs. D. Murdock, Brookside; aged 99 years.

No matter how we pine, dear mother,
No matter how we call,
There is nothing left to answer
But the photo on the wall.

Kind was your heart, in friendship sound;
Patient in pain, loved by all around.
Sweet to our memories, dear to our hearts,
All love for your memory never shall part.

Inserted by her loving sons and daughters. He had found a small child's slipper under the piano when they moved it out. A curious dog found a small child's leg bone in the yard, under the house in the town where his grieving mother once lived. A slipper. A playing card. A shopping list written on the back of a betting slip. A tiny clipping of an obituary from the newspaper. 'In loving remembrance of our dearly beloved mother. 100 years. The head of a porcelain doll. The boy child. Threepence.

Enter 50 years before

Even before Sue had reached the door.
Even without seeing who was fast approaching the room.
Even as the flames from burning lamps flickered behind their glass bulbs.

Even as the rousing chorus changed to the old acquaintance not yet forgot.
She had entered the room like lightening light had entered through the window glass and the talk began to still.

As Sue rounded the corner, already finishing sentences from conversations on the other side of the room. The enormous tray of cold meats – she cut a swathe through the throng, not unlike her horse and buggy parting a herd of sheep on the track leading into town. Already answering the need for food before the words were spoke. She laughed as the hungry moved in to help her place the dish and themselves at the head of hungry mouths. On the face of hungry mouths. 'Come and get it!'

Enter old farmhouse remembering

The room still contains everything that has ever happened in it. That can't be right. I hadn't thought it through. That would make for a very crowded room.

Maybe that should be 'everything of significance that has ever happened inside it.' What is significant and how is that determined? A murder perhaps. A party? A murder or a party? A murder at a party! Dead people having a party! People having a party a long time ago but the people have since died! Been murdered? So it's an old house. Yes. 100 years.

Rain falling.
I got up from my seat and stood at the window, looking out.
The rain was falling.
People.
Like water.
Dripping down the face of the building.
The wet trails remaining.
Some drips stick around before they fall.
Or maybe they never fall.
They just stay until they're absorbed back into the building or the air.

Thinking:
On another day the movement of the sun across the sky casting shadows and light into and onto the floor of a room.
The frame of each light-filled window is picked out, filled in and projected onto and across the floor of the room.
The floors of the rooms.

Figures moving with the light.
Sitting. Standing. Lying down.
As the window images move across the floor/s. The figures coming and going through doorways. Passing through the hallway.
Not arriving.
Not leaving.
Like bobbing bottled messages.
The figure on a tractor comes and goes from the shed. Looping in and out.
The figures stand in the paddock. Looking.

Bobbing messages in bottles: leaving not leaving; arriving not arriving. Histories. Hopes.
Fears. Remembrances.
Penetrating the circumference, the coastline of the valley, the paddock, the house, the
hallway, the room, the light and the shadow.

Standing, not sitting, not lying down.
Sitting, not lying down, not standing.
Lying down, not standing, not sitting.

Like rolling waves. Lapping at the edges and inching across the grass, the threshold, the
floorboards, the floral carpet.
The tide comes in, slowly, across the floral carpet.
The light on the floor moves very slowly.
The figures move.
The light moves. The figures move. For a long time.
The light preceding the figures moves over the floor very slowly for a long time.

SCENE 2. The Gathering

Enter silk wedding dress with short train. A man carrying a valise

*Sing me a song. Entertain me.
Don't be so didactic
To conform or belong to the group
Shifting gear
A memory
A tray of food*

We'd been keeping an eye on her all night. She needed to be watched and prodded
occasionally. Why can she not get it together? She's standing alone again
propping up the fireplace in the lounge. I know she's after that bloke. Well, not
'after' him. She's never 'after' anyone. But she wants him.
What bloke? Where's my drink?
That gorgeous thing that came with Stephen and Katy. What's wrong with her?
The blonde do you mean?
No not the blonde. Unless he's a natural blonde and he's hiding something.
Who then?
He's six foot nothing and drop dead darling. Don't tell me you didn't notice her jaw relax when
he rocked in.
What's he wearing then?
He's wearing a cream silk wedding dress with a short train.
Is that my drink?
I think you've had enough.
This one'll do.
Here she comes. Ask her.
Well?
Well what?

Have you spoken to him yet?
Who?
You know bloody well who? Drop dead gorgeous!
He's not interested.
How do you know if you haven't put the hard word on darling?
I tell you he's not interested.
We'll see about that.
No Kerry, don't. He's just not into it.
So you have spoken to him. Drop dead ay!
It's just not on.
No Kerry. No. Oh, fuck. Why does she do this?
Hey! Mongrel! Yea you. How dare you not fuck my friend!
Oh god.
Where's that tray of food?
He's wearing it.

Where's my hat?
Once bitten twice shy
To remember something important
Moving
Some music
A cup and saucer

I don't know what to do about it. It's not that I can't bear the consequences. Really! I live for consequences. You know what I mean? Look there was the tractor parked outside of the shed. Inside was a whole lot of stuff. Looked like garbage mostly. But you never know. And there was a Toyota wagon at the back. Off its wheels. God knows how long it'd been there. I just didn't know where to begin. Look it was towards the end of the day anyway. There wasn't any time to be piss farting around in the shed. I mean. The dirt. You know. It was a mess.

What were you wearing?

Well obviously I was wearing my silk wedding dress with the short train. I'd taken it out of the valise. Well to be honest, I wasn't sure where to lay my hands on it to begin with. Then I remembered the suitcase on top of the big wardrobe in the spare room. And there it was. Still fits me like a glove. 30 years on. Not bad ah? Well anyway I wasn't going out to the shed in that. It just wasn't appropriate right. I mean. On the tractor. That's one thing. That was possible. Short train. I just hitched it in, up at the back and tucked the rest into my Calvin Klein's. I was sitting in the kitchen having a cuppa and it just hit me. I mean. What a waste you know. Not wearing something for 30 years having only worn it once before. So I tracked it down to the old leather valise on top of the cupboard and the rest is history. Bob's your uncle and Fanny's your aunt as she was, as it were. Ha. Sure it was a bit creased after all this time, but aren't we all. It just felt so right. Right. But I'm not wearing it into that shed. A man's got to draw the line somewhere.

Did I tell you about the black snake in the laundry? Oh. We won't go there again. But needless to say I fairly soiled me frock. Thank god for the Fiat but. I must have cut a good 10 acres of Lucerne before the light got so bad I had to give it away. Silk's terrific like that. Don't you think? I'm just worried now that I'm going to wear the blessed thing out. Didn't think at the time to have a few spares made. Well you don't do you. You think one'll see me out. You

know. Till death us do part and all that. Just one'll do for a lifetime of pleasure and remembrance. I've still got me cake, did I tell you? Somewhere.

What year were you married?

Married? Oh, I was never married. I just liked to look good, you know. I mean. Why shouldn't I have a special day like everyone else? Oh no. Was never found by the right woman.

Enter man wearing good clothes

Standing in a smaller room than the doll's house.

Too big for the room. Low ceiling. But not too low for him to stand upright.

He manages, despite the cramped quarters, to fold out an ironing board and press a few examples of what he thought of as his 'good clothes'. So good in fact that they were all over 20 years old and hardly ever been worn. He was ironing them just in case. He'd probably just wear his jeans and a T-shirt. But they would be there, pressed and ready to go, if he chose to wear them. He was never comfortable in 'good' clothes. People on public transport were unaccustomed to smartly dressed men. 'Too smart for their own good' was the general consensus.

It hadn't happened yet but he was paralysed by the fear that it would. 'My whole life is ruled by fear' he thought, as he ironed a very lovely blue shirt that he remembered buying from a vintage clothing store in Hobart, in 1983. He had tried several times to give it away but he liked the idea of good clothes. He opened the wardrobe door regularly, just to look at them, hanging there. Perhaps it will be too hot on the night and that will decide things, after all one can't be sweating all over one's good clothes. He was already considering one of the outfits, as he emptied the remaining water from the iron into a container on the sink, to be left to cool before he watered the pot plant on the porch.

He was already considering dark blue linen pants, pale blue Hobart shirt, over stripy blue and black T-shirt that was a special gift from an old flame. Birkenstocks. Black pork-pie hat. Tram, peak hour. 'How's work honey?' Fine thank- you. He sees himself reflected in the glass. Thinks, 'How the hell do I look?' Smells beer on the breath of other passengers. Sees the crowd like so many dividing cells and remembers the dream.

Enter the stair well

He stood in the stair well. He was wearing the good trousers that he'd bought in Tokyo in 1985. He remembered still the street and the shop and the sign 'Software For Men'. Or was that the make of the slacks? Anyway. He loved the idea of them. Software for men. Now soft is quite common. For men. Not just men of a particular sensitivity. A once unusual inclination. He liked the feel of them. The trousers. The 'good' pants. He stood in them and wondered at the look, after all 1985 was sometime last century. Did he really need to impress? Well, yes, but was he capable? And what would he do with the impressed in any case? He moved from standing in the well to pacing on the stairs. Not an easy manoeuvre or even one that appealed to the average loiterer.

Thank god for Birkenstocks. Though perhaps a bit clunky for a party. He could hear them already in full swing upstairs. He imagined his software tripping him through the open door at the top, into the room, into view. That's not the impression he wanted to make. Glasses flying off his face. The shirt was a nice touch. Short sleeved. Some sort of mustard coloured viscous material. Sounds unlikely but didn't look too bad at all really. If zipped down the front. All good things zip down the front. Except of course for the good things that do up at the back. Vintage 1955 he remembered. A second hand clothing store in Hobart. Nice. And the leather coat. He decided against the hat. Pork pie and all, but no. Not black. In black he disappeared completely.

And on the head?

'Who is that skinny headless man in the leather coat falling through the door? For god's sake someone pick him up, if you can find him.'

She can be such a bitch. The suede though was a nice touch and not too hot. 1960's? Adelaide. An impulsive buy he remembered. Caught up in the excitement of being there with friends. He wasn't completely sure in which decade of which century to place himself. Nor, indeed, which room. Follow the laughter and stick to the walls. Surrendering to the attraction of walls and soft furnishings had become his practice. It had always worked before and there was absolutely no reason why it shouldn't work again. He took a breath, smiled, and moved quickly up the stairs.

SCENE 3. Dinner Plain

Enter still currents swirling above and below

*It's rude to stare
You're so silent
To overdo or exaggerate something
Shouting or whispering
A brick wall
A lipstick*

Dinner Plain / grasses / stunted trees / half submerged rocks / pools of moss / larger breathing thing – the shape/contour of the plain / crisp thin air / eucalyptus vapour hanging, in the air / damp, cool cleanness rising from the ground / all things breathing in and out, or out and out and out and out. Not taking from the air. Always expanding outward. Never contracting in on itself in the morning light and lite and lightness. Grasses so soft and strong, bending with the movement, the currents of air. Water-like.

The 'character' underneath it all, behind this thin skin, has no eyes for seeing what is plainly there
They are to me
Seeing
Though rude to stare
Still looking in quiet knowing, unknowing, ness.

Silent in being neither here nor there. Expanding outwards, away from the half submerged rocks. Though pushing upwards through stubbled skin. Dropped up and in, gently breaking the still surface of the plain, from underneath, sending out ripples of blonde and grey grasses across the field, still not contained by fences, the plain. Whispering little half said sentences on the breath of breezes, the crests of not yet waves, not yet crest fallen. Still currents swirling above and below. Not halted by walls, not contained. Untouched, not really, by modest tracks winding their way between the stunted trees. By the paths of jet engines – a trail of pale grey lipstick across the sky, at once sharp and threatening at its source but wearing down to a tired smudge from lip to cheek, to back of hand?

Roaming, coming home, homing. It's all instinctive and undecided. So hard to let that river go. Yet it is gone. But the red remains, at once sharp and threatening at its source but wearing down to a tired smudge from bridge to creek, across the sand. Till all that remains is the vapour of eucalyptus hanging in the air and the dampness from sod rising still gently through the ground.

SCENE 4. The Out of Doors

Enter on grass. The summer sun across his face

*Don't worry; it's only a joke.
I'm staying right here forever.
Crossing arms. Shaking hands.
To be memorable. Sitting on grass.
A bright light. A piece of fruit.*

He couldn't make up his mind exactly how he wanted to sit on the grass. It was important to be exact. He'd probably disagree if I put to him like that. And then go back to deciding exactly which of the many ways it is possible to be on an area of turf, the ways he would like to be on this patch of grass. He was concerned about ants or any other little thing that existed in great numbers in natural environments.

As a child he had found a way to be on grass, and he'd been bitten. He'd been stung by bees, bitten by flees, crawled upon by insects of all kinds. There were flies and fleas and ticks and mites. And there was damp. I grabbed the blanket from the car and he plonked himself on it and off to one side. He sighed and carefully removed his shoes. He took off his socks, one at a time, rolled them together and stuffed them in the toe of his left shoe. He took off his watch. He couldn't fully relax with a band on his wrist. He felt confined. Held down. He even took it off when he visited friends in their homes. Then he'd just slip it into his pocket. Now he took his socks back out of his left shoe and placed the watch in the toe, and replaced the socks.

I thought about going for a walk but decided against it, for now. He wouldn't know what to do with himself.

I make him sound a bit mean spirited but that's not him at all.

His little rituals follow him wherever he goes. But, at the moment, he's in particularly good spirits. I wouldn't go so far as to say he's 'over the moon'.

Let's just say he's quietly optimistic.

He turns forty in August. Late August.

Yes, exactly!

Now he's taken off his shirt.

This is very uncharacteristic.

I know he's been concerned about a 'softening', as he calls it, around his stomach and abdomen. He's not sure what to do about it.

He could purchase, don't tell anyone, one of those 'ab sculptor – something – elite' things that one employs if one is concerned about the softening of one's stomach and abdomen.

I am trying to get onto what a positive, great all-round sort of a guy he is, but I can't seem to get past quietly optimistic and middle-aged spread.

I reach for the thermos and pour him a cup of Chinese Chrysanthemum tea.

God knows what's in it, exactly.

I need to know these things, exactly. It helps me when I'm talking to him, or answering anyone else who might happen to ask me questions about him. Like, 'how many ways is it possible for me to be with him here in this park, by the river, on a rug on a layer of turf, on the ground?'

There's a point beyond which no very small crawling insect can go without attracting any number of violent responses.

I'm watching a small beetle crawl up the side of his shoe.

He's watching it too, and he continues to watch as it crosses over the leather upper and down the other side.

Then he smiles and breathes again and looks out and across the river to the other bank, and imagines everything that is good and fine about being alive, and wonders, briefly, at everything that is good and fine about being dead.

It has to be considered.

And he does and it is done.

The texture of grass was a comfort to him. The mild late summer sun falling across his cheeks was a pleasure. The sound of running water made him want to piss but it wasn't a pressing need. He had shed his few layers of clothes in favour of skin and Lycra. Drowsy eyes. He'd already dipped his head into the cool stream running nearby. That was as far as it would go. He was not one for total immersion. His hair parted and gathered in tiny ringlets against his scalp. Just like astrakhan. Astrakhan of course is the fleece of unborn lambs. Quite popular once. But not with him.

He reclined as if to be drawn by a room full of budding artists. Amateur enthusiasts with an eye for detail.

He was aware of their gaze and imagined himself more naked than he was. He felt them looking at his self. Looking at and into the part of him that no one can see but people who know what they are looking for in a naked man.

His head rose up and away from his shoulders in stately profile, while the flesh of his body slipped like a gentle avalanche over his hips. The newness of his swimming briefs clung to him with all of the brevity of an unborn child.

He was saddened by some vaguely felt loss of credibility and the smell of dog shit from nearby.

Hair and skin and Lycra. Astrakhan and the flesh of an unborn child too clear to be real. Worn on the head. Wrapped around his face for the cold, and his groin for the pleasure of others. He was slow to move. His large sheep's eyes rose and fell in the pursuit of nothing in particular. His jaw moved to a slow rhythm masticating gum. The cud of a lifelong obsession with regal demeanour and a tragic avalanche of flesh. He would be saved from it all in the end. At the end of it all. Saved in the end. Saved. At all.

Enter as a ploughed field

The man lay fallow. The field of him. Flayed out but thick in body. Fenced. His guts and everything about him turned over. Thick and heavy. Blood red blackness rising up in slices of wet mass. Furrows. The boiling lines of clay. Black clay. Red. Beautiful rich rolling clods of him turning over and over and bubbling up. Stirred up from underneath. Uncovering still more of him. More of the same. Broken and re-forming in waves of rolling, glistening sod. Sodden and soaking. Crumbling and breaking, flaking in relentless waves breaking over each other.

'I had admired him since I was a child. Always. One November 8th – I was 30 years old – he allowed me to visit him. He lived several hundred kilometres from Paris. I had brought a wedding dress in my valise, white silk with a short train. I wore it on our first night together.' Stemming from his rich soil a field of wheat and so many heavy drooping heads, the spiky grass-like tufts exploding into space. Fingers reaching out and out to take it in, whatever it was. Swept up. In. Blown flat and parted. Whipped up by breezes. Flattened and blown about again like a field of wheat.

I was eighteen years old. I was nine years old. I was six. Rich and heavy heads of wheat dripping still from the thaw after a heavy frost. His sods of black clay glistening in waves on the open field. My white silk budding. Heads heavy with grain reaching up and out. Away and still. Fingering out into the spring morning. Rolling over and over the rich red loam of his blackness rising and rising and falling, tilled and cracking in breaking waves of clay. Parted by the blowing breezes as he carefully turned himself over and away.

THE SEVENTH ACT

Remembering the Cottage



10. Buffalo Creek Cottage

SCENE.1. She

As she sat by the fire in the kitchen she did recall that there was, once, another man who loved a woman. She was the one he slew the dragon for, apparently. It was said that nobody ever loved as much as he did. Except of course for her husband. He loved her more. They say that nobody ever took the road that led her way. Except today. That's what she saw.

Enter shaded. Clear. Translucent. Lineless but not ageless.

I know it is her skin. The skin of her cheek.

Closer to me than the cotton top that she is wearing. At once taut and sharp at shoulder seams, and loose. Let go. Folding/falling around her neck. Soft undulating folds like nothing else but folds of crisp cotton. Not like snow or water rippling. Darker the deeper the fold the darker. To black. Behind the face. Looking right over her right shoulder (dipped). Short stringy hair. Damp, so that the tips joined together like so many tails of mice hanging about her forehead and her ears and the back of her neck where it disappeared under the cotton collar of her blouse or dress. Eyes looking out at something in particular. Not sad eyes. Dark eyes. Lips open slightly. Full bottom lip. Vulnerable chin.

Looking in at her looking out. Framed tight and up close. Looking out beyond the looking in. Further away than the place. She is half laying down/half sitting. Looking up and out of a small black boat. Square/rectangular like a single bed. One hand splayed in support of arm and cotton dress. I took the paper to the other room and she sat up as if to follow me out with her body but did so only with her eyes. Her tail was wagging in the dark. Her eyes moved to me and locked on my eyes. She may have gotten up quickly. I had to be careful for how long I let our eyes meet. Long enough to catch the wetness of her hair. A seam ran across her shoulders and down the sides of her body like a line of fencing across rolling hills. Like rivers and creeks and streams. I jumped from cotton loam to calico. Shadows veered away from floor to arm to splayed hand and to where her tired fingers met the cold surface of the black. I took a number of pennies. I built a small, a small house. A field. A distance that could be seen over my right shoulder and gazed upon. Not surprised but ready to move towards. Unable to move but not understanding of that.

It could have taken me a lifetime to build the small boat that carried her sleeping across the paddocks of cotton drill. I moved around the framed print like the air in the air. The air in the air. Travelled through black at the speed of sight. Being taken by recognition, immediately to the object of my wanting. I could see her clearly. But she looked passed me to the edge of the framed print. Beyond my destination.

I cried out at the sound of magpies coming from trees and old fence posts that I couldn't see in the darkness. She looked into the black. She looked through the black. She was looking beyond the darkness that caught the valleys of her folding cotton fields. There once was a man who loved a woman. She was the one he slew the dragon for. They say that nobody ever loved as much as he. But me. I loved her more. They say that nobody took the road that led her way. Except today. That's what she saw. She looked back towards me but not at me. She saw over her right shoulder, past my left.

Enter over a hot stove

He'd already begun. There were things to be done. It was just a matter of deciding which combination of ingredients would be brought together in the fry pan. He thought every night of returning to the wok but the fry pan was so much easier. He worried about fried food but did nothing about it. He felt like a beer but hadn't bought any in advance. She would be home soon in any case and she sometimes had a bottle or 2 of white wine in a brown paper bag. Wine would be fine.

He could hear her scratching at the front door with her key. He went to the kitchen doorway to watch her walk down the hall. She was tired but when they saw each other the real world fell away for a moment. They babbled away at each other. Panting and sighing and trying to say everything all at once through open mouths around the tangle of heads and arms and briefcase and shopping. He unloaded her on the threshold of the room and watched her wire frame skitter around the kitchen. Unburdened, and for the moment unbound. There was no wine.

"No worries darling. I should have thought of it myself."

She looked up. All action ceased for a few seconds. Then she darted about the kitchen. Laughing and pawing at things and throwing her head back and from side to side. She lunged at the couch and dropped down and into it like her strings had been cut. Again all action in her ceased as she watched him pottering about the kitchen with the makings of a meal.

Her head was tilted up and back. Her head resting against the pile of the fading fabric of the lounge. Her eyes followed him about the room until he came to rest in front of the sink. Their eyes met and she bounced up to the back of the seat, laughing and babbling about her day and asking about his. He wanted to lick her face as she lapped at the air.

Enter eating. Undecided

What is this? What is that? What is this thing? What is it?

I was outside. Now I am inside. I'm okay here. I'd like to stay.

It's warm. I can stretch out. What are you doing? What are you eating? You are eating something! I'm coming over to see what it is that you are pretending not to eat. Here I come. I'd like you to give me some of that thing that you are putting in your mouth. I want some of that.

Give it to me. I'm not going to take it off you, but I'd like you to give me some of that thing that you're eating. I'm a good person. I haven't done anything wrong and you need only give me some of that thing that you're putting into our mouth, if you want to.

I'm not going to take it off you.

Where are you going? I'm coming too. I'll go anywhere with you, but let's just go. I'm going to get a drink of water. I'm tired now. I'm going over by the fire. I like the heat. I'll have a hot drink if you're making one, thanks. I'm sure anything you make will be delicious darling.

Darling. Darl. Ling. I'm tired. What did they say? Are you watching this? Here I come! Are you ready? What are you doing? What are you cooking? Do you love me?

Smelling. Laughing out loud. Lying down again. Getting up and moving quickly to the back door. Bursting in suddenly and looking about the room. What happened? What is it? Where

is it? You're keeping something from me! I'm going outside! Touch me quickly, there, before I go outside.

"I'm sorry about this. I thought we had eggs. You've no idea how difficult I find this. I'll do the stir-fry rather than the bake. Do you mind terribly?"

"I'm sure it'll be delicious whatever it is darling, darling, darl."

What was that? What did they say? What have the bastards done now? I can't believe these things can just happen like that! Is there no good news in the world? We're happy aren't we sweetheart? We're all right? How was your day?

There was a little thing I thought
Before I thought that thing.
It took me to another place
Where people danced and did vocal exercises, which inspired confidence.

Enter heavy mist over rolling hills. A sheep dog

Misty moors and snuffling dog. Turf-sod. Brigadoon on the edge of a large expanse of echo hollow grey. Green to be seen but not heard by anyone in the vicinity. I was able to take a packed lunch and the mist was so thick it appeared like light rain falling up. I bent down to see the stone that took the world of idle days away in my aching head. The dog snuffling at my feet then running on but not far. Not too far to lose the contact with the chiming bell from all sides and nowhere special.

A boat could float. A boat could float here. A floating boat. A feather on the surface of the water. Water. Water. A scab on/from a healing wound. A man with a big heart. A dream. Twitching in the night. Grinding her teeth in the next room while I cursed the scaredy cat. The twitching leg of the girl of the dog. Rolling over with Rover. To recover the marble. The tiger-eye. I built her a lever for too far down to recover. She sat up quickly in bed, and then slumped down again. Heavy. Like her strings had been cut. Twitching quivering skin and snuffling breath. Across the moor she ran with the dog and the bell towering. I was able to build several other important devices for the blind.

Down it came. It hung in the air. The mist hung heavy in the air like heavy hanging mist. I was able to walk around the bridge from all sides before crossing it to the other side. The side not rounded up.

There was a large room built in the centre of the hollow sounding place. Hollow sounding. Sounding. Sounding hollow. She woke to the hollow sounding next door. She looked at the clock and whispered twice. It was 4 am. She went to the window to see her neighbour backing out of his drive in his big white car. What a job. She returned to bed. Sat upright for a second like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a big white car. Then she dropped to the mattress and straight into sleep. Into twitching, grinding, thinking sleep. Not thinking. Rather taken somewhere out of her mind. Straight into her resisting body. There. Irresistible! She howled out loud but had no recollection in the morning. In the light. The cat opened one eye for a moment before joining her in the night. Warmed by her sleeping excesses.

She filled the large room in the hollow place. Hollow sounding. The papered walls twitched with the memory of something that happened somewhere else. The window opened suddenly

for a moment. Then closed again. The door gaped open in the night and the room swallowed a rush of air.

SCENE 2. Dreaming She

Enter some things growing and some things dying

It's very stuffy in here.

You're procrastinating.

Exaggerating or overdoing something.

To throw something away

A rat.

A cup of tea.

Things were always there, in place. There was change. There was growth. And the things that were rooted in the earth sometimes died. These living things. The other things deteriorated over time. So some things were growing and some were dying and some had never lived but remained things. And these things were slowly deteriorating. When I was around to supervise I left the gate open so she could run around and be herself amongst the things.

She looked at me like she was looking through me at that part of me that threw things away for no reason. There was a reason. And the reason was always that she might retrieve the thrown thing and bring it back to me. It was a game we played. I would throw the thing away as if uncaring and she would return the thing to me as if to see us both together, reunited, me and the thing I'd thrown. She stood in front of me. She demanded that the thing be thrown. I'm not good at throwing things away. She knew this. It was good for me she thought. Good exercise for me to throw the thing I threw. When she felt I'd learnt enough from this task she just let the thing fly. The thing I threw. Fly off across the yard. And she wandered off to sit in the shade of one of the many growing things or have a drink of water and a pee on the driveway.

I sipped at my cup of tea and we watched each other. Me looking into her brown eyes. She looking at that part of me that would throw things if that was what she wanted. It was stuffy in the house. We both knew it. She felt it before me but put up with it until I was ready to walk among the things in the yard. Walking across the room with a cup of tea was always a sign that the inside and the outside were soon to change. Particularly if I was walking towards the door with a cup of tea. It wasn't something I was quick to do. It wasn't clear in my mind that the outside was better than the in. Though it was clear to her but she didn't procrastinate like me. She just waited till I was good and ready. And it didn't matter to the things either. They still lived and died, or deteriorated if they were not things that had lived to begin with. She waited. Looking at me with her brown eyes if I got out of my chair. Or the kettle boiled. Or I stood up and walked across the room towards the door. We were both ready for the outside when it came. It just took time. I moved in my chair. I changed channels on the T.V. I looked at the time. And the fridge, and imagined the things that were ready to be prepared to eat.

Enter returning home

He exploded into the room. The girls had been asleep on the couch. He looked around, crazed and wild, wide eyed. They stared at themselves for a moment. For a split second and longer. Just long enough to smile and rush at each other. It was a hunger and for a moment they feasted. Touching. Holding. Kissing. Lunging at each other with energy unbound. Stop. He stopped suddenly. It was an exclamation of stop. Just as suddenly they all stopped and looked at each other. They stared at each other for a moment. For a split second and long enough for him to hit his favourite kung fu pose. Right leg raised and bent. Arms up. Left hand prepared to chop. Right, fight fingers twisted into a sinewy claw. Grasshopper. Eyes squinting and glistening in mock oriental menace. The girls dropped to the floor in reply. Smiled and rushed him. Again they feasted, touching, holding, kissing. Lunging at each other and crying out like pained but happy little samurai.

Enter nine years old

"While rummaging through my mothers letters I found one, addressed to her, which started like this; 'Darling, I trust you are seriously thinking of a boarding school for our Sophie...'. The letter was signed by a friend of my mother. I assumed from this that he was my real father." Arms up. Left hand prepared to chop. Right fingers twisted into a sinewy claw. Ready to strike. Grasshopper. Cobra. His eyes squinting and glistening in mock oriental menace. His sweat glands tingled. Excruciating. Delicious.

Enter a man. Two girls. A memory

It was once a rather small dark bedroom. What they'd decided to do after a great deal of thought was knock out a wall. There was now a larger window to let in more light also. And a set of French doors for lighter still. An old Japanese pharmacists cabinet sat squarely against one wall. Now stacked with videos, cd's, and pretty things that glistened and reminded him of the women in his family and another century. There was a couch beneath the window. With a couple of cushions, and throw rugs to protect the upholstery, unsuccessfully, from the play of two happy-go-lucky girls. The television set and a VCR sat on a mobile cabinet in the corner. On the auto trolley to the right of the French doors sat a small Sanyo sound system and two telephones. The trolley also contained glassware that was never used.

He was sitting on a cushion between the auto trolley and suite of chairs which when pushed together formed another couch. Again a throw rug, Indian cotton, and an old beach towel were supposed to protect the upholstery from the girls. He looked across towards the lamp in the corner diagonally opposite. It sat on a small turned wooden pedestal and he wondered how it had never been knocked off and smashed on the floor. A large coffee table sat in the centre of the room.

His wanting had filled his eyes and reached, stretched out, not into the room that surrounded him, but into the future somewhere. Into everything that was possible through concentration and positive thinking.

She brushed against his back as he sat, and his desire suddenly relocated to the sensation against his skin. He was available. Tentacles of wanting held her to him for just as long as she wanted. He had her for the moment of contact and for the length of the memory of it that

followed, but no longer. His desire was straining through his ears to hear her raucous cries from the back yard. She ran back into the room to tell him more, to his face, but he remained sitting with his back to the door. He knew she was there. Through the hair on the back of his head he could see her sparkling brown eyes. She nudged him carelessly as she sauntered towards the coffee table. Their eyes met for a moment and a fraction longer. They smiled at each other and he looked away.

Enter a dinner party

3 visitors to the small room

4 people eating dinner in the larger room, transported into the confines of the small room. There unknowing. Held in panes of glass.

One continued preparing the meal in the small room. The smaller of the two rooms. 2, 3 and 4 sat around the table drinking white wine, making polite conversation. Letting words leave their bodies to hang in the air above the dark wood laminex table top. One continued to cut chicken and onion and coriander for the soup. It was a good soup. Could always be relied upon for a quick meal. Early in the day he had bought a loaf of corn bread from Milawa. The loaf was already in the oven heating through. He wondered what the others were talking about and felt uneasy that he might be missing out on some snippet of conversation. A piece of vital information. Some detail of their catching up which might prove crucial later in the evening as they opened another bottle and began to gurgle over their dessert. He'd decided on Tarte Tartin. Never made it before but it looked great in the magazine. Those Tartin sisters apparently had it all sorted. If I could remember the recipe now I'd tell you about it. Describe the whole thing in detail. But I can't, so I won't. Anyway he kept ducking into and out of the kitchen, trying to keep track on the tart and a handle on his dinner party. The soup was a great success. The bread was a great success. And the Tarte? Well, it was fabulous. What can I say? He hasn't made one since. But then he hasn't made much of anything since, poor darling. Lives in fear. Lives in fear of living. Now that's a thing. 2 turned to 3 and asked him how the trip to France went.

"How was France?" Well I can't remember exactly what was said though the gist was that it was great. The gardens were great. 3 is a gardener. He'd never been out of the small country town where he grew up. And there he was, travelling through France. Taking photos of gardens. Great!

Enter He. She. A sofa

She sprang up. From lying down in an apparent deep sleep, off she went like a rocket. She sat bolt upright and voiced some incomprehensible sound. Like she was calling to someone outside of the house. That's what it was like. As if this other person or thing was actually miles away. That's how loud she was. It didn't matter that this was a regular phenomenon. The loudness behind the sound, the sharp violence of it was always a shock, though I was getting better at disguising my anger. I was getting better really. Not so angry anymore. I'd taken to speaking softly to her. I told her it was all right. That everything would be okay. That if she wanted to, she should pop outside to satisfy herself that everything was okay.

Most of her days were spent resting comfortably on the couch. On the sofa. Occasionally she got up to have a bit of a wander around, grab a snack or a drink of water, but I'd never known

anyone to sleep so much. Sometimes, usually mid afternoon, after I'd felt I'd achieved something around the place, I'd join her on the couch. We'd just sit. Often I'd reach over and let my arm trail across her shoulders. And we'd just sit. She would always react, initially. The eyes would fly open. Or she would lift her head up off the pillow and turn to look at me, smile, then look away. Settle down, again breathing deeply. I didn't mind. I just wanted to be close.

My lovely girl. I'd rest for a moment with my head nestling into her neck. I'd turn to look at her and see that she was staring straight ahead. Her brown eyes staring out across the room but at nothing. I'd bend forward and gently kiss her mouth. Sometimes she would pull away but other times she seemed happy to let me cuddle up beside her. And her eyes would gently close again and I listened for her breath to change, to drop to deepen. Sometimes she'd sigh and rearrange herself for greater comfort.

Her cry came from nowhere. It shot straight through me. I yelled back at her. It was The shock. She turned to face me. What? Her brown eyes disbelieving. I caught myself and in soft reassuring tones told her it was okay. Everything was okay. It will be all right. I'm sorry that I shouted at you. Please forgive me. Please let me touch your face and kiss your mouth. Rest my forehead against your neck and let my fingers trail through your hair.

Enter crazy with blue overalls

The blue overalls were torn in several places. Just little tears mostly. Breaks in the fabric. Moths? Maybe one or two but mostly ripped. Small tares from barbed wire. Though the one larger one was from being caught on a nail. I was lucky not to have been punctured.

The blue overalls had worn quite noticeably. They were spattered with paint. Smudged from hands rubbed clean of paint, of grease, of silicon from repairing the roof. I sat at the kitchen table. What the hell. A truck?

I was off the chair and out of the room before I could even think. I was out of the door and running to the fence. Bastards! I yelled after the retreating van. Through the dust. Fuck off! Just get the fuck off! I sat down at the fence and looked out through the chicken wire and lamb's ears. Where to begin, with so much to do. I dragged my arse across the grass, looked up at the sky and down at the bruised lawn behind me. Half the time I wondered what to do and the other half was spent wondering how to do it. That's the danger isn't it! Not knowing where to start and ending up with nothing. I could always pop back inside for a quick nap.

I remember something about something. About putting something somewhere. What was it again? Where is it? Oh bugger it. I'm going in. I lent forward and had a sip of cool water out of the pan under the tap. No, I'll stay here and have a nap. Look. I'm going inside. I'm coming inside to have a lay down on the couch. Bugger it. What the fuck? Piss off! Yea bugger off. I'm going inside. If you come back I'll be out here like a shot. I'll have your guts for garters. Yea, yea. Right. But yea but no.

I went inside. Had a quick look around. Did a quick check of the kitchen floor, paying particular attention below food preparation areas, and I wandered into the lounge room. I had a bit of a look around. The couch was looking good. But first a quick check under the dining table. Na. Feel like a nap. Yea, there you go. A bit of a stretch before settling in, settling down for a kip. Settling. Settle! Settle! Going. Going, gone.

Enter a mirror. A baby. A tense baby. An alien. Bad food, good food. Tense food. An alien

Relax the steak. Seal in the goodness on a high heat. Couple of minutes, take it off the heat. And relax it. Let it rest. An alien.

A foolish pursuit
Chasing rabbits. Negotiating barbed wire fences in dreams
Of heavy breathing
Not snoring, drowning
To be taken with a glass of water
Her heavy breath moving her whole body across the settee
Levitation
Not trickery
The tip of pink tongue
Tongue tip. Pink
Pushed between teeth
Marble whites
Oh heavy, heaving in breathing
Sinking, not snoring. Coarseness
Ness, ness. Ness-ness
An anvil on the corner of the greasy bench
She came to have a quick look
Where did you go?
Your head poked around the corner
She looked up and smiled
I floated above the barbed and marbled arch
Over fences
And shredded between barbed wire in pursuit of dreams
Dreaming running rabbits and chasing after

I took to drink as a genuine response to the physical pain I felt. It solved a problem for me, and I imagined that it did for you also. I like cordial. I like apple juice and I like Lipton's tea. If ever I was feeling short of a quid up top you know. Not the full shellfish. Nothing made me feel quite so good as a glass of cold water. Love it. And of course hydration is just one of those happy extra benefits of getting your teeth wet with something clear from a cold glass. It's not a problem. Wherever I go I carry a litre of water and a change of underwear in my handbag. Am I turning into a holic? I don't think so. I think not. Not so, in fact. Factually, not at all. Nyet. No way Jose. Never.

Your voice does sound odd. How about one for the road? I've always found that a glass of full-cream milk will get me there. No cows? Well a long, cold water with a dash of ginger syrup of the genuine variety and you're laughing. Yep. Bop till you drop. Did I mention the war? No, well yes perhaps you're right. I once found a silver three pence, yes a threepenny bit. The type they put in puddings yes, well. I found one under the linoleum in the spare room.

Enter exhausted. Falling and rolling on the soft summer lawn

I lift the pan and I turn the knobs up higher
He lifts the fry pan from the sink and places it on the stove.
The fridge changes gear in the corner of the room.
Remembering everything that needs attention.
Turning off power points.
It took me years to get to this age and now I'm ready.
I'm into all of it. It took so much time.

I wondered at the softness of summer lawns as she rolled across the grass. Stopping every while to see that he was still looking. Up and running and falling down throwing the ball and dropping something. Dropping and falling and rolling on the soft summer lawn. The grass. The sitting on her arse. It took time. He took time to get here and now he's into it. I suppose the buzzing was necessary. She was in orbit round his head, I said. I came to tell you why and you took me by surprise. My breath left me in laughing sounds that drew her back again to me. You beautiful girl. The shock of high-pitched cry as she tried to lure me into a chase. She pushed around my legs as I took the pan to fry. The pot to boil. Oh pretty girl. I ran towards the door towards the gate and turned my head to watch her chase. The turning page. Bye the bye. And by the bye. I fell to my knees and held her fast between my thighs.

In standing squat and firm and implacable? She was lying on her back. Her whole weight given over to the soft curve of the earth she stood. All stone and concrete – an aggregate of river rock and cement. Her shiny blackness licked in waves against her sharply vertical walls. She looked out and into the trees. Eyes wide open. Almost closed and fluttering in their whiteness.

Her mouth was lolling open with the weight of sudden sleep. Waiting moved. Unmoving. Moving. Swelling in and out with every breath she stood. Corseted by cement and waiting still. Her glassy eyes shone. The flickering gasps her hanging arms falling up. Bracing down and rooted into the clay and granite upholstery of her bed. Her thin lips open to the rush of air. Both in and out the tattered curtains of her eyes. Fly wire cataracts to stop the flying, crawling things. Yet unstoppable. I stepped around her careful not to wake my sleeper wakeful. Her hair and corrugated matt to catch. For leaf and twig and pools of tannin water fell her eyes. Open and glistening in the evening light. I reached to touch but not her thin and open lips the eaves and sailing ships of web caught between corners. Her dribbling sighs gasp in and out and sudden breaths of other sorts she lay open to the air the thoughts of feasts and beasts and speeding cars down the dusty road the black sealed streets and up the drive. She stood waiting in the fragrant bush. The smell of eucalyptus, ants and burning off across the road. The hawking geese and up she sat. Screaming into the tidy room of her head.

Her edges exploding out into shattered glass the shredded fabric prints from another time. She lay. She sat. She stood. I reached to still her heaving walls. Not the eyes. Not the mouth nor window sills now scratched and wet from panting sleep. She stood. Still. Wide-eyed and sleepless. Looking out all windows open to the sounds and smells of smells and sounds.

Up and down the carpet hallway. She walked along the hall. The carpet smelt of dust. The tired grey print stained by feet at the border between kitchen and hall. She walked. Along the hall on carpet grey she weary walked her tired arse.

Then. She walked right passed the kitchen door and looking in continued on. Then back again she paced. Again she looked into the kitchen as she passed with sadder eyes. As she passed once more this time she stood. Outside his closed door. She looked into the kitchen. Across the floor. She turned again to face his door. And sat. She looked into the wood veneer between her and him and waited for a sound. A sign from inside that he might soon emerge. She faced the door and sat on the fading grey and browning carpet. She stood and walked the hallway. Again passed kitchen door she walked and looking in with glassy distant eyes continued on. As she passed this time once more she stood outside his sealed room. His door of wood veneer closed tight and breathless stood. Turned again she stood, to face his door. And sat. She searched the grain of plastic wood for signs and sounds and reason to emerge. What stood between them, he and her? What wood? On rancid grey and browning carpet sat. She waited. She stood and walked along the hall. The plaster walls passed one more time again the kitchen doorway turned her head but not her thought of walking on. His closed door was as before and as she stood to face it shut. She sat again on dismal pile of grey still fading into dusty brown.

She sat on the tatty brown couch. It wasn't always a brown couch. Once bone coloured brocade. Quite smart really but after years of dirty feet and work clothes it was now a shabby thing. She sat still on the shabby thing. She was comfortable enough and unmoving but her eyes wandered slowly about the room. Without the room. Outside it. Actually? God knows what she was thinking about but she had the look of one thinking through, outside of herself, something that existed beyond her immediate surrounds. Occasionally she stared into the doorway that led to the hall. She looked there calmly as if towards a familiar face. But I couldn't see anyone there. Geraldine was stretched out on a rug on the floor. It was hot. It was clear that she couldn't see anyone either, standing in the doorway that led to the hall. Familiar or not. Gerry was also full of hope for the thing, as yet unknown, that was about to happen and prove itself to be both diversionary and exciting.

Her eyes looked for it in the way the furniture was arranged. So many things to lie on, sit on or under. Lay beside or nearby. There was a little breeze generated by an overhead fan set on low. The birds were calling from outside if you could be bothered. But they both seemed to be waiting for me to organise some activity or other. Bugger that. It's hot and I was tired and hot. As it became clearer that I wasn't about to be going anywhere exciting she lay down on the tatty brownish couch and closed her eyes. Geraldine had another quick and furtive look about the furniture in the room and decided to stay put. She also closed her eyes. And I did the same, having plumped up a pillow on the other couch and laid myself out. I woke some time later to the sound of a breeze rattling at the beaded pull-cord from the Holland blind. She was now on her back on the grubby couch and deeply unconscious. And Geraldine was ready to rock and roll. Returned again to that sense of hope and anticipation. No pressure. I swung my legs off the couch to sit, and before I had my feet on the floor the girls were up and ready to go who knows where. Anywhere out of sleep.

Enter through a doorway, in fitful sleep

A door

In fitful sleep she lay on the floor. Her dreaming body twitching occasionally into the pile of the diamond patterned carpet. Her heavy head falling downward and into the open palm of Grace's hand. My hand. I turned my head and looked across at her.

Her quivering lip. Her legs wanting to run. Her arms also wanting to run, like legs running. I laughed to myself quietly, not to wake her. We were fast running out of time for moments like this. I returned my head to look up at the ceiling, and the newspaper buckled under my weight. The paper, open and half read on the patterned pile. My leg, outstretched and resting up the opened door caught the air as it moved along the corridor and into the room. I closed my eyes but still I saw the quivering lip and heard the distant throaty whimpering of her dream and felt the spasms from her trying to run.

What? What? What! What? Etcetera.

Language and silence

What is there without language?

What is there in the absence of words?

The language that just 'comes out' and is unguarded. Not in control.

What is the filler?

What is the impact of repression?

She looked out and

At and in at the same

Time. And I looked to

See the thing that she was

Looking at. Supposing that there

Was a thing to be seen

But I saw nothing out of the ordinary.

The radio was off.

That wasn't very interesting.

Could 'it' be 'that'?

She seemed to be looking into the space that is left in a doorway when the door that at once filled it is open and out of the way. There was no one standing there. As you might expect, about to enter the room or just standing there looking in. It wasn't a particularly interested look accompanying an attitude of excitement perhaps, or anticipation. Not expectant of anything.

Just there. But in feeling gone somewhere else. Like music? In another room? She sat. And as she sat she was like soft music being played in another room. I looked at her eyes, looking passed me and into the doorway. To where the door had once been closed and in the way. I looked at her mouth for a clue. A way in. But the radio was off and playing soft music in another room. Suddenly. Without moving her head she looked sideways with her eyes, and for one serious moment she was present and wondering if I could see it too. I could not. When I caught her eyes with mine she quickly looked away again. There was no sign in her that she was anything more than soft music playing in another room.

I was fast becoming water. Cool and clear on the brown leather couch.

For a long time. I don't know how long. I think long. Now. But it probably wasn't. Now that I'm thinking again and thinking it. For a long time I didn't think at all. I looked back into the room. Away from her. She played softly through the wall that separated one room from another and I was neither here nor there. I later thought. For a long while, perhaps. I'm less sure. I sat with my eyes open. Seeing nothing. A gently blowing flowing breeze inside my head. Unfeeling water suspended me. I wasn't sure where I began and she ended.

I later thought when once again I was thinking. Nothing mattered. I didn't care that she didn't love me anymore. Where once I would have packed my bags and unpacked my bags and said nothing more about it for a very long time. I said nothing. I moved closer and she, she looked at me in the eyes. I lent forward to kiss her mouth but she pulled away. Not the face. I accepted that she didn't like me kissing her face. I remember what it was like to kiss a face and have my face kissed in return. That was enough. I thought about it now because I knew that I would have forgotten it later and she would forgive me for wanting to kiss her face. She'd have forgiven me as 'she' sat on the couch and 'I' sat on the floor and she reached forward to touch my shoulder as she lay on the couch behind where I sat on the floor and she was resting on the couch and I was sitting on the floor. She dipped her hand into my shoulder though I was neither here nor there and I listened to her playing softly behind me in another room. I lent back against her even though she didn't love me anymore and her hand had withdrawn from my thirsty skin.

Later I thought, when I had begun thinking again having hung in the air like a mist over the couch I thought and my eyes began to see again having been open yet unseeing. I dropped, suddenly, as she screamed and ran from the room. She, she just charged out and the door slammed behind her. It doesn't matter how many times she does it I never see it coming, having been out of my self and hovering like a grey fog over the brown leather couch. She'd slammed the door. No. To be fair. It slammed itself, behind her, as she ran out of the house screaming. Yelling stuff at the.... what? At the postie for whatever reason. Some stranger just driving by like they have no right to be driving by. I don't get it. I've never got it and I probably never will and even if I did that wouldn't alter the fact that it's a fucking awful shock to be sitting there with someone and just when you're thinking and feeling least they yell out as loud as they can and take off out of the room and out of the house slamming doors behind them. Though, to be fair. The doors slam themselves behind her.

But still. That doesn't alter the fact that it's a dreadful shock and a pain in the arse. And I'm left there suddenly thinking again and seeing things and struggling to breathe. I'd say something. I'd take a swipe at her but she's too quick for me and it is unexpected and she's out in the yard screaming out something or other and the moment's gone. I'm really rattled for a time because now I'm there where I wasn't there before and it wasn't my choice. The bitch.

She'll be back in a moment like nothing has happened. Back on the couch watching Opera or some cooking show with a fat person deep frying with goose fat and double King Island cream and it'll be me who has a heart attack. I'll be the one left clutching his chest in a pool of chocolate butter sauce on the brown leather couch with her slamming doors and screaming out at the neighbours from the back yard. Though to be fair. The doors do slam themselves behind her as she rushes out and the neighbours do live several kilometres away. So if you want to be heard you must raise your voice. She's always in such a rush to be somewhere. But I'm not going to chase after her. No matter how much I hate being alone. That's her thing. She doesn't need me hanging around her when she's on a mission. I wouldn't want to be there and she wouldn't want me there either.

It has stopped raining.

SCENE 3. She of the She House

Enter unconsoled

*I wish you'd say what you think.
Tell me a joke
To take control
Orientating
A song
Some rubbish*

The country cottage imagined herself as a three-storey town house in Albert Park. She thought that her inside spaces were much larger than the 5 or so square metres she knew so well. Size 8? Not even 10 she thought, imagining whole floors opening out to the light through plate glass and galvanised iron. She was louvred as she sat. She was squat and dark wanting Cathedral height for her ceiling.

Not wishing it but already imagining that it was so, the light. The world outside pushed in through her shuttered eyes. It seeped in until her whole being was being filled, with the outside.

I spanked the little rabbit with a barramundi fish I did and fell into the stream just before it broke over slippery rock and fallen mossy log.
I jammed within the outside out into the forest green with blue leaves and buckling in the heat. Amidst it all the 2 cars parked on her ground floor and more.
The one behind his desk and dusty cream with red jelly.
The jolly red.
Lemon and chocolate biscuit base. The double cream sold overseas out and from under King Island. Oh. Sensible shoes.

The quiet man and a flock of cyclists in flight, in tight fitting tops and shorts with unlikely bulging headlights sit in shoes not meant for walking. They twitter over lattes on the footpath near the market. Up and up the grey cement the plates of glass with terrace for the city skyline and BBQ.

I wish you'd say what you think.

You think the thought you say could wish and slap the fish
behind the shed and over mossy verge till water deeped in pool and light came flickering through
the trees in coloured shirts and shorts too tight it made me squint into the blue lagoon.
I said a song would do the trickling down ravine and open wound.
Too soon to catch the falling snows of frosty fogless other trees escaped the wind to fall,
in their own good time I thought to wander down to check the wired fence from luckless branches dropped and raisin dead to touch.
Too much back there and after still went up the stair.

She always wanted stairs. A staircase. And now the extra storeys were connected by three and a fourth, which went up the outside to the roof. Like a fire escape. Anyone living in the bush must have a fire escape.

A plan from rock and glass in wooden frames,
to glass and steel and weather vanes.
She stood.

Enter three floors of corrugated iron

She arrived wearing three floors of corrugated iron. Crisply ironed louvre blades through which she peered out on every level. Her plate and glassy eyes shone through reflecting rivulets of blue. The reflected and refracted light too much for sky and summer day came joyous into/onto every floor of her taller self. She stood solid ground between the railway tracks and the busy street and tree lined path lay at her feet. Stretching along Whatsaname Street. It was a busy road and the traffic was relentless at this time.

And people stood for ever such a long time on the kerb, waiting for a chance to cross. Despite the pedestrian crossing only 50 metres along they chose to wait in droves and laundered clothes. Their music plugged into their ears and mobiles ready just in case their working day had joined the race. Her glassy eyes looked out through shuttered shades half closed against the sun to see her neighbours on the run. Does this hedge make my arse look fat? He moved closer to a larger bush.

I was wondering what became of the twittering roadsters. The cyclists having a quick coffee before beginning the ride along the bay road to Frankston. Why are they all going to Frankston? Not that Frankston isn't a perfectly respectable destination on a racing bike. The sooner the better. Don't they have jobs to go to? Must be flexi time. Or perhaps that's how they work. They limp around all day in those riding shoes not meant for walking. They clomp around in one of those office buildings across the street. And sit at their desks in their tight little white riding skins with splashes of Italian colours over alarming bulges. They do people's tax returns or hobble along the vinyl corridors to have meetings with each other. Something like that. Their secretaries bring them latte in handy containers like water bottles that can be secured in pockets of Lycra on their backs. Intravenous? I suppose it's possible.

THE EIGHTH ACT
Remembering Thredbo



11. Bimbadeen Ski Lodge.

SCENE 1. The Broken Room

He remembered the Post-Office. He had sat in the doorway. On the post-office steps. His right leg was bent at the knee and his chest rested forward, easy against his thigh. His hands were loosely clasped beneath his bent leg, as he recalled. There was no hurry.

Enter a man. A woman. A Chalet. A mudslide

Something unprecedented happened.

I couldn't sleep last night.

A mountain. A wobbly chair.

To keep moving.

What can I see at this moment?

Trapped in the rubble of an act of tragedy.

In the dark.

Pinned in the confined space.

A hanging room, smashed, folded, slid sideways down the treacherous slope of the larger room.

The other surface.

He is pinned there. Awake. More than awake. Looking into the black unseeable surface patina of a larger black and potential red.

Held in the concentration of an act of not acting.

Caught. Pinned within the confines of the space. Orienting himself to the vagaries of touch.

Pinned down in the rubble between one stony slab and the next.

Seeing black. Red.

Washed by icy sensation. Soaked in a dull mindfulness of everything that had ever happened before and may yet happen, or never happen again.

Wilful boy! To stay in distress.

Rendered.

Trapped in the rubble. Unable to extricate himself from the vicious aesthetic that pins his body in the space.

Performance.

And his eyes see the vision in black. Red. Sorry! Where is the paramedic now?

A silent impulse to look left. The point is beyond moving. Did he follow the urge to look left?

It is unclear, and this cross-section had never been drawn to his satisfaction.

The sound of grating surfaces and rushing water. Muffled cries. And small not-quite-movements. Involuntary. Insinuating themselves into the colour field. Black. Red.

The dance is negotiated behind half closed eyes.

Which is clearer, the black of 'out' or the black of 'in'? Red.

Who would have known in the theatre in the round, on the set on the ground, that the walls would be the surfaces for brushing skin and shifts of weight so small that listening devices might mistake them for ambient sound!

Not live. Performance. Not.

Performance art. Not.

Artefact. Trapped between irregular slabs and stony surfaces.

Enter two in a room

The walls were the surfaces from which each tiny gesture was peeled.
Not from the bodies standing easy in the space. Their bodies sticking up out of the floor.
Standing on their feet on the ground. Not that.
There was never a time when they hadn't felt their connection with walls.
He bent his legs in relation to the wall.
There was no floor for the feet.
No horizontal surface over which to pour his weight. Into which.
The surface was vertical.
There was equality in the give and take of touch.

There was sympathy behind the softening flesh of proximity.
He bent his legs in relation to the wall, and the small of his back lengthened against the quiet surface.
To reach away was to first press in. Into the surface, in front of which he lay.
She was drinking something. He admired her for holding something that hadn't existed till a moment ago.
They engaged in such ordinary pursuits – standing, standing, standing still, and sitting.
There was a chair in another room, on another page.
He admired the act of sitting on a chair, in the air.
"What use legs, ay?" Well, chair legs. "I'll keep mine," he thought. "You never know".
Now she was eating cake. The crumbs still fell down, attracted to the floor. Nostalgic for that gravity thing that they'd thought to abandon some time ago. There must have been a mistake somewhere along the line.
"If cake had brains. Well."
The time was filled with the pouring of horizontal weight.
Gravity. Now falling from the axis of the room into the walls.
He rolled over onto his side, against the flock wallpaper.
He pushed with his right hand and sat up, out. Perched on the sheer surface, watching the stupid crumbs falling from her mouth to the floor.
She crossed her legs in the air and looked out and away.

What's that sound I can hear?
I have to learn to breathe properly.
Keys. A window.
Something that caused a memory.
To refer back to an earlier moment in the writing.

Dead of night. Black. Glow of snow
Yodelling magpie

Black night.
Below freezing.
Too many stars. No. Never too many stars.
A little bit of Switzerland.
Remembering the throaty yodelling magpies in the scrub below the snow line.
Laughing and warm clothes and practical shoes.
Remember?

If I was to crane my neck up to the surface in front of my face.
I am lying on my back now.
If I was to crane my neck up to the surface as the rush of water came through, I could sip in the air from whatever little space there was. And then, when it had passed – the icy water and my curious thirst for the air above it – I could breathe properly again.
I was remembering sliding down the icy slopes on a rubber tire.
That was then. The magpies were then. The ordinary standing up and walking around whenever I felt like it, was then.
I don't remember up. I can't place vertical in the ordinary sense of gravity. You know. Up, down. Weight. Up, down. Into the ground. Out of the floor. Up.
What was sitting in a chair? What was that thing? Sitting? In a chair?
Eating cake and having crumbs fall in my lap because there weren't enough eggs in the mix.
Stupid cake!
You can't blame a cake for not being able to keep it together.
Maybe it was me.
I wasn't careful enough to relax my jaw and my lips as I bit in.
I should have gone for a smaller bite but been a bit more adventurous with the lips.
You know. Further than you think you really need to go. Just to be on the safe side.
And I might have had a tea towel on my lap so that if any stray ones fell I could see exactly where they were, and pop them back in my mouth.
That would have been the way to go.
That's the sort of intelligent approach that would set an example for cake to follow.
It's a matter of education.

Enter a bed in a room. A man asleep

A bed in the room, placed on the slab. Hard, no not so hard, but certainly a firm bed and base. Sort of your typical hotel/hostel type accommodation.
He's lying on the bed in the room.
Where is she?
He's neither half asleep nor half awake. There's light coming through the doorway leading from the bathroom.
Where is she?
He's dreaming plates of shifting surfaces. Skis glancing over snowy surfaces. Bodies moving quickly, sideways through air.

A man asleep on a bed in a room. Dreaming sliding plates and shifting surfaces.
The wall.
No, first the noise, like glaciers and arctic ships breaking through ice.
First the noise, then the wall begins to move, and the ceiling begins to move, and the floor begins, and the man asleep on the bed slides sideways. But still attached to that cotton/polyester surface, like a memory.
He and the sheet and blanket over firm bed and base move – all independent facets of one evolving at their own speed, in their own time, as one.
Where is she?
The ceiling is somewhere else.
The floor is out of reach.
Transition from in to out
From surface vertical to surface horizontal

He was standing now.
I say 'standing' but there was no weight at all falling 'down' through his body and into the floor.
He looked like he was standing, sure. But you do when gravity slips and your position half way up the wall is compromised.
He had taken to leaning out and away from the wall in anticipation of some further slippage.
He needed to be ready.
He wasn't happy about this at all.
His whole understanding of up and down had altered radically.
Who needs it! Just when you think you've got the whole life thing sorted, something gives.
He hated that.
He had everything he needed. There was plenty of water and air. All he had to do was hinge back from the hips, from this stupid bloody precarious forward leaning position. Just arch back, lift his head up and sip at the air as the water rushed through.
It came straight down the walls. It was wont to do this occasionally. Well, quite regularly really. Now.
Now 'there' was something he'd gotten use to.
He could live with that

It was as if the wall was really the floor and he was lying on his back.
That's the sort of body weight pressing back, through his body and into the wall that we're looking at.
We're talking about a major suspended horizontal thrust here.
Do you know about physics? Neither do I. But the fact remains that it was happening and he was used to it.
All of his friends, well just about everyone he knew really, were half way up the wall.
It was normal.
The seat of his pants had become tight with the falling backwards and in, and the leaning away.
It seemed reasonable.
The pin stripe in his trousers was actually saying up and down but the action was falling backwards and in and away.
It's the law of the universe.

Enter gone

He was lying diagonally across his futon. It was just an ordinary double bed size. There were 2 pillows side by side. He only needed one but he liked to have the other one there just in case. In any case, he liked the range of laying possibilities with that extra pillow there. In the middle of the night, as it was now, when he was almost awake, he felt secure in the knowledge that if he were to launch himself suddenly diagonally across his futon, as he had done now, he'd know that there would be a pillow there, where he lay before, at the foot of, at the beginning.

A wall of 7 or 9 brightly painted panels stretched across the room and beyond the room. An event of some importance, a journey, a biography began and continued slowly from the first to another and on. The light changed. The weather shifted as he moved through time and space along his life.

His past lived again on the walls behind his moving figure, across a landscape denuded of any other interesting feature. He cast bold shadows, which referred in size and texture to his past experience. Once passed, each panel opened out to reveal, at first, single episodes of importance. A landscape much larger in scale and beyond any expectation was finally revealed. A momentous event. A catastrophe not on human scale began its slow inevitable journey forwards. Finally cascading where once was room and panels and bed.

He was long gone.
He was soon long gone.
Not a Chinese tourist but nonetheless gone.

SCENE 2. She and the Wall

Enter an avalanche of movement.
A field of wall. A blast of water. She in a chair

Hello
She's very elegant isn't she!
A gutter
A man
To be socially spectacular
To belong to the group

They were thrown up over the walls; an avalanche of movement – moving figures moving. More fluid than solid. Essentially ether dancing, snatches of colour and form dissolving, progressing like music across the walls around the perimeter of the room within a room.

The sound of a life having come from somewhere, still moving now. Surrounded by the growing sound of a life half lived, still living now.

The half-animal/human figure blurred across the wall like once it was real. At some point it was clear and precise and completely real. She was very elegant. Then she was hit square on with a very forceful stream of water and the whole image bled sideways and continued to dance on across the wall. But we only ever saw her bleeding sideways in quite unexpected ways. As if she'd been projected through a water cannon. Seeing her abstracted image negotiate the corners of the room. A person watching such an event could just follow her around the walls if they wanted to. The whole thing is on a loop. I imagine it could make you quite ill if you persisted with it. Perhaps we'll need to de-brief after every catastrophe.

'How did Francis Bacon cope?'
'Well he didn't, did he, finally!'

The room opened out for the small group of well wishers to spill out. Wishing well. Which they did. It just went on and on.
A breeze started soft. It moved the grass around in waves on the vertical surface. It swept across the field of wall like a flock of tiny green birds winging in circles. It whipped up their

delicate little seed heads on fragile stems into a shimmering sea. The wall peeled up from its edges.

The field began to lift from one side, and turn. It tilted. The wall had begun to fall. Slowly. The progress was steady. No, build in momentum as one would expect of a falling, toppling thing. It turned to reveal the other side, which was not a grassy field of water whipped up by stiff breezes. She was sitting on the chair in the centre of the floor as if it was a wall and it had begun to fall. Softly. Her hair and clothes, her arms hung, even clung, to the down-ness that was constant. The breezes stilled and returned, were quiet then again they slapped at her as she sat in the chair. Gently.

The wall creaked with the stories woven into seed grass pastures. She hung in the air, in the chair, on its side, rooted to the memory of a floor that once was, once floor, now wall. Not a waterfall. Where is she? She had been lost behind the wall beneath the grass. Hidden and silent under the turf but now revealed. Summoned up by soft starting breezes as they swept across the field of wall like a flock of tiny green birds winging in random circles. Her hair and clothes, her arms even hung, clung to the down-ness that was constant. Clung to the wooden chair that was silent. The light was everywhere. It took its time to be bold. She looked like she slept, overcome by an obstacle.

SCENE 3. The Ochre Wall

Enter he as she as he in a dark suit

"I don't scare easily"

"I had a fall"

Getting dressed or changed

Slowly rotating

A feral fox

A wall

The ochre wall ran for 20 metres only, but there was a suggestion that it just kept going on like one of those wire fences in central Queensland that has been purpose built to keep out feral cats, foxes, rabbits, wild goats. It was implied in the repetitiveness of the ochre wall's construction that it simply continued on for hundreds of miles. But it ran across an end. It began, and it stopped suddenly 20 metres later. A man in a dark suit had been gradually moving along it. He was engaged deeply with a sense of himself and the place that he was passing through. A place that existed for only a short distance beyond the darkness of his suit. He was looking into himself. Even when he was looking out he was looking in. The brightness of the ochre wall caught the sharpness of the blackness cast against it as he moved.

The shadow was real against the orange wall. Or became real when the sunset and I could see through it. She took his time. The same time that it took him. She took it too. Her slowly rotating body caught the quiet of the reflected bright light. She caught it and took it into herself, and moved with it in a way that suggested she had been doing it all her life across the desert plain and along the hundreds of miles that carried the feral fence. She was looking back over her right shoulder as the sun set against his slowly rotating form. This feral fox.

This mangy dog in a dark suit. This introduced species. Rabbit. Old wild goat. Her mouth was soft and full lips barely touched as she slowly turned and looked out and beyond her right shoulder. As the sunset she was consumed by ochre and memory of something that had been going on forever.

The sound of magpies and breaking twigs. Weather. Bushfire. Breaking ice. Words and sounds and the slow transformation of a mirage. From water back to sand. From liquid back. To there from here. I changed quickly into a navy blue cocktail dress and prepared to step into the small and fragile boat that would take me on. I continued the journey, looking out from behind so many damp tails of mice against my face and neck where it disappeared into the blue. I took time to look out and in and let my life go the extra distance. The ochre wall seemed never to have existed in the landscape. It was gone. Sound remained and for a thousand miles into the distance a recollection hung in the thick air.

Enter falling

The wall had fallen. And she was standing in a pool of light inside the building. She moved in response to a story that had some relationship to the world of the man on another and nearby wall. She flung herself around the pool. Her hair flicked up and away. The spasms taking hold. Her pleated dress did the same. Flicking up and out like crazy hair. She played the perimeter of the pool of light like it meant something. A wall of words fell gently through the room. He, the man. Sometimes a handsome man from another page and sometimes a handsome woman from a pool of light was moved by words to dance across the surface of his wall. He was there to tell the truth about something overheard and felt by her. He disappeared into the black only to re-emerge more tightly framed. His body now was something that dropped from frame to frame and in and out of light in a language held in check by chic and self-control. Her pool of light glistened on the floor. Some mirage! A magic body twisted and turned above it, now old enough for aches and pains and more Panadol than was really necessary.

I wondered about the returning wall as the floor began to lift below her, to pass through her, gently, back to vertical and beyond. A screaming bird could be heard from behind the rising grass as the wind began to build again. The words were blown away, blown up and out, incinerated to fall like dust and settle on surfaces to be written down again. And said out loud in the minds of people watching.

She's back in her chair on the wall. What the hell is she doing there? What the hell am I doing here? There are words. There are always words. Thank god the wig fits! Still, more than 5,000 people were incinerated and she looks at herself sitting there and wonders, "Does my arse look big in this frock? In this chair? Sideways on this wall?"

It's another falling wall but no casualties I hope. Still in her chair on the wall. Is it a mountain ash out of a mole hill or the silk purse out of sow's ear that attaches itself to the song?

She sings out of the silence of precarious balance from her chair on the wall. A song from the words. A tune that keeps repeating, like history and Shirley Bassey. I took the book from the shelf and carefully removed its dust jacket. I held it for a moment and enjoyed the fresh crisp new card underneath. The virgin cover. What a lovely thing to hold. Then I replaced the dust jacket and returned the book to the shelf. I don't remember who wrote the book.

All those words written down. All that. All those thoughts and ideas. Nice. Jeffrey Carey, was it? Nobel prize for book, or something? Lovely!
Still in her chair on the wall she is humming into the silence of the moment interrupted occasionally by birdsong and the screeching of tyres from the freeway, a block away.

About 5 more minutes of tune and tyres and I'll be ready to jump.

A silk purse would have made a nice touch.

What's wrong with a silk purse?

How do you hold onto a silk purse as you hold on, sitting sideways on a chair on the wall in the air?

What next? What happens now?

Slowly peeling away. Turning. Falling. Folding and unfolding.

Just a few more minutes.

Revealing more and more of less and less.

SCENE 4. The Construction Site

Enter the debris of years falling over him like dust

*Are you crying?
You should throw it away
Touching something or someone
To trudge forward
Some music
An overcoat.*

Cyclone fencing.
The past in dust is dancing.
The decomposing.
The demolition.
Another detailed homicide.

Another detailed homicide and still more too numerous to count. The bricks dislodged from their wall. The cement that bound. Pushed apart by heavy earth moving equipment. The rising dust. He breathes him in through the cyclone fencing that surrounds the demolition site. Attracted to the breaking bricks, the blades. Slicing through the concrete of the time and many times before and all who passed this place or wandered through now turned to dust in the air to settle on the sharpened collars of passers by. The steps once taken now and still alive in the dirt as it passes through, unheld by cyclone fencing. The falling, crumbling bricks of people gone and coffees had.

Oh. Love me like a new machine.
Am I crying still?
The falling alive of dead and gone, not dead nor gone, blown up from the ground and falling
rock.
Still as floating through the fence unable to fulfil its purpose to contain.
Leaked out up the shimmering wall before and after it is moved to fall.
I spoke in grating, rasping tones the grader's blade through dusty bones
to settle now around the heads of passers by not moved to cry.
Still watching.
Insatiable the breaking glass to release a view.
The looking out now looking through, in through the thickened air.
Love me like a new coffee making machine.
The memory of seeds scattered and watered, the grasses grown and cut and groan.
Grown and mown. Mown and moan.
Looking for something in the bodies left by bodies gone.
The horse's hooves on asphalt now.
And gone.
A vehicle parked and gone.
The years of workers worked now also gone.
In dust they pass on air through cyclone wire there and hang in clouds above the site.
The breaking face and body of the words once spoken over factory work, now dust and light.

Enter over tea and biscuits. A dripping tap. Rising damp

The corner where once the coffee maker stood, along with kettle and cups and various
paraphernalia for making teas and soups and other snacks of different kinds, and the bar
fridge which had held the milk and odds and ends of food both fresh and in decay. In this
corner – the wall now peeling from the rising damp the voices remained. Every subject fit for
discussion over tea and biscuits, and some not? No, no subject not.

Now peeling with the rising damp. Oozing out from under paint from under too many layers of
skin to be remembered. The ecstatic itching sore. Too many colours in the fashion of the
day. But mostly not the fashion of the day. Just what was ready and at hand. Cheap talk and
lead-based paint peeling upwards and out from crumbling render and sagging bricks. Why
don't you just kill me! The voice of the already dead and gone now dead but not gone. "Don't
tell anyone," the secret now adrift in spores, suspended in the mouldy air, told to everyone
who came whispering across the surface of stale water – the pools collected on uneven
surfaces, adrift. The dripping tap with sink no longer there. Still there, with drain no longer
clear, still there. Someone laughing out of tired rust stained walls and through the broken
glass remaining jagged in window frames. The pain. The panes.

Enter man dreaming

I found myself in front of the deco building on Queen St. I looked for a sign, any sign that
there was an apartment for sale. Even though I'm not in a position to buy, I like to imagine the
possibility. I decided to have a coffee in the cafe on the ground floor. It was a bit grungy but I
liked the feel of the place. I ordered at the counter and sat down towards the rear of the shop.
I imagined how it might have been, this coffee shop in its day. With panelled walls.

Forgetful of which European city I've been to where deco buildings are still a common sight. Am I losing my mind that words hide from me? The places I've been to so frequently can no longer be named, though conjured up in images. For sure. But made real in words? What bird is that? Now there's a book! What deco coffee shop is that? On the ground floor of which street, in which Australian city? I sat beneath the floors of smart darkly panelled and furnished apartments and imagined the dots joined and the pages coloured in. But there are always more pages to be coloured in. Needs to be met, like expensive shoes. Insatiable. So much lovely storage space for so many things. And a lockable door. Vienna! That was it. Now 'they' knew how to panel a wall in walnut and leather. `

Enter reverie. Coffee and cake

The bloody blood spurt up and out.
Across the wall with every stroke.
He sliced the cake clean through and laughter bounced off the walls
The dripping blood whispered the secret as parts of phrases caught in tiny cracks and bruised edges.
Black Forest was always the favourite. It'd become a bit of a cliché as every birthday came and went and stayed the same. Caught from dripping through the cracking, peeling paint.
Black Forest.
The story was told in one quick god-almighty gush across his face and neck and down.

She whispered something rude into his ear and he continued with more and more energy. Like it was a neck and not a roast and not a cake. The forest ran with the black of red. The blood over the edges of the plate. 'I'm showing off now' he thought as he flicked the bloody blood from off his hands across the floor and out the door. Not every slice got the regulation cherry but still he made sure the birthday girl got one, and a larger slice. He remembered doing this before. So many times in fact. So much cake but never a party. He cast his seed across the levelled ground. Lightly watered it. Then waited. For it to grow. He stood in the yard watching. He went inside and looked out through the lounge room window. He went to the bathroom, turned on the cold tap. Washed his hands clean. Turned the tap off and listened. He listened for the sound of grass growing and was reminded why he hated cricket. He turned the cold tap on and catching the water in his hands he washed the bloody blood off his face and neck. He turned the cold tap off. Dried his face and hands with the nearest towel, and listened. Laughing. Snippets of conversation. Half a fire siren. A horse walking along the street outside.

1. And I am
2. What am I?
3. What? What!
4. There are words
5. I am held together by words
6. I say...
7. And I answer myself or just leave it
8. The words...like cataracts
9. My eyes heavy and cloudy with words
10. A mist passing through a net of words and words
11. I've never had a baby or owned a gun. You never touch me.
12. Never had a cataract or cast a net. To put things in order

I've flown through clouds. Releasing pent up tension. I've walked through fog and mist. I've seen smoke and I've been surrounded by it. I leant with my back against the wall and drank from my bottle of water and thought that I was leaning back and drinking water.

SCENE 5. The Bedroom

Enter four women in a bed

There were four on the bed in the room and the little one said, "Roll over. Roll over." But they just looked at her like they weren't sure where all of this was leading. Their hands. Their arms linked. It was very good, but so much time had already passed. Too much time. Such a thing as too much time had already passed. So they all rolled over and one fell out.

Now in order to remain attached to one who has fallen from the bed it is important to stay as close as possible. The person who has fallen must try very hard not to fall further, than is necessary, and the person or persons who are attached must attempt to go with that person, as much as possible. Sympathise. In this case it is the second largest person who has fallen from the bed. It must be ascertained as soon as possible whether or not this person has sustained any permanent or lasting damage from the fall. Whether this second largest person has been damaged in any way, physical or psychological, by the fall. The remaining bedridden must question the fallen woman, in this case, with the entreaty "Are you alright Janice?", who is allowed to reply "Yes, I'm fine!", or "No, I think I've broken my collar bone." Or some such thing. Now, depending upon the nature of the injury, or not, it behoves the bedridden to:

1. Calm the fallen and administer CPR in situ, or
2. Attempt to arrange themselves in such a manner as to allow the fallen woman to remount the bed.

Now that there are 3 in the bed, the little one may say as much, and add, "Roll over. Roll over." As this directive proved itself unsatisfactory the first time around they may choose:

1. To roll the other way while remaining attached, thus allowing the fallen woman to get a leg over and remount the bed.
2. Ignore the directive entirely, thus remaining incomplete as 4 women in a bed.
3. Ignore the directive and release the fallen woman who must then go off and make cups of tea and prepare some sort of light refreshment, or
4. Remain attached but repentant. Cascading over each other and the edge of the bed. The light flickering in the night sky. The stars shooting across the ceiling of the large room on the moor.

Enter dreaming

Waking up. Going to the window. Looking out.

Responding to what they see and what they think, looking out.

Running. Getting nowhere. Running. Trying to run. Being chased by the skin. Something or someone or numbers of ones. As close as skin but no voice to call out. No sounds but the

gasping struggle to breathe. To cry out in the night. Remembering the door left slightly ajar for the one to come in, as she will. But she didn't will.
The black crack. Where is she? Where is he?
He is lying on his back on the bed.
He is running with the will to run but not the means.
He is crying out with the gasping to breathe but not to speak.
He is hitting out without the arms to move. I woke in fright and looked to the door still slightly ajar for the one to come in, as she will. But she will not.
Moving.
Unmoved.

I wept into the wall to see the lampshade spinning in the night. The light from the street still filtered through drawn blinds and into the room. I took a hammer to the globe/light/shell/floor. Piece of shit. How can that be?
Behind the curtain, under the covers of the sleeping tent.
I spent the day inside a closed room not tightly shut against the moving breeze within the trunks of fallen trees.
There was a time when the silent flowers fell from the line to take the time an insect crawling across the fake wood surface of the table. I bent forward in my chair to see how long the world would be before it opened out across the sky.
Gasping. Calling out. Choking. Still. With eyes wide open then less wide open.
He got up from the bed and walked to the window. Out through the blinds and into the night. The street was silent.
The lights burned down onto carefully tended cars and carefully tended flowers.
Where is she?

The flowers had closed against the night-light. The wind was up and it had begun to rain. I wish it would pour down and wash the bird shit off my car.

Enter not yet dying

It is midday. But I wasn't to know that, or I wouldn't have known if not for the town hall clock striking it out. I counted them off. I ticked them off and counted them down. I sat and waited. I had the coffee. Perhaps I shouldn't have but I did. Anyway it's done now and my brain is zipping all over the place. At least it gets me going. That's a good thing. Unfortunately I may be having a heart attack.

There's something definitely not quite right. What is it they say about strokes? Memory loss? Trying to remember something about peripheral pain down the arms. Across the back? Bit of a headache and definite arm pain. I don't want to make a fuss. Maybe it's just that my neck's out or I've pulled a muscle in my back, trying to do too much. I'm either going for too much or I'm asleep on the couch in the middle of the day. I think I'm losing it here. I don't want a heart attack. I should have cleaned out my cupboards when I thought of it months ago.

Now it's too late and I'm dying. Should I drive to the hospital outpatients? What if I'm not dying? Can I drive anyway? What about phoning for an ambulance? I am covered for ambulance. That's a bit extreme in the middle of the night if it's just a rib. I knew I shouldn't have moved that stuff by myself. But that's it isn't it! You feel good so you want to do stuff and then when you do it.....Too much. But I feel sick as well. It's a stroke!

I am aching all down one side. What'll I do? I've got to go in and wake him up. No I can't do that. It was a hard day. He's had a hard day and he needs to sleep.....I am dying. I don't have any control over this. Not at all. None whatsoever. If I could be sure it was just death. Dead like some animal. That'd be alright. Then it would be all over. All would be over. All over and sorted. But bed-ridden and dribbling from every orifice? If I could just be sure, one way or the other, I'd know what to do. I have to wake him up. 'I'm sorry. I know you're tired and you've had a shit of a day but I think I'm having a heart attack.' I'll just say that and he'll tell me what to do. He'll know exactly what to do and we'll do it.

THE NINTH ACT

Remembering the Journey



12. Railway Platform

SCENE 1. The Bus

He watched as journeys of abstract imaginings overlapped in their travelling. As if through half closed eyes. He knew they were real people on foot, on their bikes, in their rickshaws, in their cars. He was refreshed by the coolness of the stone underneath him and comforted by the warmth of the late summer sun on his face.

Enter sitting. Knitting or trying to read a newspaper

The air is very thick over there by the edge.

But there may have been a mistake.

A prefabricated house.

A door. A dream.

Hitting something.

To release something that is pent up.

It is unclear where the journey began, or its purpose. But they were off. Packed in like those bus loads you see, of India or China. In India or China. Or Africa. The bus was climbing through mountain passes in Kathmandu. Edging along precipitous paths through the Grand Canyon, in India. Veering so far out on the bends that back and side wheels lost touch with the road and spun in the air. A sheer drop. The view disappearing in cartoon perspective to the treacherous rivers lurching drunkenly below. Craggy Chinese vistas looked back through bus windows. Or the bits that could be seen passed the heads and luggage and caged birds. There are always caged chooks on precipitous bus journeys through exotic foreign locations.

She was knitting now, or he was trying to read a newspaper, or he was knitting and she was tackling the paper as the bus swerved out to overhang some terrifying ravenous path or other. Gaping mouth. Gasping at unconsciousness. Or she was he was she both knitting with words and trying to read the newspaper at the same time, through not 100% pure new wool. Moving sideways on the seat and out of the bus, through the others and luggage and the cages of feathered things. Slipping sideways through gasping unconsciousness, passed newsprint and knitting needles. Out beyond the bus to above the treacherous drop. With mouth sagging open and head lolled back. And all the while the cartoon sound of falling from a great height, before shifting sideways back through all of the bits, again into the bus.

Dreaming of the house that wasn't delivered like the other, on the back of a truck, from some mountain camp where it was no longer needed. She wept beneath the trees behind the chicken shed, above their fibro cement hut. It was three miles to Tumbarumba.

SCENE 2. The Train

Enter with little or no expectation. En-route to somewhere

*I'm sorry. I apologise.
Suddenly everything is clear.
A problem to solve.
To lose control.
A spider. A stake.*

Shaky traveller.
Not a reluctant commuter.
She liked sitting back and being driven somewhere. It was a form of meditation.
She enjoyed the dullness of having no expectation.
She was found by herself, staring at a frieze of graffiti written anonymously in some abstract script, the precise meaning of which she was not privy to.
She wouldn't have mind reading it, but she didn't mind not.
No mind. Never mind!
She cut herself off from drifting into the casual self-abuse that took her thoughts away from time to time, only to return with reinforcements.
Never mind!
She reread her brain.
There was some comfort in the gentle jolt of the train en-route to somewhere – the remembering of thoughts pieced together moments before, or still being formed, or about to be had and in proximity to ones already had and on the way out.

She was still reading when it happened.
I'm sorry?
She was still reading her own brain, which we've already established beyond reasonable doubt, when it happened.
What happened? Nothing 'happens' when one is reading one's own brain on a train.
Particularly when the graffiti's illegible.
Is this some sort of game in the brain on a train? It is insss....not very cogent really, is it?
Having got this far she brought her attention back to the carriage and the young man under a hat. He was not happy. This disturbed her train, of thought.
She imagined him abusing her over something or other. Her lack of discipline perhaps. Her use of public transport as therapy?
She could walk! She likes to walk. She could just as easily do it on her feet.
That's telling him. She thought.
He apologised and left the carriage.
Her eyes returned from their glaze once more to examine the graffiti on the back of the seat in front.
What do I feel?
What do I want?
Why don't I know what I want?
A biscuit and a cup of tea.

Enter in search of sensible shoes

Shirley set out early for the city. She woke with the very beginnings of a 'sort of' headache. She'd had them before and they were just 'there' – a dull thickening of reason, which didn't respond to Panadol and would stay until it was ready to go.

She went off in search of sensible shoes. She had long been aware of the theory behind the wisdom of sensible shoes. Or the wisdom behind the theory of sensible shoes. She had known for some time of the existence of sensible shoes. She simply hadn't had any firsthand experience of the pleasure of walking, running or standing still. She found that she couldn't think very clearly at present but there was a need there, and surely if she didn't think too deeply on it right now, but simply jumped on a tram that would take her to that part of town where one goes for that sort of thing, it would all be simply marvellous and neither her feet nor her head would hurt anymore. She didn't think too deeply about this. She was driven by a need not to concentrate on the pain but to place herself in a situation most conducive to comfort. Normally she would stay in bed. It took quite some effort within the rationale of 'non doing' to get herself on a tram on the way to sensible shoes. It was a quest, in an unclear, haphazard sort of way. Her feet had emerged from an unsettled nights...whatever it is when feet are attached to the sleeping mind. She bought a ticket and tried not to think about it. She was trying not to think about buying a ticket as she fumbled through her purse for the correct fare.

Enter Mordialloc. Running for the train

Late at night.

Running to catch the last train.

Woman with a pram thought that she was being chased

Darkened street.

Menacing shrubs and trees

Distant sound of the train approaching the station.

What the hell was he doing there? Mordialloc? Is that where he was? By the time he had caught all 3 varieties of public transport and waited between each for the connections that had been promised by every reliable source, then done whatever it was he was there to do.

It was late. It was very late and it was time to catch the last train home. It was not what you'd call a short distance between his job and the station. The railway station. It was a fair hike. A 30-minute walk and he had 20 minutes to catch the train, which may or may not have been there in any case. No time to think. He just put his head down and bolted. As he crossed the highway towards Station Street he was aware of the sudden drop in light. The highway was lit up like a football field at night. The street that led to the station however. That was a different matter.

He could hear the sound of his feet running. Still, he noticed the gloomy and threatening darkness to either side of the path. Dark and looming trees and shrubs. Larger, darker trees. Hedgerows and driveways. The entrances to lane ways and other smaller, darker streets. Blind alleys. He kept on. Occasionally shifting between fast run, quick trot and brisk walk. Ahead he could see the distant light from the station.

Enter the woman and the soldier

She sat uncomfortably in the comfortable chair.

She sat. Reading in the chair car. The book held above her lap. Above the gently rocking of the train.

He lent backwards and into the darkness of the third class seat. The carriage window behind him cast fading light across the left side of his face. His once crisply ironed uniform unbuttoned at the neck. He looked out and beyond but nowhere in particular. Outside this gloomy booth. His hat lay across his lap. Away and beyond, the countryside a blur. Though still discernibly country – its molten green and brown the grey light a remembrance of a dark and gloomy place.

She held the book out and away from her body and the train's vibration. She held it like a precious gift that she hadn't expected to receive.

She felt the humming carriage floor through the soles of her feet. She moved her toes inside the shoes that covered them.

Their faces fixed in steely resolve.

"Something to drink madam?"

"No thank you." She didn't look up from the page.

He was thirsty but there was no energy left. Nothing could prize him from the corner of his dingy cell. Pinned through the groin by the weight of felt and leather.

SCENE 3. Paris

Enter rue Geoffrey L'Asnier. Bottled water

Don't underestimate your ability

Anyway I'm going to celebrate

A juicy steak

A bunch of keys

To hug or massage someone

To finish something

He walked into the gallery forecourt as if he was entering a dream. The glass pyramid stood before him. The sound of water and traffic and people pushed at the air around him. There had been a controversy, as there always is in Paris, he remembered, over the placing of the radically new so close to the old. The Louvre.

I don't remember walking. He didn't remember walking. There were miles of rooms. Kilometres in fact. It being Europe. Off galleries lined with ornate gold gilt frames wrapped around art. Like the finger that pointed to the moon he smiled, to know more about the finger than the moon. What magnificent gold-gilt frames for the placing of art! His life was perfect this day, this week. What a privilege to wander the streets of Gay Paris, to be able to give directions to tourists from Ohio who spoke American with French accents so that they might better be understood. To weave his way through trails of dog shit and know 'no, not today, this turd is not for me.'

He began to remember walking as he looked for a place to sit for a moment. To view the art. To see inside the frames. He thought about his own work on the walls of the studio. His studio, looking out over rue Geoffrey L'Asnier. What is this thing, Art? Never mind. He couldn't be reached by questions aesthetic. There was too much at stake. He was fine. As fine as he'd ever been and more completely himself than he ever was before. He shaved twice a week. He ate meat without concern for man or beast. He had sex with strangers like drinking water. Though he didn't drink the water.

He didn't frame his life with gilded wood. He had red wine and white wine and deux baguette. He didn't speak the language, so for six months he remained unaware of the news of the day. It was a retreat into sights and smells and the textures of taste and language without knowing. Apart from his work and the need to arrange for food, his mind remained remarkably uncluttered by thought. He floated along in a sort of poetic stream of unconsciousness, amid repetition and proliferation.

He moved a little closer towards the painting that was hung on the wall, or to the window that was hung in the wall. In any case he approached it as if from within a room with a view. His feet stopped as if held back by an unseen barrier, in the event that his attention may prove too much for either a framed art work or a landscape seen from a distance.

Too much for it to bear?

Too much for him to bear?

His feet had stopped but his attention continued forward by inches and centimetres. And his head continued closer still. He stood, mid-flight and fascinated on a ski jump towards an old master collared by golden gilt, or an older landscape framed in old wood behind hundred year old glass. Hundreds.

His feet were still, on the edge of the light.

On the brink of the tide.

The thought of something else played across his face.

The light lapped at his feet.

He stood on the beach of light as it played across the floor of the empty crowded room and he thought of something else.

SCENE 4. The Aeroplane

Enter a woman standing flat footed in a shallow bath at 36, 000 feet

"I can remember the narrowness of our bed."

"She has bruises up her arm."

To brace oneself.

To wrap something or lift something.

A door lock.

A Staircase.

Slowly rotating figure. Fluorescent light.

The tight bright surface shone in and up and out. Tight as a drum.

Would be ankle deep liquid if the man or woman figure was standing flatfooted.

He was moving so slowly that I couldn't be sure that he was moving. He barely disturbed the skin of the baby blue water. The rose water. The lavender water. The pale green. His body was pulled up inside of itself. Like pulling on too tight jeans on a cold day, over bent white legs. His shoulders were hunched with the effort of slowly rotating on tiptoes in shallow water. It was warm in the cold clear water, shining up to light the undersides of his body. His arms. His head. I heard nothing but the sound of nothing.

It was clear in the darkness. The radiating light was a square thing. About one metre square. About as wide as a narrow bed and about as long as the width of a narrow bed. It was as deep as if to the ankle of a woman standing flat footed in a shallow bath. The light was shining up so that the undersides of her slowly rotating body glowed. The taut wet surface puckered now and then with the movement as she moved so slowly that water wouldn't pucker. Still the light was disturbed on the surface of the undersides of her body, like bruises coming and going across her skin. She has bruises up her arm. I looked around, around and into the dark. It was time for something more. Something else. Some other thing. Something. He was moving so slowly that I hardly knew that he was moving at all. He appeared to be looking for something beneath his feet. Ankle deep in Lavender water. He didn't find it, or he did but did nothing about it.

The air was absolutely as clear as air could be between the place of dark and the place of glowing light. It was clear like cold air, but it was as warm as the bush on a summer's day. I was able to see it and beyond it. I was able to look around. It was nearly time to go but I knew it wasn't over.

I looked out of the window at 36,000 feet.

[Enter over Siberia](#)

35,000 feet
Over Siberia
Looking down
Trying to sleep
Wishing time away
Fiddling with the onboard entertainment system
Plugging in/unplugging
Pushing buttons and turning dials.

At 35,000 feet he looked out of the window and down into the black. They were over southern Europe. He guessed at Siberia having checked and re-checked the course of the flight against the graphic on the screen in front of him. But so many singular lights together in groups. Clusters. He didn't attempt to count them but was sure they could be counted. They were so clear. He wondered what landscape would cause the singular lights to cluster in such patterns.

She was asleep beside him. Apparently asleep. She appeared to be dozing in the seat next to his, but she was not. Her eyes were closed and she was listening as a young family attempted to settle itself towards the back of the plane. A baby cried briefly. It was 4 am and again it was quiet, but for the hum of the engines and the collective rustlings of 500 people trying to sleep or remain asleep for as long as possible.

It was a sound like so much distant static. You could believe it was completely silent on board if you wanted to. He did. She didn't.

He began tidying up. It was 4.03 am and as the juggernaut cut effortlessly through and above the cold Siberian air he fiddled with the onboard entertainment system.

Looking at Siberia from 35,000 feet.

They were moving so slowly that the movement of 500 people hardly registered at all. The singular lights shone up into the blackness. Shone up from below. As far as the eye could see. Having eaten something real. Having been waited on by flight attendants. Having done many things and thought even more in an effort to move quickly from one place to another, they now appeared to be moving so slowly, at speed, that they seemed not to be moving at all. She especially appeared not to be moving at all. But she was thinking. To be sure, she, her thoughts and her handbag, and the rest of her onboard luggage were moving at 800 kilometres per hour, and all appeared not to be moving at all. It was a miracle.

SCENE 5. The Elevator

Enter confined in open space near the blue and the green

*Don't be so fidgety
There's nothing worse than being naive
To make a decision
A handbag
Wet sand
To keep moving
To blaspheme*

At the top of the rise he stood at a place. He was going no further than this place. He could feel the turf beneath his feet and knew its warmth. He saw the blue beyond the green and knew that there was more than this place.

There was nothing behind or to the side or in front of him but the blue and the green and the promise of something more on arrival. Though he was already somewhere.

At a place.

He didn't move inside this place but still the whole place moved.

A green field.

A blue sky.

The promise of multiple destinations beyond this place.

A row of numbers and buttons in his mind, in the air to the right of his right shoulder.

There was some indication of points of arrival.

At once the top of a rise in an open field on a clear day and an infinite of blue sky beyond.

At once a moving room.

A room too small to be an ordinary room, which transported people and their goods or people alone or unattended goods between surfaces in a much larger place.

The blue and the green.

He took a hanky from his handbag and was able to blow his nose and mop up excess oil and sweat from his face in one uncomplicated movement.
Green grass, not too fidgety to be seen clearly. Going everywhere in tufts and clumps whipped up by mountain breezes.
His hair parted each time the door of the moving room opened.
Opening and parting in tufts whipped up by mountain breezes, or the sudden shock of movement caused by a place arriving at another place.
He wasn't thinking.
He simply looked out and beyond this place, in anticipation, or not, of some other expected arrival or other, or not.
He slipped the hanky back into his handbag.
He began to think.
He wondered if there were other people and their goods or people without their goods or goods alone that were in place behind him. Out of sight. And was it rude to be for so long with one's back to fellow travellers. Even if they weren't there, he wondered.
He didn't look.
A mild late summer sun shone across his cheeks.
He needn't make any decisions to keep moving.
It was all so easy.
Just standing still and the whole place moves to another place.

Enter not remembering having entered a moving room

No worries!
I'm on a steep learning curve
A door
A handbag
To release something that is pent up
To hit out at something
To make someone laugh

There was a pretty little view of a lazy fishing village in Cornwall. Another familiar scene from one of the Greek islands. Some sort of civic monument behind a blur of fast cars. The walls of the lift were adorned with a selection of post cards from exotic locations. She sat on a little padded stool just to the left of a cranky old apparatus, a tangle of metal trellis which needed to be shunted sideways for another door to be moved sideways, to the right, if people were to come and go.

I didn't often have reason to visit this building or use this lift, but over the years I suppose I'd been here often enough to be able to strike up a conversation with Shirley. A series of infrequent short rides over several years was enough to put together some short story about her life in a lift. The postcards on the wall only hinted at other possibilities. We didn't discuss these. Talked politics mostly. She had a little transistor radio that hung from a nail carelessly driven into the impeccably polished panels of the wall directly behind her. Not the gorgeous brass hook that one might expect from a wall of such a charming old fossil as this. She knew the news before I'd even suspected. It was she who told me when Gough had got the boot. Well, if it wasn't it ought to have been.

She didn't have an opinion. Well not one that she expressed to me. That was the thing. Maybe that's all part of lift training. 'Don't provoke the customers with opinions or they'll take the stairs or complain to the Body Corporate or both. Taxi drivers don't get that sort of advice.

Or barbers. There was continuity of reflection in the bevelled edged mirror that ran around 3 sides of the lift. It was a good 6 inches above Shirley's head. I guess she could have stood on the stool if the need arose. I could see my face from 3 sides. It was weird to be told by a mirror that I was alone in a lift when all the while there was Shirley, rabbiting on.

Enter without the regular rhythm of steps

Shirley in bed. Too hot to sleep deeply. A night spent kicking off layers and pulling them back over. Of turning. Of half wake. Half sleep. Fitful dreaming. She moved from the step of the big house, up and into the entrance hall. The corridor was lined with closed doors. She moved without stepping. Somehow without the regular rhythm of step, fall, balance, step. Step. Just there, to imagine and be there. To form or let form an intention. A query in her mind. She was inquisitive and her desire to see and know transported her immediately away from the labours of her body and directly to a place. A row of closed doors. Of doorknobs facing into the hall. The sameness of white painted wood panelling was of no immediate interest. She went straight for the green door as she would a tray of food. She imagined and it opened for her and she was in. Another corridor. Another wall of closed and painted white wooden doors. Just as her interest began to shift the walls slid sideways and the floor became wall and the ceiling became floor. The green door was at once a square of turf on the crest of a hill on a mild summers day. She lost her nerve and threw back the white cotton sheet. She rolled onto her side and stuck her leg out and into the still night air.

SCENE 6. The Waiting Room

Enter the green door

He wasn't pacing up and down. That's what he imagined. It was the old district hospital and a clear mile of drop-dead-clean, shiny linoleum. He passed half open doors leading to bathrooms and toilets, with walls pinned together by gently tapering lengths of handrail. There was a metal grate over a low trough, to wash feet; now holding assorted mops and blue detergent concentrate. His polished shoes. The remembrance of squeaking steps on sparkling lino.

There was the matron's booth with glass on all sides, for seeing out, and looking in. He wasn't pacing now. He still saw clearly that larger than normal, pale green swinging door. Towards the end of the corridor. They're always towards the end. On the right. With a small clear glass pane, just near the steel oblong plate, to push. Always to push. From both sides to push. To push away from. To push away but follow through. Never to pull towards and walk on past.

The shining clean linoleum continued under the swinging door and into the ward. It went under the beds and under the chairs beside the beds. And under the metal cabinets between the beds and under the curtains that hung off rails around the beds. The squeaky clean linoleum.

But he was on carpet now. Ordinary shitty brown carpet, in the doctor's waiting room. He looked down to the plastic crate of kid's toys under the table. He looked across to the small

pile of tatty magazines on the seat next to his. And to another stack, on a seat across the room. He preferred not to touch magazines in doctor's waiting rooms. Touched already by so many sick people. How many? Hundreds. Maybe thousands of poor, sick and sorry souls with snotty noses and terminal diseases.

He listened for a ticking clock. But no. Only the muffled sounds of traffic that one hears through the brick walls of suburban surgeries. He had a watch. He glanced down at it but only for reassurance that he wasn't late. That's all. He wasn't in a hurry. He didn't have to be anywhere in particular.

He looked up at a travel poster print on the wall. Some airline or other. The Greek Islands was it? He didn't recognise the place, or the name, but suspected it of being very well known. And most people dreamed of a wonderful two weeks on sunny...thing! What's-a-name!

Enter as She

She moved through the green door.
The room was like a doctor's waiting room.
Like a place where people waited.
Like a place where people sat and read out-of-date glossy magazines, and there was a counter built into one wall. A counter cut out of the wall, and it had sliding frosted glass doors, which were open.
There was a box of toys in one corner of the room, spilling out and onto a very ordinary brown patterned carpet – 60's? 70's?
There were a few posters around, of exciting destinations, on the walls. And on the counter lay a whole swag of pocket-sized pamphlets with information about flu shots and Aids and Diabetes and Menopause and Hepatitis B, on clean reflecting surfaces.
She'd moved through the green door and into the room.
She knew about walking through doorways.
She could see the sides and the up and the down.

She knew about ordinary brown carpet and had been there, in the 60's and 70's.
She knew.
From another time she knew about sweating on sticky vinyl kitchen chairs in doctor's waiting rooms, flipping through the reflecting surfaces of glossy mags. Even tearing out that rather special recipe of something exotic and tasty for a dinner party that had never happened before and will never happen again.
She knew about dusty plants in plastic pots in the corners of waiting rooms.

Still she waited, from the wall.
She saw it all from the sheer vertical surface.
Her back falling into the flock wallpaper.
Her unruly floating arms held in check by framed prints of exciting destinations.
Her floating, thirsty feet remembering the taste of ordinary brown carpet underfoot.
She knew gravity when it was up and down.

SCENE 7. The Writing Room

Enter writing. A fireplace

My heart is racing
You're not listening
Shouting
To tell the truth
A camera
A bottle of water

Truth is stranger than fiction
Embolden
Life is only a dream
Keep alive to the unfamiliar being familiar being unfamiliar

"Can I get you a cup of tea?"
To hit out at something.
To remember something important.
A train.
Some beer.

A place where fires had burned.
A hole in the wall. Not a hole. A very neat square set into the wall.
Set so far into the wall that it protruded out the other side, and it could be seen in the garden that there was a fireplace with a chimney coming from that particular room.

The things that had been burnt in the place where there had been fire were now ash and had been removed and returned to the earth. Things return to dirt in the end. Wood and paper and the little bits of combustible debris that one throws into the places where fire burns, had been burnt. They had warmed and steamed then dried and caught. They were caught with the fire. Caught by the fire.
Burned till they glowed red and burnt away. Being watched, by eyes. Lost of the will to remember. Burning with the wood and paper and debris that was something once, and once again will be something else.

The train? The chimney of course was shooting smoke like the room was a train – a steam engine on its way to somewhere.
She opened the green door and stepped into a room on its way to somewhere else. In the corner there glowed a place where fire burned, but the room appeared not to be going anywhere.

He woke suddenly from his sleep in the chair and tried to remember something important. The room stopped suddenly, its slow journey to somewhere else. So slow that he appeared not to realise that he had been moving at all. He had woken with a jolt from his slow journey to somewhere else. He tried to remember. But as he looked again into the flames his thoughts left him.

The glow from the fire flickered across his face like a succession of surface wounds, each fading as quickly as it had been struck.

When I finally entered the room he appeared to be asleep in the chair. I offered him a cup of tea but he didn't answer. I moved away and watched him for a moment from the other side of the room. He appeared not to breathe though I knew that he was breathing. I left the tea on a tray on the table beside his chair, and I left the room.

He was sitting in a sensible chair at his desk. He could see that. He could see himself writing at his desk, surrounded by the things that were precious to him – writing things. All sorts of things.

But there was no sitting yet. He prowled about the room. He agitated the stillness that filled the room before he entered it and was, after all, the reason why he entered it. He paced, and fiddled with bits of paper and things. He made lists of things, but not while sitting calmly in a sensible chair at his desk. He carried a small, pocket-sized note pad in the pocket of his dressing gown. He kept an assortment of pens and pencils in the other pocket of his fraying old tartan gown. He made lists of things while standing at the door or the fireplace or the window.

Between laps of the room. He lunged from one stillness to the next. Never recognising the presence of stillness as he passed through it. His stillnesses appeared to be moving, as they were. He took up a pair of eyeglasses from the mantle piece above the fire, and thumbed through the rows of books on the shelves. Those once read. And those bought out of a genuine desire to be knowledgeable in all things, and never read at all. He shuffled things around. He stopped suddenly and looked towards the desk and the blank and open pages lying there, waiting.

"Did you say something?"

Something was saying. Something was being said so softly that it appeared not to be saying anything at all. But something had and was being, said. The sounds of something oozed out of the books in rows on shelves over shelves around the walls of the room. Something was filtering up from beneath the floor and down from the ceiling. Something so soft that it cut through his flesh without leaving a mark.

He took the pad from one pocket and a pencil from the other. He had decided on a plan. He began to plan something. He saw himself planning something that could be achieved. He saw himself sitting down in preparation for the doing of things. He decided to light the fire.

He sat at the table and looked down at his hands. Where they rested on the page. He'd stopped reading. It didn't interest him for the moment. He wondered when it had happened, that he had begun to look old. It wasn't a major concern. It was just one of those things that one is led to ponder as one looks down at their wrinkly old hands on the crisp new white paper. It was no bother really. Not knowing exactly when. He thought of the young man sitting beside him on his right, and remembered what it had felt like. What it had felt to be immortal. And then one day you wake up and you're 50 years old and already things don't quite work as they once had. And you walk into a crowded room and you're wallpaper. And occasionally someone brushes up against you by mistake.

He lent slowly forward in his chair so that the weight of his body moved out of his arse and into his feet. That way he could scooch his chair slightly closer to the table and a little nearer the young man seated beside him to his right. Using this technique he was able to approach

young people on public transport. Seated women reading books and magazines. Young men as they also observed seated women reading books and magazines. He was fascinated by the smell of cologne, perfume. Body odour. He liked to look at their skin. The shape of their teeth. Their hair. Their shoes.

He looked down again to examine the scar on the back of his left hand. The one clear eye on his body, looking back at him from the now loose and crepe-like membrane falling casually over his knuckles.

He was surprised, from yesterday, the sheer volume of words to be used to convey the absence of language.

Like when you see a dance performance and you wish they'd just stop moving around for a moment, or an actor and 'if only he'd just shut up'.

He marvelled at the flamboyance and the intricacy of the written word, the script itself, and the doing of it. The act of writing and the calligraphy left behind which remain busy despite their literal meaning, in a way which is different from the physical person who is silent and still. A figure standing in the space. The written form is gestural and moving. Dynamic. Moved by meaning. The figure standing silent and still in the space means nothing unless he is named by language. Described from the outside he thought.

He took the pen.

He took it up.

He held it in his hand.

He held it, poised over and above the pale blue line. The blue, the blue, the baby blue.

The shadow it cast on the page.

The snout of a pig wanting to dig, into the snow. Truffles in the ice. I don't think so.

Oh the way his fingers folded around the ink sheathed in plastic, before it came.

Looking past the tangle of prints and tips of, nails and knuckles.

Into the soft hollow of baby flesh half hidden.

The gentle palm at the centre of it all.

Oh the swallow's egg inside the iron fist.

Oh baby blue, he watched it come across the page as he pressed it to the paper.

His body sat heavy in the chair.

Fallen. Falling down and into. Falling backwards and up.

Thrusting into and out of. Letting go.

Up.

Letting up go. Up gone. Up and left.

The weight of his arm was taken by wood grain, laminex and paper, once wooden pulp now pages of parchment.

His arm hung down. Fallen out of his shoulder joint. Disjointed.

A soft cloth shirt falling, gathering in folds at elbow and wrist.

Falling and folding from the soft fabric yoke from shoulder to shoulder, shoulder to elbow to wrist and iron fist.

Oh baby blue my swallow's egg.

Eating the soft palm meat and tender. Is best.

The black ink coming over the white page.

The little boy pissing his name into the snow.

Oh.

The chair took it sitting down.
His legs hanging from their knees through ankles and feet.
The floor pushing back.
His feet hanging in. There. Hanging in there.

He looked down again at the rutting pig.
His clenching teeth.
His floating skull.
Oh hair.
Oh cradle cap.

The flamboyance of black ink as it came across the snow white, as she lay across the page.
White.
From left to right.
Splashing backwards and forwards.
Into and out of his eyes.
His iron fist.
The plastic piss.

He filled, in a space where there had only been emptiness of body sitting in chair, a moment or moments earlier. Now leaning forward to pour his blackness out onto...his blackness out.

He poured himself back into seated ness. Sitting. Listening for the movement of weight displaced and moving. Flowing back. Falling in and falling out. Replaced my heart with shouting. Racing-ing. Pouring bottled water but not empty-ing. Heaving heavy arm and scrap of paper unmoved by turning pages and second hand ongoing. Round. The dull ache of fullness of open ears to hear. Aching and heavy stillness pouring back and back again. And again. And pouring backwards. Black words.

He scratched the surface of his lazy cheek. He dropped his jaw. His jaw. Dropped and gaping open. Aching waiting open. Pulsed and waiting open poignant mouth softening down and full of waiting openness and waiting. Untouched by touching. Drunken bottled water. True. His mouth listened for the empty taste of bottled water. Resumed to aching feltless feeling softness and weighty in the chair. An arse anticipating falling weight and openness in waiting. His legs, hung and absorbing through the wooden floor.

THE TENTH ACT

Remembering Places

The weight of his upper body rested comfortably against his thigh. He could feel the volume of his abdomen expanding and softening around his leg with every breath. He looked into the deepness of his stomach and felt himself sit. His hands clasped loosely beneath his leg. He felt the world changing before him, before his very, very eyes, softening, half opening to witness the parade of near, now abstract images pass before him. Half closing against the shifting summer sun. The flash of light.



13. Industrial Promotion Hall

SCENE 1. The Street

Enter a man walking in the street

*Don't censor me
Your face is bright red
Criticising or analysing something
To examine something in detail
A battlefield
A memory*

Having stood. Now once stood. He fell away. Not down to the floor. Not a collapse to the ground but a sinking. Again not down onto the, the wooden floor or even into the floor and further, into the hard red clay under it. But horizontally. Backwards. Away from himself and where he was/had been, standing. Backward. Drawn back. Like there was a river flowing up his body. The back of his body. A body of water flowing up, and he beginning to sink. He let himself sink into it. He let himself in. It allowed him to let himself in and into it. Not open, or parting in the biblical sense. Just a quiet breathing away of himself. From himself. A gentle exhalation backwards. Backwards. In the, the running river that flowed up the back of his body. Not floating him away. Not like he'd fallen into the creek and the current just took him along with it. He breathed himself out of the back surface of his body and into the same place, but removed. Was it like stepping backwards out of his shoes before entering through the kitchen door? No. That's not right. It was soft and slow and gentle and normal, this being overcome by the ordinary. He could still feel. In fact his jaw dropped soft and open into the flowing lifting river. The running rising water. Back and up. Back and up. A promise and a feeling but not a violent departure. He was giving way but not collapsing. Nor stuck in traffic.

What is it? What? What! What? What! What? What! What! What? What? What! What?

Something had gently shifted in him but not yet occupying another place. Removed but not yet gone. He hasn't gone anywhere. Where? He hasn't gone off anywhere else. Just becoming bled of sensation. Is that it? It? No big deal the falling backward and in. Is there such a thing, to be a fallen person and yet remain? Ever so gently gone? From himself? Not like something from the hard rubbish collection on the verge of the road. There's no way I'd be allowed on a tram with a 3-seater lounge strapped to my back.

Enter the hard rubbish collection

As I walked back towards town... The tram had got me there too soon for the allotted time so I just stayed on board for a few extra stops so that I could kill a bit of time and window shop and walk back. I liked window-shopping. Anyway, as I walked back towards town I noticed that people had stacked their hard rubbish out beside the road. And they were still doing it as I passed. I fancied a few things too. Not because I needed another television set or a bed or some more chairs. I mean, how many arses does one person have? But they were going free. It wouldn't have cost me anything. But I was sort of glad in the end that I didn't have any way of transporting things. That solved that one.

I felt like phoning someone and saying, look, get down here straight away. There's some really good stuff here if you want it. I didn't want it. Well I did. At least I wanted to want it. No. I mean I didn't want to want it. But I did. Because it was good stuff. A lot of it. Funny what some people think of as rubbish. Not that I'd necessarily want to be sleeping on someone else's mattress that they'd left out on the side of the road for god knows how long. But it looked all right. Later I wondered if visitors to Melbourne might think we'd all moved ourselves out of doors for our health. Because of the heat. To make the most of the cooler southerly breezes off the bay. Anyway. I kept walking. Slowly because I was still very early. I'd caught the bus up Hoddle Street and the number 6 tram. Thinking it was peak hour so it'd probably take me hours to get across town. Well it didn't. More like minutes. Anyway, as I slowly walked along High Street people were already stopping their utes and 4 wheel drives to pick up the stuff that they didn't need but wanted, that'd been put out.

SCENE 2. The Church

Enter standing in sunlight on the corner of a busy street

*He keeps interrupting me.
The days are so long
To exaggerate or overdo something
Shouting
A long cool drink
A strange sound*

What comes to mind in the imagining of a place?

He stood. He was early. Of course he was. He was always early. He stood on the corner. The sunlight warmed the back of his neck. He checked the temperature as if it was bath water and he might burn the back of his neck, leaving a red, to his mind, unsightly ring, of red, below his hair line and above the collar of his T-shirt. He looked down the busy peak-hour street for any sign of the bus that he wasn't waiting to catch. The place where he needed to wait was close to the bus stop. He didn't want the bus driver to think he was waiting to catch the bus, holding up the traffic, blocking the flow of people into work, into the city. He walked out of the sunlight. There was a chill in the shaded air. He walked back into the light. He felt the sun now on his face. His cheeks. His chest.

He turned again to face the traffic. The sun on his neck. Across the road a church had been converted into luxury townhouses. A couple were having breakfast in the belfry. He looked away as soon as he saw them. So that they wouldn't think he had been watching them eat their breakfast. He had been watching them eat their breakfast. He looked again down the road. A bus was coming. He turned away and looked at his feet. Tried to look like he wasn't waiting for a bus. He stepped away slightly and around the corner. He wasn't waiting for the bus. There were signs up. Auction, to rent. To lease signs up on the fronts of buildings that surrounded the square. He thought about living there. He wondered about having breakfast in a belfry that overlooked a busy road.

It was warming up. The weather was warming up. The day was getting warmer. He stepped sideways out of the sunlight and into the cool shade and imagined a long cool drink. The bus had come and gone and there was another one on the way. He looked down at the bluestone. The cobbled gutter that turned the corner from the busy street and into the not so busy one that surrounded the square. The houses that emptied into the street. Houses emptying their people into the street and into waiting cars. People driving off to work. He looked again at his watch. It was still early. He stepped away from the curb and took a few more steps away from the bus stop. Just around the corner and out of sight of the bus driver who may think that he was waiting for the bus. Mistake him for a passenger and interrupt the flow of people to their work and to the city. Out of sight of the bus but not too far from where he thought he should be. He scratched at the insect bite on his wrist and remembered to stand tall in the face of possible scrutiny from peak-hour commuters in need of inspiration.

Enter hedge plants. A Bobcat. The yard graded level

*I wish you'd say what you think
I'm starving
Keeping moving or moving something around
To confront something head on.
A bottle of beer
A tram.*

Had there been a choice, the church, a holy place now graded level? The Bobcat arrived on the back of a truck at 8.45 in the morning. He moved the red soil from one pile, there, through the gate to there. I propped the gate open with a bit of branch that was positioned by the fence. For the purpose of propping open the gate. It wouldn't, the gate, stay open of its own accord, and so needed to be propped. The Bobcat returned again and again with soil from the paddock and dumped it in the yard. It levelled the once sloping area into a relatively flat and usable space.

We could eat breakfast in the belfry watching the cars raising dust on their way into town, or from town. Either way they were taking their passengers to work.

I busied myself with moving rocks in the yard. I tried not to look at the Bobcat so that he wouldn't feel under pressure. No pressure. I felt the sun on my neck. I moved rocks from the pile under the poplar to the garden bed in the yard. But I liked to watch the Bobcat move. Bob the cat. Bobcat moving Bobcat-like. Delicately placing red soil. Spreading. Out. Dragging the bucket back over it to flatten it out. So satisfying. Is this really a man thing? Keeping moving and moving around. So strong.

So delicate I wanted to cry.

Oh mummy, mummy. Hold me. I feel bad. I am 53 and you are 87 and I feel so sad mummy. She shuffled her walking frame around the veranda and sat again to drink tea and think of things and forget things. Streams of things just flowing through.

I looked away so that Bobcat wouldn't think I was waiting for the dirt. The cat. The Bob. Just a few bob. And stop to give me a lift to work. I am working. See this wheelbarrow. See these rocks. Watch me move the rocks and make a stone wall to hold the garden bed.

Oh mummy. Mummy. Watch me do this grown up thing and tell me what a beautiful thing it is. It is. What a beautiful thing it is.

I'd dug up 13 Mexican orange blossom thingies in order to replant them higher on the now levelled yard. Wasn't that a good thing to do! Tell me how good that thing was to do. To do such a good thing. It took me all fucking day and nearly killed me in the heat. Too hot to be transplanting them. Then it rained and stormed and blew them all to the shit house and washed the levelled red soil in torrents across the yard.

"Oh mummy, mummy. Hold me tight and make it all better for I feel so sad today."

She pushed her walking frame through the doorway and into the room.

She propelled herself into the room.

The frame was the first part of her that entered the room. With it came the bits and pieces of wretched old body. Still enough life in the old body to enliven the new frame.

From the door she could see out through windows to the square across the street. They were already eating breakfast. Toast? Toast anyone? Anyone? Toast? Toast? Anyone? Toast!

We must keep an eye on the time. The street below was awash with peak hour traffic. She moved closer to the table and the windows of the strangely high-pitched room. It was like the bow of the titanic, she imagined. Then forgot. Tea and toast in the belfry as it sliced through the arctic sea. She put on the brake, on her walking frame, and leant forward into it to take the weight off her legs. She looked down into the traffic and away from the breakfast table so that they wouldn't think she had come to watch them as they ate. She had come to watch them as they ate. They were talking. Were they talking? She couldn't hear them as she was looking away.

She couldn't see them from inside the lofty loft.

Cut off

By mezzanine and walking frame and luxury town house conversion.

Had the church been debriefed or decommissioned as they do?

Bobcat moved so delicately through.

His teeth full of white porcelain and shiny glass and fragments of toast.

The sun fell across her cheeks.

It splintered through the plate glass, piercing the cold morning air.

Oh mummy, mummy.

Hold me close for I feel so sad.

And I am only 53 and you are still so young.

SCENE 3. The Cafe

Enter man on red bar stool. Foccacia

It was passed the busy lunch hour time in the city. A time now that he most felt able to face food. The people had returned to their offices, their workstations. Not all, but the ones who remained ought to have and they all knew that. Their spirits at least had been drawn back off the streets and into lifts and up escalators in high-rise blocks. Back off and away from the streets and fast food venders, just off footpaths, along streets. They had yet to return with their fed bodies from chic laneway cafes to typing pools and boardrooms.

He liked to wander at this time to graze on the horizontal lines, the vertical faces, the tufts of humanity spilling out over too large white porcelain plates and cups of coffee.

He sat. There was a row of bar stools. Red vinyl. Chrome uprights. Bolted to the polished wooden floor so that a human being prone to stick to red vinyl would not inadvertently leave the eatery with a rogue upright still attached. You can't be too careful.

He straddled the shiny red thing in his ungainly fashion. Legs falling down and over the edges of tightly stitched padding. A saddle not up to the demands of even half a human being. He may have had 4 legs for a brief moment of convulsion as one foot missed and the other too failed to connect with the chrome rung placed especially for that purpose. He changed position quickly, twice.

He sat in the stillness. The silence broken. Or was that the noisiness broken by short moments of silence? It was a side street. There was a near constant ache of traffic. He had found a balance of sorts. His legs stuck out from beneath his jacket. They seemed pinned somehow between the hovering weight of his body and the cushioned wanna-be comfort of something that looked good in red.

He sat like a sheep balanced precariously on its stomach, with legs dangling down.

His eyes wide and innocent. He chewed at a dried tomato plucked from a foccacia too rich to tackle head on. He scanned the counter and the array of bowls and platters containing the other choices he might have made.

"Let's open all the windows," a waiter chanted in a quick shocking burst of enthusiasm before going ahead. He didn't mind. He didn't like to say. He was happy with them closed. They kept out the noise.

SCENE 4. The Store

Enter incontinent

*Am I happy?
I'll tell you why I like you
Worrying
To intimidate someone
An unfortunate accident
A clock*

He pulled his head back slightly from its place of resting fullness in his hands and moving he allowed still fingers to brush against the crown of his head. His forehead. His eyebrows. Still hands and moving head. He wandered what death was really like to someone alive to experience it. Like anything but nothing. No sensation. No words. No. Nothing but a cavernous nothingness.

He rested his left foot over the heel of his right and knew for sure that he was not yet dead. Because he could feel it. And he had a slightly upset stomach so he was conscious of not wanting to vomit through his arse. It could happen. Suddenly and without warning. Or at least warning enough to avoid it. He did worry about this from time to time. His friend was a paraplegic. This meant that she wasn't a quadriplegic and she had the use of her upper body but not her lower body. So she still had to sit for ever so long in a wheelchair. He'd never asked her but she didn't appear concerned about shitting herself in public places.

He was neither a paraplegic nor a quadriplegic. But had, in any case, been caught out, at least caught short though not actually caught, having decided to fart but was unprepared for the follow through. Short and long. He froze for a moment then walked very carefully away. It can happen to anyone. Particularly in lifestyle shops where there are lots of rotary fans around and you're moved to fart by the sensation of all of that moving air around your body and despite being neither a paraplegic nor a quadriplegic you suddenly shit yourself because you had an upset stomach in any case. And sometimes these things just creep up on you when you least expect it. His mother always said 'There's no point in worrying about it', but I don't think that was quite what she had in mind.

He got up from where he was sitting. Walked to the table that was placed there specifically for that purpose, selected a cheesy biscuit and ate it carefully as he walked round and around in a circle. Clockwise. Then he went and sat down again and wrote in his book for writing in that that was what he'd just done.

Luckily there was a little cafe bar, still in the same store and on the same floor, and it was nearby and he knew because he'd been told once by someone who knew, that cafe's and other places that sell food, even if it's junk food, are obligated by law to have a toilet, preferably more than one, for the use of their customers, because most cafes cater for more than one person and people who eat food tend to want to shit sometime afterwards. Maybe not straight afterwards but possibly straight afterwards depending on what they'd already eaten that day and when in the day they'd eaten it. Eating places are obligated by law to supply a toilet or toilets to those people who eat there for their use thereof or who so forever may choose in perpetuity. So even though he didn't see one straight away he knew that there must be one so he stood very still and slowly looked around.

Just off to the left of the food bar he noticed the sign that stood for toilet so he walked very carefully towards it. The first one. Because there were two. Which is good. Because different people have different needs and the first one was for men and people in wheelchairs who may or may not be paraplegics or quadriplegics because not all people in wheelchairs are either paraplegics or quadriplegics...or men. The first one had a sign on the door that said 'out of order. Use the toilet next door.' The other toilet was for women, he thought, because women must have special needs in terms of personal hygiene and in any case may not want to share a toilet with either men or people in wheelchairs regardless of whether or not they are either paraplegics or quadriplegics or other women. This toilet was engaged. And there wasn't another one, which, he thought, was reasonable though inconvenient. Because it was only a small cafe bar and you don't expect everyone to want to use the toilet at the same time. Or shit themselves. Even if they have eaten something dodgy which may or may not have been junk food. So he stood very still and waited carefully outside the door and hoped that no one else would turn up to use the women's toilet or the men's toilet for that matter but have to use the women's in any case and stand next to him because the women's toilet was occupied and the men's was out of order. His mobile phone rang in his backpack, on the floor, beside him, and he carefully looked down at it, with his eyes, without moving his head, but he decided not to risk bending over to answer it.

He wondered if reality really was stranger than fiction.

There were hundreds of hanging lights. Two escalators. And the room was full of Chinese antique furniture and doors.

SCENE 5. The Post Office

Enter a man sitting. Late summer sun

I just like to make fun of myself

How old are you anyway?

Soap

An aeroplane

To refer back to an earlier moment

To keep things moving

He sat in the doorway. On the post-office steps. His right leg was bent at the knee and his chest rested forward, easy against his thigh. His hands were loosely clasped beneath the bent leg. There was no hurry. He sat on the granite steps like he'd always been there. It was a mild late summer's day. He had no particular business at the Post Office. He was just passing and the step was an opportunity to sit. There was no hurry. And any opportunity to sit and observe the world go by seemed worthwhile. He sat. He watched as the journeys of abstract imaginings overlapped in their travelling. As if through half closed eyes. He knew they were real people on foot, on their bikes, in their rickshaws, in their cars. He was refreshed by the coolness of the stone underneath him and comforted by the warmth of the late summer sun on his face. There were clouds, he thought. He didn't look. He felt the light shift as the sun was revealed and concealed for moments. Momentary. His shadow shunted sideways suddenly before disappearing completely, briefly, into all shadow. Again the sun emerged and he lowered his eyelids in slow, measured response.

He watched as abstract images overlapped before his, in their travelling. Their journey from left to right. He sat.

The sound of bike bells and shoes walking over concrete, and wheels turning over asphalt entered his eyes, his ears, his gently opened mouth, his soft fleshy nose, along with a river of tastes and other sensations which he didn't name. He could smell soap from a laundry just round the corner. He didn't describe it. He heard little cries of joy coming from the streets around him. Snippets of conversation. Shouts of anger punctuating the moving images, the dynamic shifting forms. He sat. His right leg bent at the knee.

The weight of his upper body rested comfortably against his thigh. He could feel the volume of his abdomen expanding and softening around his leg with every breath. He looked into the deepness of his stomach and felt himself sit. His hands clasped loosely beneath his leg. He felt the world changing before him before his very, very eyes, softening, half opening to witness the parade of near, now abstract images passing before them. Half closing against the shifting summer sun. The flashing light.

He sat in soft, summer cotton pants. He felt his hands emerging from the crisp cuffs of a clean shirt, gently clasped beneath his leg. A light, wafer thin jacket was held loosely together in front by the even pressure of his body against his thigh.

As he watched and listened he felt the texture of words and sounds from the street long before recognition or comprehension. He saw the sound of lost temper dart out from between the crush of soft summer fabrics. He heard the moving mass fade in and out as it bled into the folds and forms of greying, decaying architecture. He felt his hands clasping gently beneath his leg. The crowd moved on. Pulled inevitably sideways, from left to right, into and out of the frame of his desire and his site/sight. The skin of his face drank up the warmth of the late summer sun. He felt cooled by the movement of air across his tongue. He carefully pitched his weight sideways into his left buttock and quietly farted into the stone step. He settled again. He sat.

Enter fifty years later

I walked into the Peace Park understanding that a momentous, tragic event had taken place on this site. I looked around at the gardens, the very ordinary plants, perhaps it was the time of year, I wondered at anything that could grow in this place. I looked up at the skeleton of the Post Office. Still standing after the balloon and the bomb and 50 odd years had passed. I felt that I must feel. I felt feeling. I was sorry that this had happened. I wondered if they thought that I was American. But I felt nothing until I entered the museum. I saw nothing until I saw the clock. The watch that had been on someone's wrist.

The clock that had stopped at precisely the time.

The photograph of the street and the Post Office and how it had been.

The molten keys.

I was leaving with my feelings when I saw them. Against the wall of the room, beneath the windows, the Post Office steps. There sat a man. The shadow of a man. The late summer sun shone in, or not, through the long windows. Depending on the cloud formation and the speed of the air mass, the sun burst in, or not, and fell across the Post Office steps. The shadow of a man appeared or disappeared into other shadows, depending on the light.

Where he had sat.

THE ELEVENTH ACT

Remembering the Image

The light was going. She took a glass from the table, washed it, and helped herself to the booze trolley against the wall. They'd managed to drag a settee out from his apartment and set up a record player on the sill of the bathroom window. As she sipped at something warm and bubbly and looked out across the roofs of buildings she thought of a place called Tumbarumba



14. Kowloon Rooftop

SCENE 1. The Painting

Enter girl in a laneway beside a rail yard, at night.
People sitting in deck chairs overlooking the water, at night.

Things are not what they seem.
Fantasy.
Fabrication.
Lies.
Hardly remembered things.

The girl in a laneway beside the rail yard isn't about to do anything, which is why I'm watching. But she knows that she's being watched. Not by me of course. No one knows that they are being watched by me. She composes herself in anticipation of some significant moment. There are none foreseeable, unfortunately, so the moment itself becomes the important time. Her ever watchful self zooms in, for a close-up. Her camera? Well she is directing it, as mine observes me watching her. She's alone in a laneway, being observed. Now that's significant. And I could be anywhere. I certainly wouldn't have placed myself behind a railway station in the middle of the night.

I am sitting in a deck chair overlooking the water. It is the 'not-silence' that surrounds this imagined scene. Not-silence because it's clear that nothing is happening or being heard, much. There are sounds. Well, there's lapping water. But it's become like white noise as I sit, not falling into it but still it is closing in, like a camera for a close-up.

I am at once in front of and behind its searching eye. It follows the furrowed folds of fabric of my jacket. It waits, is waiting there to embrace each suspicious moment, as they surface. Each disturbing movement that emerges, out of and away from a tired bony structure under muscles, under skin. Every soft and shallow breath disturbs the tranquil surfaces, like a cascade of natural fibres crashing like waves over each other. Humping horses over shoulders and across my chest and down.

Her all-seeing eye traces the lace around her neck, from behind, like a dirty white tattoo over sallow skin. It searches between her straight blonde strands of greasy hair. She'll wash it tomorrow morning before breakfast and it can dry of its own accord, then, under the warmth of the radiator. But that's another location. She weaves away from this diversion to return to the real drama. It follows her shoulder blades as they move out and in, from breath. It notices the distance between, expand and retreat as she sighs deeply, just once more for the camera. It's tidal, her body.

And the thought takes me back out and into the black waves. I adjust my heavy self, cumbersome in the light canvas sling. Clearly the listener will pick up the sound of hollow scraping wood and creaking fabric.

Perhaps someone faints. I think not. What is it they say about children and pets? Well, anyway, I won't be upstaged by a dramatic falling action away and to the left.

Possibly the crashing of tables and upturned trays. Then of course there's the body, another one after mine, slumped ungainly on the deck.

She's enough! Still standing, immobile in the cobbled lane near train tracks after dark. What's her sound source? The camera pans slowly down her back, to the lacy, silky pucker that is lost, there, over her hips. It blisters and bubbles away, disoriented. Off the boil of her calculated breathing and the effect of some tantalising little breeze or other.

I am ready for the shot of the face. It must be something to do with the salt air and the cold. My eyes are glassy and wet from the spray. Let's call them tears, not to waste this deeply moving moment on a weather report on salt sea air and post-nasal drip. I've got a head cold. The eye emerges from scratchy woollen textures and pursues each horny fibre till they become soft neck skin. Sinewy wrinkles and stubble, and pores.

Straight to the glassy teary eyes and the promise of slowly closing lids. Closer and closer, and just as tear ducts open and the salty saline solution pours like rain over cheeks.... I allow a phone to ring.

She is beginning to shiver now. Part cold. Part fear, and part self-loathing. She is aware, however, that the whole thing is a fantasy. She is watching as she watches and her camera sees. She is critical of this need she has uncovered in herself. To be appreciated on every subtle level imaginable. Even the ones that can't be filmed and seen by an adoring public, or penetrated by the seeing eye.

There are others on the deck.

There was no one on the phone.

There is someone behind the door, off the walk, beyond the cobbled lane.

There is no audience to sit and tearfully contemplate the standing, sitting, watching enormity of each and every moment of it.

SCENE 2. The Photograph

[Enter the scene of a crime](#)

I was put to bed.

The sky is very dark.

A shoe. A sledgehammer.

To listen attentively.

To take a leap.

I couldn't get close enough to see him but I knew that he was there.

I knew how he'd be, there.

I could see, in my mind's eye, the look. The wide open eyes looking out like you do when there's no light to see and you're searching for something to see. Something particular.

The eyes are wide and open and the intention is out there, but the 'not seeing anything' has a sort of impotence about it. And there are all of those faces looking back and into the eyes that are seeing nothing.

They were seeing, for sure, because the street lights gave off plenty of light for seeing.

I could see it on all of their faces, the look.

The dull, tepid looking out and down.

The sort of look you get when you can see what you're looking at but you can't quite believe that you can.

They just accepted that they could see without really trying and that he couldn't.

Well, he was dead of course. I didn't want to say it. What do I know about death?

There were about ten or eleven of us at the scene.

The three cops (I could tell because of their hats). Or they may have been Firemen, but there were no flames in sight. And no smoke.

Anyway, the three of them in their particular hats were still attached to the wall.

When I say 'attached', there was no mountain climbing apparatus holding their bodies half way up the roughly rendered surface. It was simply a gravity thing.

There was just enough horizontal thrust to hold them upright and in place, but not so much that they couldn't move about.

You know! Look around, make a few notes, light a cigarette, look down to see what happened to a one for whom the tables had turned.

There was a group of others – four and a half, four and three quarters in number, if you count the slither of a man off to the right. They were all torsos and heads, which is all they needed really, and they were positioned just at the height from the ground where one would be if one had legs.

Three and a half of them wore straw boaters, which tilted at roughly the same angle as their heads, as they looked down to see what they were looking at.

Certainly the figure in the foreground appeared to be standing firmly, on the ground. But I could see from the stretch across the seat of his pants that he was peeling forward and away from a clear and transparent surface.

SCENE 3. The Newspaper Clipping

Enter 64 windows, Lucky Luciano, and his Chihuahua

Stop making assumptions

You owe me nothing

A wooden sailboat

A red car

To see the funny side of things

To loosen up and be a bit crude

A long lens can see and compress space
"The only other acceptably sharp areas were just a little nearer to the camera from the boy and just a little farther away." It was 6.25 am and Lucky sat drinking his tea and reading the morning paper. Though traffic was heavy in New York on the day this picture was taken, the long focal length of the lens used by the photographer made the scene look even more crowded than it was.
All usable space had been diminished.

There was the profile of a quite delicate porcelain teacup, which Lucky held lightly between his thumb and index finger. The thumb is not visible here so it must be discarded. It's his right hand holding the profile of a teacup. The right forearm simply doesn't exist. Lucky's left thumb is also missing along with most of the little finger, also on his left hand. He is completely absent below the ribcage and the front half of a Chihuahua protrudes from his left armpit. The very crown of his head is also absent. The mob courier him money monthly to ensure that he has the care that he needs. But Lucky is already a broken man.

A third of a chair is visible over his right shoulder and a fragment of chest of drawers over his right. A third of a saucer is visible behind what is partially a newspaper. Part of an ashtray can be seen on a fragment of doily on the chest of drawers. His dressing gown is piece-meal and 9 stripes on Japanese silk are all that can be seen of his tie. There appears to be some sort of a plate resting on a fragment of table slightly behind and off to the left of his left hand.

Lucky is both framed and confined by these fragments of self and furniture but appears remarkably unmoved by such brevity. He is suspended, age 57.

SCENE 4. The Painting and the Photograph

Enter Christina looking up from the field below the farmhouse

Carpet/rug/field

"May I have a closer look?"

Seeing her and it rather than the room, the field. Beyond the room. Across the field.

Looking to where she looks.

Her body is on the turf. She is looking up and out across the field to the hill. The place where her home sits. She is now inside a room. She is sitting at a table just to the right of the window. She sits, naked from the waist up. A stiff black ribbon holds her hair

back. A physician in a dark suit explains to the other men standing about the table, the nature of her condition (malady). It is dark outside. The streets are lit by gas lamps. There is a cold blue light. The room is open to the night air. The room is also lit by cold blue light. The room is on the 1st floor.

The field had recently been cut for hay. Christina is laying/half sitting on the stubble of grass, looking up to the house. A ladder has been placed against the building. It reaches 2 storeys, from the ground to the roof.

"May I have a closer look?"

The room is open to the night air. She sits perfectly still. Her hands clasped loosely as they rest on the green velvet tablecloth. Her hands are supporting her weight against the stubble of grass on the lower field. As Christina looks out of herself and up to the big house she doesn't feel the eyes of men on her naked skin. As she lies in the grass. As her hair is caught and pulled back by a ribbon. As her unfeeling feet hang lifeless in smart summer sandals. As her cotton dress is peeled back and gathers around her knees and ankles. As the room is bathed in cold blue light. As the eyes of men look inside her for a truth more profound than any they have seen before. As the light casts shadows into edges and corners.

SCENE 5. The Photograph and the Painting

Enter 27 men

Is that a lie?

I can feel my heart beating

Interrupting something.

To see through rose coloured spectacles.

A knife.

Some rubbish.

Eyes caught

Waiting

A work force

Coffee pickers

Peeling paint

Post office

Small village

Boy on a wall

Body in profile

Mobile

Head moves

Dog in back window of car – bobbing head

2 desks

Sitting on half a seat

Two women sat at their desks in the small room. They remembered the detail of working the machines but the machines were absent. A boy appeared to be playing a piano over the entire surface of the wall behind them. The women wore crisp white, short-sleeved shirts and slacks held up by black braces. One pair of slacks was black, the other white. Both wore comfortable shoes. The woman on the right was sitting slightly to the edge of her chair. Her shirt was buttoned to the collar. The other woman sat in the centre of her chair and her collar was unbuttoned at the neck. The desks were placed apart from each

other with the one on the right slightly behind. This desk was also slightly taller than the desk on the left.

The boy on the wall continued to finger the invisible keys of his piano and he appeared to be looking directly towards me, though his eyes were in shadow, so it was difficult to be absolutely sure. A chorus of men and women, also wearing white short-sleeved shirts and slacks held up by braces were standing in a trench at the front of the room. They were standing in profile and appeared also to be engaged in some industrious activity, also without the aid of the machinery for which the activity was intended.

Enter Carlos Marcello, Dorothy and Marjorie Madden

Magritte fireplace. Floral carpet. Radiator. Clock. Old photographs. Silhouette of a suited man half appearing from another, a previous, page. Door just open. Flock wallpaper – probably variations on crimson but difficult to say as the photo was in black and white. French armchair. Oddly textured floor like the crazy nesting of dying wasps. A potted plant. Difficult to say if it was alive or dead or entirely artificial. It certainly wouldn't have lived for long in that room. Picture within a picture. Topless man wearing a fez and playing a Spanish guitar or just a Guitar. He's not Spanish. Painting, of the room, on an easel, looking through the room and into the other room or hallway. There is a striped mat on the floor at the feet of the painted figure. Not Spanish.

An assortment of brushes and pencils contained by 2 cups. On the easel tray. One larger brush lay on its side on the tray. The bristle end protruding. He was watching me. Though not Spanish, and me neither Spanish nor a guitar player. Through my eyes he could see out from the easel and back into the room and through the open door. The door that was held open by some sort of vessel, maybe brass, but at least heavy enough to hold open a door that would rather be closed. The polished floor, maybe lino square tiles, or marble, led through the doorway and into the room or hallway beyond.

The Devil in a fez, playing a Spanish guitar and sitting on a Greek throne. One slipper on. One slipper off and away to his left. In front of the seated figure, on the floor, on the floor in front lay a striped woven mat. The painting on the easel was of the room in which the painting sat. The easel on which the painting was held was also visible in the painting. But this painted painting was blank. In front of the real easel in the real room sat a stool. Four legged. Nothing fancy. As I looked through the doorway, or as he looked out from the painting through me and back through the doorway we both could see the corner of the mat. The one that lay at his feet in the painting was now on the floor of the other room or hallway. Leading off the hallway to my left and to the painting's right an archway opened out into another room. More comfortable. Less Spartan. A thick carpet. A cushioned couch.

"The first Mrs. Madden – Dorothy, with their daughter Marjorie (1930) – had waited [in Majorca] for their breadwinner, through various incarcerations." The Magritte fireplace. The floating logs not burning. Not drowning. Not waving back from the fading photographs on the mantle. Carlos Marcello, topless, but still wearing a fez and one slipper, played the Spanish guitar from the easel against the white walled room. "He had taken a house next to the chief of police, set up casinos and got hitched a second time (to the post-master's daughter)."

A silhouette of a suited man was half appearing out of the darkness of a previous page. The door was just open. The room was lined with flock wallpaper. Probably variations on the colour crimson, though it was difficult to tell through the black and the white. Oddly textured floor like the crazy nestings of dying wasps. The comb changed seamlessly from its regular geometry to the now molten insanity clagged to the floor of flock's crimson room. A potted plant stood against the wall near the door. Difficult to say if it was alive or dead or entirely artificial.

SCENE 6. The Snapshot

Enter a suited man on the street, and shadows cast in burgundy

*I've been working like a dog
I've changed my mind
A noticeable silence occurs
To wait for something
A man in a suit
Broken glass*

The barbershop. Windows on either side of double doors. Open. Screen doors closed. Three naked light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. View to the outside through fly wire. A street, a tree. Possibly the edge of a park could be made out. The bare footed boy sat high in the barber's chair as the barber worked away with scissors and comb. Nearby stood a trough for water and a small wood chip water heater. The boy's cut hair lay in tufts on the floor around the barber's chair.

The floor was unsurfaced. It was worn, through years of hair. It glowed soft and velvet smooth from all those years of hair oiled strands swept over and over. Every day. A suited man on the street, walked, absorbed in the doing of some errand or other. Something that reminded him of another, person or thing. Some other thing or personal other. He was somewhere else. Not knowing that he stood at the edge of his life. Soon to be once lived. On the verge of rich crimson and burgundy flock. A just opened door. A potted plant, alive or dead or entirely artificial. The French armchair on the crazy nesting floor of dying wasps. From crisp geometry to marbled paper in quick time. The bare footed boy in the barber's chair had been taken by his mind away to somewhere. Else. He had already left the shop. For somewhere other. Some other thing or personal other. The dullness of the flock wallpaper in the poorly lit salon. The shadows cast in burgundy, of leaves and branches alive or dead or entirely artificial. He walked, self-absorbed along the street, as if through swirling crazy nests of dying wasps still driven to build. Now marble cake. A swirling mess of lemon and chocolate sponge. Continuing on inside the walls. He wondered if he put his ear to the wall would he hear them busying themselves and dying still, swarming into the cavity. Guarding fiercely the urge, still. To continue building, and getting it wrong.

Enter Jasmine growing on the fence

One cut. 2. 3 snip. Cut. Cut snip. Hmm. Mmm. What to do on a day like this oh. Hello, oh hello. Jasmine growing on the fence. It took me back it took me on. Oh jasmine growing on the fence. You smell so sweet. Oh howdy doody brother yes. Jim started in the business quite early.

As an apprentice at 13 he swept the floor and ran errands. He would save locks of the longer hair and when he had a moment, practice cutting. Love that hair. The smell. The oily feel. The way it floated about across the floor, picked up and tossed about a bit by breezes. By gusts of wind through the fly wire screen. Picked up and moved about. He chased it about the room with his dustpan and broom. How the old boys would laugh and tease him, running around the room 'like some crazy whirling A-rab dervish' they said. Anyway, in time he was cutting real hair. I mean hair still attached to heads and faces, ears even. He didn't even mind nostrils. I mean it all had to go didn't it. And for someone to trust a person enough to allow them up their nose with a pair of sharp scissors. Well, that's something special.

You can't lose sight of the big picture, he was told. Someone comes in here to get sorted out, well that means everything. It's not just over the top with a cutthroat. But there's some that wants just that too. You've gotta respect that. But this is more. Shave that neck, trim those ears. Them eyebrows. Sort out those mo-staches. Them noses. Yea, he loved it and before long it was all his. Over the moon he was, on the day he got his own set of keys and could come into work at sparrow fart. He'd open up. Mop the floor. Scald all of the combs and scissors under boiling water from the wood chipper in the corner, and still have time to brew a good strong coffee and settle back in the chair with the newspaper.

He read everything. All of the papers and magazines that came into the shop. He got there first. There was nothing he didn't know about the news of the day. And from his customers he found out the rest. The best crop to sow. What to grow and how it will fare and under what conditions. He knew when to be sending pigs to market. How to buy and sell shares. What the politicians were up to, or not up to, which was more often the case. He knew about love and life and gods and music. And magic. One fella once talked him through how to build a barn and install the plumbing and electrics. The lot. Thought he might give that a go one-day. Not that he had much use for a barn. But isn't a house just a glorified barn? He could certainly do that. He loved that thought, to think that he knew everything that he needed to know, and then some.

SCENE 7. The Sculpture

Enter life-sized man standing on a plywood square

*Am I conservative?
I can hear you breathing.
To shift gear or change mood.
Losing control
Wet eyes
A bag or suitcase.*

Mixed media. Life-sized man stands on a plywood square. Not quite as long or wide as he is tall. He wears polyester slacks dipped in plaster. He is naked from the waist up. He has a lit cigarette in his left hand. His arms hang loosely down from his shoulders, at his sides. He is bald. He is looking straight ahead. Behind and slightly to his right a window is sealed against the light with white butcher's paper. A shabby skirting board runs along the bottom of the wall, where it meets the floor. The butcher's paper is creased, as are his trousers. Though there has been some attempt, some time in the past, to iron a crease down the length of his slacks. He is almost entirely unpainted though certain details are slightly tinted. But on the whole the scene is ashen-toned and greyed back. John was born in 1946 and the men he collected remained alone in rooms similar to this one. Men poured into themselves. A slip of unbaked clay filling them up their insides.

He sat with his grandfather by the lake. He was with his grandfather. The old man was nearby but he wasn't really with him in that moment. Or was so completely with him that there was no need to talk or even to acknowledge the presence of the other. He sat cross-legged by the campfire. The lake in the background puckered from a northerly breeze. There was a small kitten in the breast pocket of his overcoat.

The kitten looked directly at me. The young man was looking down and into his thoughts. Absorbed in self. Self-absorbed. His legs were crossed at the ankle. His arms crossed at the wrist. A skillet of bacon sizzled on the fire. A billy can of hot water not yet made into tea sat on the rocks at the edge of the fire. The old man was sitting next to him on the ground. His unlit pipe hung down from between his lips. He may have been breaking eggs into another pan though I couldn't see the eggs or the pan. The old man was not his grandfather after all though he could have easily been, if years had anything to do with it. All was black and white and shades of grey. Except for the red-spotted handkerchief, which I couldn't see, and the kitten, which I could. The young man continued to look down and into the wisps of smoke and smells of cooking bacon and sizzling self. His hair fell up from his head, as it had been in sleep. He slept in logging camps, in ditches and swamps and mud flats, next to railroad tracks and inside country jails. He journeyed through all of America this way, and now he sat cross-legged by the lake. Unmoved by his hunger and the cooking bacon on the fire. I can't hear you breathing or see your eyes wet from smoke and cold morning air. The inlet behind them went further into the distance beyond where I could see, before joining the lake. The tea

was not yet made. The lake was skirted by dead, dead trees. The rippling tannin of cold water tea lapped silently around the rocks at the foreshore.

In Europe there are the beautiful and disturbing male torsos of Jan van Leeuwin. An artist growing up in this period, who wanted to paint what he saw, could find no ready models. Where were they in the bacon smoke? The damp wet boots the colour of mud and cold tea, which once fired, has been stiffened and thought too deeply.

Blisters at his wrist

The bites of disturbed insects

Welts. Burns

Stinging nettles

Antihistamine

White lumps pushing through red raw skin

Stinging with the wanting to leave his flesh. Jump out of his flesh.

Stinging with revenge. Rejected, by his blood. His skin. His flesh.

He scratched lightly over the blind heads left by insect bites.

The excruciating pleasure of scratching lightly at the lumps on an insect bitten wrist. The bumps. The tops. The lumps pushing upward and out of his flesh, but not clear of it. Not able to escape. Unable to take off. The alien rejected welts. Oh. Stinging, delicious revenge of my body. Trying to be free of the pain. To be emptied of the itch. I love to hear the music as it sits on the lake. It floats suspended above the tannin still waters. Not free but wanting to be. So much wanting to be sucked out and away but suspended in any case between the puckering dark waters of the tannin lake and the colder air above it. He looked down and into himself, the rising smoke. The sizzling fat spat into the cold morning air. His arms crossed with the thought of fading bitter bites. The sand flies. The mosquitoes of the mud flats. His crossed legs poured full and still drying into the shape of sitting. Oh the fading, biting pain of bitter biters. He had set forth to seek his fortune and found the company of old and abandoned men. The kindness of swamps and ditches. The sizzling skillet by railroad tracks. The unmade tea still cold in the can. Oh the flirting flies. The biting bitches there to keep him in sodden ditches, company. Gently trailing his nails across ecstatic screaming skin.

SCENE 8. The Photograph and the Memory

Enter the bishop and the actress

Just go with the flow

Don't touch darling

Entertaining or charming

To throw something away

A parent figure

A storm.

Are you cold, still photograph?
Still, a photograph? A photo still
The bishop and the actress.

Held to him, against him, his arm around her. His hand over her right breast. He kisses her head as he would the head of a child.

3 hands on her body. One hand holding the staff

His eyes are slightly open, or slightly closed, as he kisses her head

Eyes open but unseeing he holds her chest to his chest

She holds her arm to her waist. Her eyes open but unseeing

He holds his staff at his side. She rests her arm on his wrist

He holds her breast to her chest. She leaves her head on his chin

He holds his lips to her brow. Are you cold?

She stands by the road in the evening light and looks away towards the view and in the direction of oncoming traffic, of which there is none. Her suitcase sits on the shoulder of the road. There's a bend in the road and the double white line ensures there'll be no overtaking of vehicles as they climb the mountain and take the bend.

Oh I wish. I wish. I see and say and over the road there is freedom and I could away from my suitcase. My hands still clasped behind my back. Far and away. To cross the double white line, off the road and into the darkness like a rabbit in the night. Bound away. Bound behind. Held by the breast the greedy soft hand on my chest warm in the dim light, as God is my witness. My staff and half closed eyes the smell of soap and perfume and hair. The life I might have had across the double white lines. My falling folding gown. The gingham skirt and flat-heeled shoes of twilight wait as darkness grows and with it comes the falling sky. The trees and I.

Enter a man and his son

Hold me dad. Don't touch me. Don't look at me. Don't speak to me

Hold me dad. He cleared his throat and spat into the grass. He kept fiddling with the carburettor. Is that what it was? It was a smallish bit of machinery from a small engine.

Perhaps the lawn mower. The old Victa lay in pieces on the path under the clothesline.

Oh daddy daddy daddy. Hold me with your greasy petrol hands. Don't touch me. Look at me with your wet green eyes. Don't look at me.

Tell me how much you love me now and always have. Don't speak to me.

Eat me up. Let me roll against the lining of your mouth before you spit me out into the grass. The broken glass, my bare and tired feet. Eat. Don't come near me. Oh dear me, my tired aching feet. My cold and angry heart. You've looked away. I took a naked chicken from the fridge. Had it run across the yard without its head before she threw it into a bucket of warm water and began to pluck its feathers out? Its naked back. Your balding head, looking away. Frowning into the thought of something said, or done so many years ago.

Was it you he held against his chest? Your silken breast. His half closed eyes now not looking as he kissed your forehead as he would a child's and loved you like a boy too young to know the boldness of the hands that hold. She stood quietly and thought about shopping for shoes as he held her close and kissed her powdered brow. She wondered about which bus to catch when his hand was at her breast and his eyes were partly closed. I've changed my mind. I think the black ones with the heel are best. He held her gently to his chest. Are you cold my dear? But she was in another store and could not recall what came before. The smell of baby soap and hair. His heavy hand still resting there.

SCENE 9. The Hallucination

Enter floating kitchen contents.
Breakfast laying on the carpet before the open door.
Candle lit ballroom still in silence and space. Chandeliers

I'm going to panic
I'm not dead yet
To overdo or exaggerate something
Calculating
Lipstick
An intellectual

Vegemite on toast and a boiled egg poised to fall from the bench to the floor. A cup of black coffee. A plate of toast. A newspaper. A napkin. A silver coffee pot reflecting, now distorted, the pattern of the carpet. She lay on the floor in her pyjamas. On her back. Her right leg at rest, half way up and against the open door. Her head turned to the left she smiled across at the body beside her. His chin resting in her open palm. The brocade curtain was also open and pinched in against the window frame with tasselled rope.

Un-plugged and hovering above the kitchen bench – the toaster. A chrome bird. It was 7.20 in the morning, perhaps. The numbers of the kitchen clock were dishevelled and fallen from their place. All except for 12, 1, 2, 5 and 6.

As candelabra hung from the ceiling the couples still, in silence and space below, appeared frozen in time and dreamlike. The double and still stainless kitchen sink overflowed with morning fresh soapy suds onto squares of linoleum floor tiles. The Venetians were neither open nor fully closed to the morning light, picking out the white satin trim of her dark pyjamas as it fell into the room. The black and formless empty floor unseen the diamond squares of woven carpet. Oh rubber floor tiles and a power point still on, unplugged.

She took the weight of his head in her open palm and outstretched hand, sown through her elbow into softly patterned carpet. The weight of her body falling down and into soft pile and half read pages. The news of the day.

They stood around her in candlelight and musty silence, poised to begin or finish. Not dead yet but stacked in rows on stainless steel between wire rungs painted white. Dripping into the tray. Oh potted plant on the corner of the kitchen sink. How the floor has fallen away from unreflected candlelight.

Enter poised. A coffee pitcher

She stood poised. To dance. To waltz. Still, but for a quiver in her lower lip. About to cry but without hope and unable. The trembling lip. The trembling on and on in the candlelight. Only movement existed in candlelight and trembling lip. Her arm outstretched to be taken, to be

turned, by her partner, about the floor that was no more. And all the partners, no signs of life behind open glass eyes. Her ever-trembling lip shook the minutes and the hours from time itself, against a kitchen wall. 100 years. And fallen soapy froth. Her arm outstretched to be taken and whirled about the floorless room. Over a flawless floor. Black as pitch and out of sight. The couples still and facing beyond each other. Her quivering lips, a soft vibration beneath patterned carpet and the outstretched pages of her flawless face. The news of the day. 100 years. A coffee pitcher glistened in woven diamonds now carpet field she lay against the woven weft and smiled at the trust of his warm and heavy jaw in her hand. Light spilling through the old glass. Filtered through sheer drapes. Picking out the white silken satin trim of her darkly fallen pyjamas. Gathering in folds over lazy morning limbs against the diamond studded floor. The deep blue and patterned sea. Not taffeta and lace, no more 100 years, now melamine and morning fresh. The yet uneaten toast. Her lying. Side-turned head and softer smile. Softer still. Somewhere the quivering lip.

SCENE 10. The Photo Shoot

Enter Robert Longo, Thomas Henkle, and Cindy Sherman

"She dropped her bundle."

"I've found my keys."

To pace

To refer back to an earlier moment

A school.

A sexy person.

Just to the right of the main door at 635. The numbers and their corresponding buzzers were grouped in rows of 6.

"Hi Bobby! It's me!"

There was a whining, sickening buzz from the intercom and she pushed her way into the building. Robert's door was already open as she left the elevator on the 4th floor.

"Bobby?"

"I'm out here!"

Robert had been shooting friends and family for hours, against the outside wall of the elevator well on the roof of his building. People had been coming and going all morning, but for now there was just his neighbour Tom, and himself, behind the camera, with a glass of champagne. Tom was dancing to The Velvet Underground in a dark suit. Robert was trying to shoot something particular against the orange wall, before they took a break.

"Howdy cowdy! Have I got a frock for you! Just drop your bundle over there. We're nearly done. Thomas Henkle. Cindy Sherman. Tom, Cindy. Cindy, Tom."

"Hello Tom!"

"Hi Cindy! Loved the show on 58th!"

"Just dance Tom. Nearly done."

Robert was going for something 'dropdeadgorgeous' that looked like homicide. Everyone was in smart suits and party frocks.

"Just dancin' and dyin'. Groovin' around like being shot through the head."

Cindy was polite but didn't take direction. Robert knew this in advance and didn't expect her to wear his gorgeous frock. She'd come prepared.

Cindy had a short blonde wig, a blue satin blouse and a grey skirt to just below the knee. She wore 2-inch heels that had belonged to a friend who'd been run down by a horse in Central Park. The left shoe still had a deep graze across the toe from being dragged for several yards across gravel.

The light was going. She took a glass from the table, washed it, and helped herself to the booze trolley behind Robert. They'd managed to drag a settee out from his apartment and set up a record player on the sill of the bathroom window. She sipped at something warm and bubbly and looked out across the roofs of buildings.

She remembered Tumbarumba.

THE TWELTH ACT

Remembering Lace



15. Lace Curtain

SCENE 1. The Lace

You're not dead yet
I'll tell you why I like you
Describe something in detail
Fighting (something or someone)
A Newspaper
A bottle of alcohol

Seeing out at the same time as being seen within. Its innards seen. With in. With 'in' it was seen from without. Seen. And the sound of water, sparse and flicked from delicate fingers. Not yet wet but dispelling the wetness implied. Lied over and over again, the memory of something real. A souvenir of an experience that had been promised. With the promise even recalled though not yet had. Sealed in droplets the little bobbing bottles of promise promised and floating on a tide. A lying tide. The bottles unbroken on breaking waves and foaming horses. Mist and missed. So many bottled promises of fire and storm and chiming clock tower in softness falling up. Tethered together by holes and souvenirs. The blue and the yellow. Not words on a paper nor sutures of thought preserved in alcohol blue. And yellow. Notwithstanding the pull of expectation. Down. But up and around in its mist. The droplets held together and apart in drunken gentle haze the soft implosion out. Within and without and missed. The overlapping lenses and the absence of thought. The magnifying moments as cloud and fire-rain pass over each other. The storm and the calm together in moments.

Without yet a thought he braced himself in tallness. A rigid structure contained and moving yet filled in softness the souvenirs of cells dividing. He braced against the violence promised in bobbing bottled messages drifting unbroken on a breaking tide.

I could kill you
He turned and looked out the window
To refer back to an earlier moment
Losing control
A red dress
A strong wind

A cloud of mist rising down and falling upwards. The delicate seal unbroken around the raging fire and cracking openness of weathered souvenirs. Still in movement all around and through the grey metal and ungiving of his hard and braced-fixed frame. The room of his gentleness held tight against the violent wind in droplets fell and flicked clear of frightened fingers.

Breathed through and unthinking the tightly held container of his gentle messages. Unwoken and drifting unbroken the shifting sands of his golden/grey beach. The foaming froth of falling water to the sky in him. Droplets still and bloody in their red sunsets of softer pleats and falling fabric moved by breezes softer still and still in softness. The red redressed by flaming blue and yellow to the core. Its weight and dampness rising more, within his rigid frame.

The fluttered feathers rose as one and off the lake at sunrise gone. He held their struggling feet against his chest while sounds of more became less and less. Softness rising in downy waves. A million wings and more took off inside his howling cell. Feathers dividing in woken gentle fright unbroken. Sealed in stormy weather and the hillside cracked open. And howling wind and howling rain, and the howling fire of a gentle dog left out the pack. A cloud.

Enter rising mist and droplets of fire and dust

He was unable to move in containment of moving. Held fast but for the fullness of desperate moving. Held tight around the cascade of searching. Along. Along. A long corridor and conduit. Ravaged from the inside and scoured by gentleness and peeling bells. His hallway opened. Slashed regularly along its length. Across its width. In its height from floor to ceiling blue. The sky is water through. And blood red new.

What are you staring at?
Outside the sky was blood red
To break the rules
Overcoming everything
A pair of sunglasses
A man in a suit

The softer, gentler cuts of staring, tired eyes. The searching stare of rising mist and droplets of fire and dust. Rising dust falling again as mud down the screaming walls of his rain. Built up and fallen down through a wall of water and feather down. And a million birds are flocked against the tarnished gold and faded green of old wallpaper over Hessian. Cut from the walls and rolled to contain the souvenirs of blue paradise. Fluorescent leaves of gilt slashed against his steadfast sides. The up and the down of it caught mid flight. His delicate suit of gunmetal grey now a vessel for romantic sunsets and avalanches of unbroken glass. The bottled messages of promise promised. The wounds opening into other rooms and other corridors otherness not yet thought into life. A gentle river flown and flown and flowing and gone. Again and again and again and gone. Unbroken rules dashed, softly against walls before each delicate moment of stillness. Held tight and captured in gruesome softness.

Enter a dream. Another room

Again it happened and as it went it went. It was ongoing in the rush of it falling and rising and broken together. It went along the path of not knowing the difference between the forest litter to a clearing not and the singing birds looked around the house of fallen cards like tinder dry and browning leaves lifted and tossed it grew the howling of it. Again it went to the other side of lifting and tossing to uncaring waterlily green, of dark green and tannin lake, of mosquito larvae and built constructions through the open door of another room, it chose blood over water or fruit juice or good coffee in a cup. I plunged it and poured over warm milk something like water then squashed in my hand, not concerned with the kill. It was all a dream caught in amber, not chocolate. A strangely disturbing music playing quietly in another room. His silent stillness was cut into by gentle burning. The delicate lightning pierced him through. Through the rising waters and the millions of singing birds. The tide broke softly across his floral carpet. He was galvanized in gunmetal grey. A tubular steel construction.

A vessel built for sterner stuff and braced against a flimsy mist. A fog. A delicate thought lapping at sandbags around the skirting boards in a quiet room. A steamy blue in another room.

SCENE 2. The Motel Room

Enter a dead starlet. A woman in a hammock. Floral Damask

Suspended in net, the reclining shadow held together a taut collection of holes. She sat. Her body sinking into the plush floral pile of the comfortable chair, as she lay in folds of lace and strung with pearls diagonally there and across the peeling bell of floral Damask.

It was ten minutes to midnight under the reading lamp on the bedside table, with ankles crossed and hands unseen clasped tightly at the hem of a spreading floral field and silk 'kerchief.

You're a taboo breaker
He no longer recognised himself
To pick a fight
Over-exaggerating
Dirty teeth
A fire place

A head laid flat, tilted back, held up and supported in hand over stretching holes suspended. With half closed eyes, half open and dead to the plaster ceiling unseen. Not to notice the diamond arse of a man in dog pose by the pool unseen. Near beach ball tanned bikini laid out to take the sun near floral net of shadow leaves against the tiled surround. Oh floral frock on floral pile and seeming plush the naked legs crossed at the ankles of naked feet too big and broad for sharp high heels. Lifeless under lamplight over crumpled floral Damask. A sitting dog of a cushion alone to guard in lifeless light, the pillows under grey Damask was spread. She looked up and away from comfy chair and lump of body sitting there. A short cut wig of tight blonde curls to rather hide an auburn mane, held back from face looked up yet fallen back, lifeless in, yet looking out from taut strung holes of suspended shadow over tiled surround. The pooled Damask.

From out of the filtered leafy light the shadowed green now the colour of tiled surround. The leaves of shadow held together by holes of light. The floral shadow pile pushed gently up from the comfort of the weft and weave. It took her passive weight and held her gently its leafy grey.

There's a full moon
She ran out and the door slammed shut
Describe something that's going to happen in the future
Doing something out of character
Lipstick
Car keys

The lacy blooms stitched together and held by space against her fragile and now seeming lifeless pose. The rise and the fall of the body her 'scape and the spread of Damask. Unseen by probably yellow light picked out the field of double bed. Stitched inside by daisy white, the nylon crop of petalled brocade and easy pearls strung fast the lifeless neck and mattress bound. Her pearly whites under painted lips no less, in deathly silence held her breath.

In time the floral field laid its petals flat from front to back on grass Damask in hand, still gripped tight at hem. Vapours rising upwards through gaps of silken thread between, once stitched and petalled drawn together over weft and furrowed weave. Now sprouting through her painted lips and gently clasping finger tips her gaping pearly whites.

Enter not to scale and floating. A lacy fish and horse's head

I don't know what happened
His skin was wet with sweat
To conform to the rules
Crying or laughing
A bowl
A cigarette

As the bell peeled his vessel rained up to the sky. A soft avalanche of mist rose from the pool beneath his feet. Fleeting fingers flicked off the drops, as they were due/dew. The startled now inflated ring of horse floated him above and in suspension from the pool. In climate held, he navigated gently through a rolling cloud and delicately trod the stormy waters of the deep up down. The thought of a man in a suit rolled against the petals of his floral skin now held together forgiving thread and wet with sweat.

The souvenirs of mist once had, collected in droplets in the air. At once a lacy fish and horse's head he trod the waters down below and sipped at the sky through parted lips, he flicked the dew from finger tips.

I don't know what happened next. It just seemed to continue within a filigree of sound that seemed to come from all around.

I've got to make a decision
Are you crying?
To keep the ball rolling
Questioning or interrogating
A memory
A glass of wine

At what points did it change? It: the understanding of what it was to be in the world, she wondered. She looked back upon herself, the back of herself as a young girl. As she sat on her bed strewn with petals and other garden debris. How had it got to this? Looking down and into the collection of leaf litter in her hands, where the faceless childhood? Even as she remembered she was being recalled by the sack of old woman in a straight-backed chair. With bitterness catching sight and looking out and accusingly towards her younger self and the absence of all of the years in between.

SCENE 3. Fog

At a predetermined point: a point held by those who know, to be the point at which water boils, a cloud of droplets forms. A swarm of bubbles rises through the water as one. Their connective tissue breaks and their collective nothing is released into nothingness.

She looked around and saw a dreadful mess
You're looking lovely
To confront something head on
Floating
A storm
A broken mirror

A web of fragile thread has woven together holes, now held by crocheted petals and the stronger fabric thrown casually and rug-like over some more substantial form. A bed. A comfortable chair. Now picked out in stained and broken glass. Carelessly overturned cups of tea or coffee soaked between the open weave of his puckered upholstery. The clusters of such growing things as daisies and sunflowers and orchids now enmeshed. A fascia of flowers through which the tolling bells, held together by souvenirs and time, toll. The bubbles of space thrown down and sat upon through her stormy weather. The web of walls once walked along through corridors at random with sights unseen in empty frames. A comb of remembrances in the maize of silken thread now rising up to that predetermined point: the point held by those who know, to be the point where clouds of droplets form and bubbles rise and burst their collective nothing into nothingness. She looked around and saw a dreadful mess.

[Enter a thing and a ticking clock](#)

The mass of bubbles rose in boiling around whatever the thing was that had been simmering in the place, on the thing, now taken up and emptied through a colander. Its hot and steaming transparency passed through the maze of baked enamel and over stainless steel.

Are you sure you can't remember?
He didn't want to leave
To blaspheme the space
Thinking deeply
A ticking clock
A long silence

A cloud of steam, a mist, rose up through the precious nothingness. A vapour of remembrances that could not quite be recalled became the lacy tolling chimes held apart but connected to in time. The thing. A long silence, and the woven smells of the thing that was, hung in the air. An open weave stood still and wondered for a moment what it was itself. A shadow of suspended holes held together by silken threads and daisy bells. Sunflowers and orchards strewn across the shoulders of itself. The vapours risen through a delicately ticking fascia of irregular time, of thoughts once had but now forgot, yet still were caught in the tired wallpaper of her maze of rooms. An open weave through which once poured a soaking rain

and rose again through honeyed comb. A drifting mist. A humid fog. A telling tale. A delicate web played out in lowered tones, in deference to the fragile life now playing softly in another room, now played out.

Enter webbed rivulets of water

Through the darkness of its open weave a cautious mist rose.
In the half-light the gentle weight of dust fell.
Unseen in the shadows a line of water trickled in narrow rivulets up a wall.

Have we eaten?
Tell me something secret
To plan something
Flirting or seducing
A shower
A handbag

The lack of light hung. A flimsy filigree, through generously open-woven as a host. A delicately darkened room at night. Dust settled and settled and spoke softly of a warmer northern wind, of gentle breezes and a thin disguise of shedding skin. The water vapour hung on every opportunity and dripped onto the ground around. The sticky floor retold the tales of journeys had. A damp brocade of flowers did not resist the tide that lapped at its edges. The floral carpet was taken again and again by dust and rising damp. Webbed rivulets of water both rose and fell like upwardly falling rain.
Have we eaten?

Licking through the gaps of finely stitched brocade, the hungry filigree tasted then swallowed whole in pattens made by holes collected and strung together.

He couldn't stop himself
I'm going to give up meat
To keep moving
Cutting or chopping
A knife
Steak

Its cords strung out and staked with fraying edges tied and trimmed around her hungry eyes. In knotted patterns stitched and laced and dropping quickly to the floor. A wild tattoo that puckered in response to a barely read line from a page. Hung in the air and nibbled at. A taste. Or swallowed whole, just for the sake of a loose collection of farts held together by delicate linen thread. The twitching legs of daisy bells, of sunflowers, of fuchsia barely still for long enough to register as a rest. Through delicately parting leaves the sounds of food preparation drew an immediate response. The parade of finely stitched flowers were waited on in the hallway in anticipation of something fallen through, and otherwise unnoticed from the bench. A rising vapour of casual disinterest rose through his leaf litter and precious tattoo. And sound of cutting through, now indirectly waited on against greying but still woollen carpet pile. A few tasty morsels were set aside the loosely thrown shadow of a flower field.

There was no mistaking that some excess from the randomly rising collection of drops would at last coalesce and fall to the floor, and be come upon by accident. Debris left by shedding leaves. One careless movement of the net and through it a remnant fallen down.

Enter uncertainty. And dandruff

Caught without the words to describe the words. Aching in need of knowing.

I've got to wash my hair
She felt confused by what had happened
To breathe more deeply
Releasing pent-up energy
A garden
A hand

I've got to wash my hair but my skin is already dry and flaky. Too dry for more product and I hate the water but I love the water. I am trying the judicious use of hair oil and it could work. Hard to know whether it is the oil or the massaging in of the oil that would be the answer to the problem. I hate to scratch my head but I love to scratch my head.

When I was waiting for a tram in Collins Street a young Indian student – an economist, as it turned out – said, "I like your hat. Where did you get it?" I quite enjoyed the challenge of explaining to someone new to Melbourne how to find a small hat in a large shop in a small lane some blocks away. Reminded me of my time in Paris when tourists from Ohio would ask me for directions in American English with a French accent. I always knew the answer. I could become one of those people of a delicate age who hang around in red T-shirts at major city intersections in order to direct people to somewhere else. I'd quite like to tell people where to go. I think I'd be good at it. Based on experience. It is surprising how often I find myself walking from A to B when I spot someone or ones who clearly are in search of a clue. I am desperate to tell them about something and for them to be very grateful for my help. What a marvellous resource I could be if only I gave a fuck. But I resist the impulse to be helpful and I go off instead, possibly to one of my few favourite places to eat, and I have the same something to eat that I always have to eat. You know? Once you've found something that you like and you are of a delicate age, stick to it. That's what I say.

It is important to know that when one is hanging in a trapeze harness... He was braced within the confines of a tubular steel construction. Unfortunately coffin-shaped in its 3-dimensional aspect, though open to the elements on all sides. From stillness the sparse sounds of dripping water began. Very sparse. A lot of space between irregular sounds made by droplets falling into water. The water takes us to the sounds of birds being themselves on an estuary in the very early morning. Whatever happens happens and the birds take off. Millions of birds. The sounds made by millions of birds taking off from the water and into the sky. The sky is red and dark with fire and smoke, as if the world is on fire in the sky, or first on fire on the ground and then in the sky. The ground cracks and splits open with the cataclysmic sounds of earthquake and violent eruption. The sound has built up from gently dripping water to horrendous earth shattering noise. Then sudden stop. Silence. Pause.

The fire brigade officer called out "This is the fire brigade.
What the hell is going on in here?
Can anybody hear me?"
The words came back "I can hear you."
They were the first words we had.

Enter slowly turning figure in decay. Projection.

Close up.
Silence. Pause
The suspended figure begins the slow dance. Treading water. Wading monkey.

He was a loose collection of holes held together by thread.
'He' was a complex pattern of stitches connected by holes.
As a delicate filter of light, a curtain against the world, they were happy enough.

That feels nice
You're shouting at me
To say something that's difficult to say
Criticizing
A knife
A parent or a child

He remained connected and supportive but was happy to move with the flow.
'He' remained defined by the fragile patterns around him but was clear in his uncertainty.
They worked well as a team over a sturdily framed gap in a wall with views onto the countryside and a Japanese maple.

I don't know if I can keep doing this.
There's nothing exactly wrong but something is wrong. There's nothing wrong. We're alright
aren't we? Yes, we're fine. We're fine.

SCENE 4. The Hanging Frame

Enter at sea in the air. A sky full of water

Caught in the air. It seemed like a contradiction, having the freedom that comes when gravity is just the souvenir of something remembered. At sea in the air, but still caught. Not unlike a side of beef but not on a hook and neither a leg of lamb tattooed from head to toe.

She felt her knees give way
I'm feeling very nervous
To break the rules
Overreacting
A cigarette
A leg of lamb

In light and dark and shades between he slowly rotated against him, through him, exhaling between intricately woven threads that spoke of daisy chains and meadow flowers, breathing quietly in and out the spaces left where spaces were. His fine threads were knotted together in a delicate pattern, the fragile petals picked out and pulled tight across his skin, notwithstanding the substantial lack of anything but space within, and an uneasy memory of the first snapping sound of wings struggling to be airborne. In an instant. Then gone. An intermittently dripping sound menaced by silence from all around. A hollow tubular steel construction held him fast in thin air. Unfortunately coffin-like in appearance but open from every angle to the elements. A mist rose inevitably through the filigree of finely wrought thread and snapping feathers sounding out. From condensation tiny droplets fell. The sky was full of water.

He was unsure about the yellow plastic skinned flotation device that appeared to hold him up: the ring of air between walls lapped at from every side by rising mist and gentle rain. A surprising duck looked strangely alarmed at being caught mid flight with a man inside. Fucked in a number of senses. Caught between the dickhead and the deep blue sea.

Am I happy?
You look sexy
To put things in order or clean up
Humming
The Devil
The deep blue sea

A lacy expectation hovered above his head while his rusty and slowly turning form rotated against him, and gradually looming longer and taking longer his fading light rose gently through a loose collection of holes. A brocade of uncertainty and as yet unspecified expectation clouded his mind. The wash of waves that gathered overhead began to spit a fine dust of ash across his tired and damp face.

So, I was just hanging there. Well, not casually. It was predetermined, but I was nonetheless suspended off the floor. There wasn't a lot of room to move but there was enough.

I remember enjoying that the lack of choice, in terms of other places to be, spatially, set up a series of quite interesting challenges. I like not having too much choice. Suspension was the 'given'.

Why did I say that?

Don't panic

Philosophising

To take a skeleton out of the cupboard

An odd sound

A big sky

I was wearing a trapeze harness and a rubber duck. Well, not so much a 'rubber' duck as an inflatable plastic tube with a duck's head, and little yellow wings...And flippers...And diving goggles...And a stretch lace body suit...And projections of a suited man slowly turning around himself to the sound of water dripping. An odd sound but appropriate I think. You had to be there, if you could get through. The water had risen overnight and emergency services weren't letting just anyone through. You really can't take that sort of risk when your waters have risen. I mean, you can't be sure exactly what's going on below the surface. You think that it's safe to just plough on as usual but you never can tell what might be there underneath. Subterraineally. Potholes are always a problem when you think that you are on your way to somewhere else.

THE THIRTEENTH ACT

Remembering a Performance



16. Performance Photo (a)

SCENE. I Could Pretend the Sky is Water

Prediction

Just as Betty had sat and knitted from a pattern, or was it that she had 'read from a newspaper' and the lines of words on the page, once read, embraced and were seamlessly drawn together by stitches? Anyway, she was sat on one of those three solid, straight-backed chairs, and as she sat her body remembered Tumberumba. And the old Council Chamber chair remembered the shape of her arse and recalled what it was like to support a seated figure. And I remembered Corryong through the filter of Mark's recollections of his childhood in the Otways. And the rain ran off the tin of the roof when it was not a showerhead, and it remembered to pass through it when it was.

I sat at the table, determined to remember.

...snow on the grass, enough to crunch underfoot on the way to the dunny down the back
...the green fruit and vegie van leaning into the corner as it rounded the bend into Hamilton Crescent

...frozen water pipes, grass held fast in pools of frozen water on the side of the path to the road

...the white tin mail box at the front gate; the number painted badly on the front then, later, when we could afford it, picked out in black metal and held by screws against its side

...the frost covered clothes on the line, dripping in the same regular holes on the ground underneath, past the grass and the dirt to the river sand uncovered below

...the wood shed, called the wood shed, full of bits and pieces and stuff in dark anonymous brown bottles and worn tins, and wood

...the smell of Jonquils, growing under the laundry window and beside the apple box covered by a hessian sack that was the back step, and the Daphne bush

...the wattle trees down the side and along the back, and how the yellow blossom got in my hair and down the back of my shirt

...the smell of wet cow shit and rotting wood and eucalyptus

...the feel of the stringy bark on the floor of the woodshed

...the vacant block over the back fence, owned by the council, where I built cubby houses out of old packing crates with my brother Bruce and Robert Condon

...the sound of the F.J. Holden and chainsaws being revived by my father

...my mother cutting kindling in the wood shed

...how we cut down the big wattle tree because wattle trees are dangerous and the man next door made some bowls from its trunk and gave us one and how I thought that that was pretty good

...how the lady at the end of the street always had the best kept garden and how this somehow seemed a comment on her moral character

While Betty had sat on the verge of the back veranda, plucking fetid feathers from a headless chook in the hot waters of a pale blue plastic bucket, or was it that the tired skin of her puckered feet soaked in the tepid salty waters of a silver tin milk pail as she poured over the cryptic clues? Anyway, she was sat on the edge of the wooden decking that skinned the veranda, and as she sat her body remembered Tumberumba. And the hard wooden boards remembered the weight of her arse and recalled what it was to take it sitting down. And I remembered Corryong as Mark had recalled Colac. And the blood ran off and away from the quills of the dead chook when it was not a feather pillow, and it soaked into them when it was.

...I think I remember
...my father cutting off the head of a chook at the back step and my mother plucking the flightless bird in a bucket of hot water, and the smell
...we ate the chook
...tall round bottles of preserved fruit made by my mother, and smaller ones with jam and pickles and more fruit and bottles of home made ginger beer with sultanas floating on top kept in a big cupboard against the wall of the dining room, and bundles of old newspapers stacked on the left just inside the door to the laundry
...that the door was red. In fact all the doors facing the outside were painted with red weatherproof paint
...that I've seen countless photos of our family standing in front of them, particularly one of my sister Terry in a mumu which confirms this
...that the door of the wood shed was just wood, though I've never been back to see it
...that on a clear day you could see Mt. Mittamatite in the northwest and Playles Hill in the south
...standing with my Aunty Freda at the clothesline and being shown how to turn trousers inside out and peg them by the waist band so that the pockets would dry thoroughly. I think that I've done this ever since
...the cold in the house, the damp, and how we would close off the kitchen from the rest of the house to keep warm
...that in the middle of the night I would cry out from bed with the cold in my feet and legs
...that on top of the wardrobe that I shared with my brother, in the room that we also shared, was the train set and the James Bond car and a model jet aeroplane that someone had made. My mother gave it away because I never played with it. I just liked knowing that it was there. It appeared to be diving out from between her sewing boxes and a stack of knitting magazines
...that our bedroom was also my mother's sewing room. I think this room was blue
...the built-in wardrobes in my parents' room
...being put into the shower with my father and how this didn't seem to bother him
...having my head under the blankets for as long as I could stand it, afraid of something lurking near the bed in the dark
...the small wooden porch at the front of the house, and the plain wrought iron balustrade down one side where one day I got my head caught between the rails
...the wood-paling fence I use to hide behind
...playing under the house and being told to get out from under there because of the spiders
...trying to ride a push-bike that was too big for me and not being able to reach the peddles and losing control and getting my foot caught in the spokes of the front wheel
...killing ants on the back veranda of my grandfather and Aunty Daisy's house at Cabarita Junction in Central Concord and thinking that this must be for them what weather is like for us
...that clouds are like really big feet but ants don't know what feet look like
...the scratchiness of the woollen shirt that I wore as a nightshirt and that I got to like it
...the truck collecting night soil
...the noise that the cans made as they were dragged on and off the back of the truck
...the smell of shit
...having poddy calves suck my fingers in the paddock of my best friend's farm
...driving in the car with fog so thick outside that it ran down the windscreen like rain
...stubbing the skin off my knees and the ends of my big toes and again before they'd properly healed
...that I'm still clumsy in thongs

As we had sat uncomfortably close on uncomfortable chairs around the stereogram, listening to the Goons, or was it that we had stabbed at our soft-boiled eggs with soldiers of toast at the dinner table? Anyway, we were sat on or above the irregular square of floor, and as we were sat the itchy pile of the Axminster carpet that covered it remembered what it was, to give in to the weight of randomly placed chairs and casually arranged feet, and we listened as the studio audience laughed. And Ron and Betty laughed. And my brother and sisters laughed. And I remembered the smell of the damp and rotting leather upholstery of dad's old Morris Oxford in the shed on the block at Tumberumba.

...sitting in the lounge room around the stereogram, listening to the Goon Show, and eating hard boiled eggs with fingers of toast and sweet weak white tea, though this probably isn't true because we always had to eat at the table
...driving rain outside and the power failing and the search for candles in the dark and the huge shadows cast around the walls of the kitchen and dining room
...going to local shows, fetes and dances and trying to be invisible
...that my father was playing the drums in the old-time band at one of these dances and that it was in the Corryong Memorial Hall
...being made to go to Sunday school and being scolded for talking
...the tennis courts at Corryong, Tintalra, Walwa and Lucyvale
...the football game where Kevin Mack lost his shorts and finished the game in his guernsey and jock strap
...the football games where it was so wet that you couldn't pick the colours of the teams for the mud
...a game where it snowed and no one could stay on their feet for ice
...the sound of wet leather boots kicking the wet leather ball, and the car horns going off
...trying to see over the dashboard to watch the football at the Corryong Show Grounds with the car parked facing the boundary fence and the sound of the windscreen wipers going and heckling from around the field
...driving onto a farm at Ournie with my father and up to where a tractor had rolled down the gully
...thinking that the colour of broken soil is the colour of life and death at the same time
...walking through town to school and trying to go different ways to keep interested
...watching seagulls land on the sandy school oval and knowing that they were seagulls because I'd been to Sydney and had seen them there
...the buses arriving under the pine trees at the front of the school
...talking to my friends in a camp voice after seeing Kenneth Williams in Carry On Camping
...(text from Kenneth Williams)
...the smell of cows milk and cow shit and damp hay all at once
...watching my uncle and my cousins trying to catch a fish in the Jeremal Creek
...driving a grey Ferguson tractor down a hill on a farm in Thougla with my sister and her boyfriend Ernie walking alongside
...driving a red Massey Ferguson tractor across the paddock of my friend Adrian Hogg's farm at Biggara while he dropped feed off a trailer at the back
...my brother pinching a packet of cigarettes for the Harris boys from the front seat of a car parked near the house on their farm, then nicking off
...having to hitch a lift home with the man who lost his cigarettes. I think he was their grandfather
...the bitter car ride back to Corryong with the angry old man threatening recriminations
...the car journey more painful than walking

...sitting in the front seat of dad's old Morris which I think was a Morris Oxford, which was given to him by my grandfather, in the shed on the block at Tumberumba
...the smell of the rotting leather upholstery and the small round dials on the dashboard and climbing onto the back of the old Fargo truck

I had held on for dear life on the back of a grey elephant at the Taronga Zoo, or was it that my knuckles were white with the gripping of the leather reins of a painted wooden horse at the Royal Easter Show? Anyway, my brother was lost in the crowd, and the beast, once mounted, remembered what it was, the worn and shiny weave of my little boy's shorts. The even pressure of thighs against flanks. Fists clenched tightly around bridle straps and show bags. The thrilling smell of fear and Fairy Floss in the flared and painted nostrils of a wooden sideshow pony, repeated in series around a suspended circle, like so many wooden Russian dolls.

...being led on an elephant at the Taronga Zoo – or was it the Royal Easter Show? – in Sydney

...the cold in the rooms at the Consolidated School and how we ran for the heater when we were first let in and how we were only allowed a moment there before we had to sit at the tables

...I can't remember eating lunch at the primary school

...lining up in the shelter sheds to be given hot milo steaming out of big metal cans. We could use our own mugs which had our names written on band-aids on the bottom

...lining up on the steps at the side of the school when a girl fell and got grazed and bruised

...that I was at the top of the steps when it happened and that I had made it happen

...the buses queuing at the front of the school under the pine trees, ready to take the farm kids home

...wishing I could catch the bus home with my best friend Ian Boardman who many years later died of AIDS

...waiting to see the last of the buses disappear up Hanson St. and along Towong Rd.

...getting half way to Sydney on holiday with my family and my father turning the F.J. Holden around and taking us home because the car kept breaking down. That I always woke up wishing that when I opened my eyes I'd be in Sydney

...that Ian Boardman lived with his family in a nice big house on the edge of Kosciusko National Park and that they had lots of cats and an above ground swimming pool

...making dams at the mouth of the stormwater drain near the tennis courts just down the road

...the way tractors would leave clumps of mud on the road after they had gone

...the way the cows lined up in the milking sheds and the red and the black and the white of their coats

...setting off alone for the butter factory to where the bridge crossed Towong Creek and seeing a platypus and being shocked by how small it was

...seeing dead cows and dead sheep and other dead animals of all kinds

...walking a long way out the back of the Hogg property at Biggara to pick blackberries and that the sweetest ones grew along the creek

...picking and later eating a pie made from blackberries

...my brother shooting a red bellied black snake near the blackberries on the block at Jingellic and that he hung it on the barbed-wire fence

...the chook shed at the bottom of the garden and how I was always afraid of chooks

...that the chook shed in Corryong remained empty for a long time after the last of the hens had either been eaten or died of disease

...being told that my sister had cooked all of the new chicks one time in Tumbarumba when she was trying to be helpful by turning up the temperature on their incubator
...how I wasn't much interested in poultry but some of my farm friends could recite the names of all of the breeds and draw these names into casual conversation
...the curve of Hamilton Crescent as it ran in the direction of the netball courts and the tennis courts, the golf club and the road that led down to the scout hall in one direction and the show grounds in the other
...learning to make a phone call by cranking the handle on the phone and following the directions of the operator
...getting a new Bakelite phone with a dial and being able to dial direct
...that Uncle George and Aunty Pat and their daughter Georgina lived in a neat little house on the access lane off Towong Rd. past the High School
...being taken out in a blue Holden that smelt of cigarettes and had a compass on the dash board so that my sister's boyfriend Jimmy wouldn't get lost when he was out shooting kangaroos
...how I would much rather have stayed at home
...how my Uncle George wasn't really my uncle but a family friend
...how Uncle George and Aunty Pat ran the local sporting goods store and that I believed that they were rich because they owned a shop and everything in it and how lucky Georgina was because I thought that she could have anything in the shop that she wanted and how much later she died of a stroke related to a bad car accident
...how they had a set of wooden Russian dolls that all sat inside each other and were kept on a shelf in the lounge room

Just as I had thrown-up into an otherwise empty ice-cream container in the back seat of the Austin Freeway, as the car wove its way through dappled light and overhanging trees on the drive down to Albury, or was it that the F.J.Holden was winding its way through the Snowy Mountains to get to lake Jindabyne and I was looking down and into the black water below? Anyway, as I slipped back and forth in the tray of the wheelbarrow as my brother pushed me across the yard, the barrow remembered to dump me onto the grass when I was the annoying younger brother and keep me safely contained in a plastic tub when it was the back of a moving car and I was half digested spew.

...the drive down to Albury and how the trees would hang across the road
...the petrol fumes in the Austin Freeway and having to throw up into an ice-cream container in the back seat every time we made that journey in that car
...the holes in the back yard where we played miniature golf
...being hit in the face with a tennis ball thrown by Chris Hunter
...looking for mushrooms on weekends on people's farms while my father cut up trees for firewood with the chainsaw
...my mother peeling the mushrooms so that they would be safe to eat
...the cow shit that you unexpectedly stepped into when crossing a field
...climbing through barbed wire fences and over slippery moss covered logs
...my father with one foot on the lowest wire while pulling up on the next so that we could scramble through
...the sound that the fencing wires made when my father pulled them apart so that we could get through
...the sound that the wires made, hung between power poles
...wondering how birds could sit on the lines and not be electrocuted
...the smell of petrol and oil on my father's overalls whenever I was close to him

...the smell of tripe in white onion sauce cooking on the slow combustion stove in our kitchen
...the hollow sound that gumboots made when they dropped from my feet to the concrete path
...the cold inside a rubber boot when you first put it on
...how disappointed I was with the first television pictures I saw
...the green upholstered couch that folded out to make a double bed
...being fascinated by the grooves embossed into cement paths
...the drip from the hot water overflow on the roof of the house
...how it would sometimes rush out in a burst of steaming boiling water
...the green wheelbarrow that my brother used to push me around in and tip me out of
...the area of town where all of the Housing Commission homes were variations of our own
...how my farm friends rarely if ever visited there
...the dirt road on the way to the local swimming hole
...the black mud banks of Jeremal Creek
...seeing my mother and father in bathing costumes down at the creek
...my brother and sisters getting me to pester my father to take us swimming and how he always said 'ask your mother' and she would always say 'ask your father'
...the photographs of the family on the sideboard in the lounge room and sneaking a look inside at all of the special bits and pieces that were too good to use
...the green and gold shield that was the badge of the Corryong Consolidated School
...driving back from somewhere at night and asking my mother why the moon appeared to be following us and not getting a satisfactory answer
...sitting in the back of the F.J.Holden and watching the stars and the moon appear to be following us
...the long trips down to Albury and stopping for a cup of tea from a thermos along the way
...the drive along the river road and how I always liked the look of water
...the climb up through the Snowy Mountains to get to lake Jindabyne

While Betty was relieved to hear that my bow legs and pigeon toes would probably right themselves, if my attention wasn't drawn to them, or was it that the inevitability of an alphabet, picked out in the coloured chalk that framed the blackboard, would calm my restless legs? Anyhow, as I struggled up Playles Hill in heavy leather boots the grazing cows looked on with suspicion at the shape of my arse. And I recalled the smell of milk and cow shit. And I remembered the noise made by trees dripping with dew into leaf litter in the early morning mist at Dead Horse Gap.

...the walk up the back of the school in heavy leather boots, up Playles Hill, as practice for the school camp at Dead Horse Gap
...the cows that grazed at the back of the school
...the grassy slope at the western side of the school oval where I sometimes played and twice got bitten by bull ants
...stripping down to my underwear and being weighed by the school doctor who suspected that I was undernourished
...how Gavin Showers had to keep his shorts on because he wasn't wearing any underwear that day
...that my mother was told how my bow legs and pigeon toes would probably right themselves
...that I had an in-grown wart on the ball of my foot and how I had to have it burnt off in hospital
...when I was coming out of the general anaesthetic I kicked the bandage off and my sister fainted
...that I was in hospital for 3 days and hated having a bed bath

...I was excited about having to use crutches but the wood hurt under my arms
...The long and interesting walk from the front of school to the back of the school and from the left side of the school to the right side of school and from the right side of the school to the front of the school and from the front of the school to the left side of the school and from the left side of the school to the back of the school and around the fence to the right side of the school and around the fence to the front of the school and the not so interesting walk back to the left side of the school
...school assemblies being held out on the asphalt in the freezing cold and having to do exercises to warm up and in the scorching heat and having to stand there till we were perfectly still
...the small bottles of milk with foil tops in wire crates in the shelter shed
...the smell of milk
...the concertina doors, between the three rooms of the junior school, that were opened for assemblies, lunch time and play time when the weather was too bad to go outside
...the alphabet drawn in coloured chalk around the edge of the blackboard
...the little chairs and tables on the wooden and linoleum floors of the rooms
...having my mouth washed out with soap for saying shut up to one of the other kids
...being sent with another boy to borrow the guillotine which I thought was some sort of liquid fuel and for some reason was kept on a table outside of the sick bay half way along the corridor
...falling into a big puddle on the oval and being soaked to the skin and being put in the sick bay until my clothes dried off on the heater
...the sick bay bed that I think had wheels
...the smell of girls who'd pissed their pants
...the girl that pissed her pants, not wet but smelling of it, riding a bike down the footpath at someone's birthday party
...how it must have been early in primary school because people stopped asking me to birthday parties
...coming back to school after being away in Sydney
...feeling nervous about having missed so much school but glad I had
...playing in the sand and on the monkey bars at the bottom left end of the playground
...becoming Adrian Hogg's blood brother behind the shelter shed on the left side of the oval
...falling from the monkey bars and being winded from the fall
...waiting for Ian Boardman to arrive on the bus when Ian had stayed at home and missing the play lunch that his mother would always pack for both of us
...being punched in the stomach by Norman Taylor when I told him that his beauty spot was a mole
...being afraid to go to the toilets when the big boys were in there pissing
...a boy pissing over the toilet wall

As my brother and I attempted to smoke stringy bark in a makeshift cubby that was an old refrigerator packing crate, or was it just rising steam from an armful of hot wet clothes straight from the copper that kept Betty hot and bothered? Anyhow, as my throat burned it remembered the fire siren and the look on Wayne Gordes' face as Betty chased him from the yard with the garden hose. And I remembered being swooped by Plovers as I walked along Strezlecki Way. And all the while the sound of women laughing and talking and the pouring of strong black tea.

...listening to women laughing and talking
...trying to learn how to whistle and to spit and being unable to do either convincingly
...being swooped by plovers and magpies on the way to Cubs
...playing cowboys and Indians with my brother Bruce and Robert Condron from next door
...that Bruce had a Davey Crocket hat with a real fox's tail
...that there was a fringed vinyl vest and a gun belt with a gun holster and pistol
...wanting to wear my brother's Davey Crocket hat that I think was a present from our grandfather
...not being able to sleep on Christmas night
...that the present was a battery powered James Bond car that my brother and I had to share
...that I sulked about it for days
...not being able to help myself
...yelling for our mother whenever my brother did anything to me
...sometimes getting my brother into trouble
...my brother and I getting a battery powered train set called a Train Set made in Shanghai China for Christmas
...that I still have it in its box
...being yelled at one day by my brother because I gave all of my marbles away to his friends to spite him, and my mother saying that charity begins at home
...my mother putting the hose on Wayne Gordes when he tried to jump our fence and come into our yard
...my brother and I trying to smoke stringy bark in the cubby we had built from packing crates in the back yard
...seeing huge thistles growing in some of the paddocks
...my mother talking about Patterson's curse and wondering if it was poisonous
...hearing the fire siren in summer and noting that it was always followed by a rush of men in cars and utes and trucks heading towards the station
...that we searched the horizon for any sign of smoke and how sometimes there was some and sometimes there wasn't
...watching the men and the big boys throwing hay bales onto the back of a truck
...listening to the little brown transistor radio and comparing it to the big stereogram which was always referred to as my mother's and knowing that mum's, which was in a shiny wooden cabinet and also played records, was somehow a better one
...that the first television program that I remember watching was William Tell and that for years I was fascinated by the test pattern and sat watching it for ages
...watching my mother pulling handfuls of steaming clothes out of the copper and feeding them through a mangle attached to the laundry trough
...seeing my mother with a white Simpson wringer washing machine and being fascinated by the wringer on it and how I once put my arm through and another time my hand and how the rollers couldn't get past my thumb but kept revolving burning my skin
...the way the washing machine sometimes flooded the laundry
...the Crepe Myrtle tree in the front yard near the fence that separated the front yard from the back yard
...mum's roses growing along the front fence
...balancing on the tops of fences
...the wasp nests under the eaves at the back of our house and trying to smash them with the broom handle

I had tried to hit a tennis ball before I could hold a racket, or was it that 'the swinging bridge' on the other side of Khancoban was struggling for stillness. Anyway, my failing grip on the wood and gut remembered, in movement, what it was to hit a ball. And an uncertain tangle of ropes and beams balanced a shaky figure when it spanned a deep ravine. And the still dark waters of the Jeremal Creek remembered to hold me up as my fearful body learnt to float on its back. And I remembered the sagging nylon net strung between iron poles on the pitted tennis court at Biggara.

...my uncle Alfie and Aunty Patt's new house in Beecroft and how the digging had turned up bits of different coloured sandstone and how I use to draw with them on the path
...the tennis courts at Biggara
...trying to hit a tennis ball when I could barely hold a tennis racket
...watching the tennis from the tin shed at the side of the courts at Corryong
...driving up into the Snowy Mountains to look at Murray 1 and Murray 2 Power Stations
...stopping at Khancoban on the way and walking across 'the swinging bridge'
...my ears hurting in the car on the way back down and being told to hold my nose and blow till they popped
...stopping at a man-made tropical lagoon on the outskirts of Khancoban, built by the Hydro Electric Power Authority and that it had a punt floating in the middle that you could swim out to and jump off of
...slipping on the black muddy bottom of the Jeremal Creek and falling under
...the murky green colour of the water as I sank to the bottom, gasping for air and getting mouthfuls of water for what seemed like a long time before my father pulled me out and then being sent to the car for sulking
...being taught to float on my back by Aunty Pat who was not my real Aunty but Uncle George's wife and a family friend
...my sisters hiding me in the back of the F.J. Holden when my father drove to the new Housing Commission house and how he must have known that I was there all along because he opened the door for me when we got there
...sitting in the holden parked in the back yard of the house at Hamilton Crescent, it was on a corner
...being taken to see a doctor in Sydney when my legs swelled up from an allergic reaction to grass mites – I could hardly walk and that this was somehow exciting
...catching a double decker bus into the city in Sydney because it was hard to find a car park
...my father pulling me out of my seat by the ear so that a lady could sit down
...the traffic lights along Parramatta Road
...driving on holiday to Tathra with Ian Boardman and his family
...driving to Khancoban at night to visit my mother's cousin Gloria who was on her way through and she giving each of us a jelly sweet covered in sugar
...driving with Uncle Alfie, my parents and Aunty Moira (where were my brother and sisters?) from Narrabeen to Beecroft in Uncle Alfie's car and having to hold the Trifle so that it wouldn't spill but making them rest it in the back so that I could look out at the scenery without worrying about it and arriving to find that it had been spoiled and Moira trying not to be angry with me
...I don't remember where my brother and sisters were

Just as I had wondered at how my crooked front teeth were the same as my mothers and my cousin Sharon and my uncle Alfie and my grandmother Broughton who had died when I was a baby, or was it that the irregular bars of the car's radiator grill were smiling into the face of oncoming traffic? Anyway, my father's shoulders remembered to support me up when I needed to see the Queen and Prince Phillip drive through Khancoban, and hold me down

when we were in the front of the Holden and I was struggling to see out in the days before seat belts and there was 'nothing to see'.

I remember

...going to the Dora-Dora pub and the publican showing me his finger in a little tin box and everyone thinking that this was a great laugh and how it was said that every night at a certain time he use to fire a gun

...walking into the bush at the end of Strezlecki Way

...wondering how electricity worked as I sat on the school bus going to plant pine trees with the school out the back of Thougla, or was it Tintaldra?

...driving in the F.J.Holden that was my father's on the way to Khancoban to see the Queen and Prince Phillip

...my cousin Sharon's same crooked front teeth as me and my mother and my Uncle Alf and my grandmother Broughton who died when I was a baby

...playing in my Uncle's house

...driving to Sydney in the green F.J. Holden with my parents, my three sisters and my brother
...loading up the car at 5 in the morning so that we would get an early start and mum packing a lunch to eat on the way and carrying out pillows and blankets for the back seat and dad tinkering under the bonnet and writing down the mileage in his little book and tying a canvas water bag to the front of the car in front of the radiator grill

...driving in the green F.J. Holden on the Murray Valley Highway out of Corryong and there still being frost beside the road for hours after the sun had come up

...how anxious we all were whenever the car played up in case dad would turn us around and take us back home

...the way the sunlight came into the car when the sun rose

...sitting in the front of the car between my parents and complaining that I couldn't see and being told that there was nothing to see

...being in the car while my father tinkered under the bonnet

...counting out loud with the others until the moment when the car was once again driving on asphalt and spelling out 't-a-r tar' or 'd-i-r-t dirt' when we'd reached a stretch of dirt road

...coming to a point where there were a multitude of roads, heading off in many directions

...my mother looking at the map and then my father looking at the map and continuing on

...sitting in the front of the car as we drove into a sand storm

...stopping many times with my father opening the bonnet each time

...sometimes there were herds of sheep or cattle in front of the car and on either side

...we turned off at various points along the way to stretch our legs or see some sights or have a bite to eat or drink from the thermos or the canvas water bag that had been hanging on the front of the car

...the Holden had holes in the floor big enough to get a sense of the road moving past underneath

...even for a later car, the Austin Freeway, which was also second hand, we did not join the RACV and we never had an accident

...my father driving right off the road to get away from the road when he needed to have a rest because he was getting tired of driving

...sitting in the front of the car reading a picture book while the car bounced about

...being desperate for water when the radiator had boiled dry and having to wait in any case till it had cooled before my father would fill it again

Just as it rained mud on the windscreen after a dust storm and the car horn got stuck in the main street of Tumberumba, or was it that the high throaty voice of Mrs Williams in conversation with Betty kept them screened and barely visible through fly wire at the back of the house? Anyhow, we got to see the ferrets in their cages behind the shearing shed, and I remembered how the signposts and guardrails shone in the car's headlights at night. And the ferret eyes glowed pink in the daylight. And I remembered the slow and satisfying journey across the river on the Wymah punt, when it was called a punt, being just as slow and satisfying when it was also called a ferry.

...driving into the main street of Tumberumba and dad tooting the horn because we use to live there and he knew people and the horn getting stuck and him trying to stop it because it was causing a big commotion on the street

...the wind was blowing and there was a lot of dust in the air when it began to rain and the windscreen wipers were wiping mud

...I can't be sure when but we called in to visit Nugget and Mrs Williams outside of Tumberumba and Mrs Williams offered me a banana but I said no thank you to be polite but I really wanted it

...the Williamses had a sheep farm across the road from where we had our block and they kept ferrets for rabbiting

...my mother and father climbing out of the car and the dogs barking and Mr and Mrs Williams coming out to their gate and mum kissing Mrs Williams and dad shaking Mr Williams' hand

...we all got out of the car too and it was very cold and Mrs Williams told us how big we'd gotten and we hung around for a while before mum followed her inside to the kitchen and dad followed him down to the shed

...that through the fly-wire screen door on the back of the house I could see into the room that I think was the kitchen

...I could hear my mother and Mrs Williams' high throaty voice as they chatted inside but I couldn't pick up what they were saying

...I think that my brother had gone with dad and Mr. Williams down to the shed and I must have followed along because I remember the talk was about foot rot and drenching and dagging sheep and we got to see the ferrets in their cage and the shearing shed

...my brother and I became fascinated with the spiky seed pods that were all over the cypress trees growing in the back yard. I think that we wanted to throw them at each other but we were given 'the look' so we resisted the temptation

...later, back on the road, sitting in the front seat of the car between my mother and my father while my brother and sisters slept in the back, I think it was the same trip to Sydney but it may have been another time

...it was at night and as we made our way on the sometimes dirt and sometimes tarred road the lights of oncoming cars blinded me

...I didn't understand how my father could see to drive

...the signposts and guardrails shone in the car's headlights

...this is my first memory of them, and the red and white reflectors that were sometimes on posts and sometimes on the trunks of trees and power poles

...my mother explained that they helped drivers to see where the road was when it was very dark

...that as we drove our headlights would light up the overhanging trees from underneath and the light would appear to jump from tree to tree and trunk to trunk as the car moved along the road

...willing us to catch up to the red tail lights of any car that was in front and get further away from the whitish-yellow headlights of any car that was behind us

...we were all completely silent in the car; maybe the others were asleep
...I remember car lights beaming through the rear window then passing and casting light up into the tree canopy just like our own did
...then being stuck for miles behind big trucks or cars pulling caravans especially going up hill and that sometimes they would pull over to the side of the road so all of the other cars could pass or we would pull over if they were in a hurry and that this is something I still do
...being in the car when the car was running well and dad joking about other drivers and cutting their water off and us laughing and mum smiling and handing out Minties and taking the paper off of one to slip it into his mouth as he drove
...we always took Minties on long journeys and I remember being in the car with Poppy who was my grandfather and Auntie Daisy who wasn't really my aunty or my grandmother because my grandmother had died of breast cancer when I was a baby and Poppy remarried, well Daisy smiling and handing out chewing gum and taking the silver paper off of a stick of Wrigley's Spearmint Gum and slipping it into Poppy's mouth as he drove
...coming to a sign that said we were now entering New South Wales though it may have read that we were now entering Victoria and we were on our way back home
...I liked to look down into the water of the Murray River as the car crossed over the bridge
...The best bridges were wooden because they made a regular clunky sound as we drove across
...and sometimes the bridges were single lane and we had to wait till it was our turn to cross
...once we went across on the Wymah punt which the locals called a ferry but we called it a punt but this wasn't on the way to Sydney

While Betty and I looked out through the carriage glass as we sat in the 'sleeper' on the journey across to Adelaide, or was it that we were perched in a rocking boat on Hen and Chicken Bay with her cousin Ronald? Anyway, as we sat looking down and into the fluorescent waters of the Parramatta River Betty remembered baking potatoes in hot coals with her cousin Gloria, and I recalled the oil covered rocks near Cabarita Baths. And the dead eels lay caught in the slick left by speedboats. And as the rain fell, through the city smells of traffic and the gasworks, we stepped down the big steps from the bus and up again to the footpath on the way to somewhere else.

...at a much later date going to Adelaide on the train with my mother and telling her things about the sights along the way because I'd been there before
...being on a train in a single sleeper on my own, and then at another time in a double one with my friend Bob Broughton
...and my mother and myself in a double sleeper together
...I had to make a booking to eat in the dining car at the front of the train and I was called when my meal was ready so I always ate with someone I didn't know
...I was on my own a lot
...the way the seats in the sleepers folded down into bunks
...standing near the little driver's booth at the front of a Sydney train and being able to see the track stretching out in front of me and how fast we seemed to be going
...the rain falling as we stepped down the big steps from the bus and up again to the footpath on the way to Strathfield Shopping Centre
...being on the rocks near Cabarita Baths and seeing dead eels and dipping my hand into the strangely fluorescent water and it coming out covered in oil from the speed boats
...but another time I went to Cabarita with my mother and we stayed with Poppy and Auntie Daisy in their house on Cabarita Rd. when she had to see the doctor

...thinking back now she seemed to be angry and I wasn't sure what was going on; perhaps she felt angry about being sick or perhaps she was angry at me
...but we walked along Wellbank St. to the Doctor's in Central Concord
...I liked to look at all of the brick houses with their brick fences and smell the city smells of the traffic and the gas works
...I recall the size and shape of the big gasometers of the gas works
...the double road that led up from the park and walking back along that road and along Cabarita Rd. so tired that I thought that I wouldn't make it
...the next day my legs were so sore I could hardly walk
...and the next day I spent most of it near the back steps of the house playing with whatever was lying around
...Aunty Daisy's son Paul came to visit with his wife whose name I can't recall and he tried to talk me into investing my savings in Shares for the future and how now I wish I had
...my mother and I being taken out on a boat on the Parramatta River by her cousin Ronald at Hen and Chicken Bay, Cabarita
...some years later my mother and I went to Manly on the ferry to visit her cousin Gloria
...very young being taken to visit my father's sister Netta though we never had very much to do with his side of the family

As my heart raced out of time with the slow, dull grey-green of the painted walls on the first day of school, or was it that the bright and impossibly green new growth on the fruit trees in the backyard was somehow a portent for warmer days and happier times? Anyhow, as my father forgot to collect me from kindergarten I waited, like a dog with an eye for fallen food and an ear for uncommon movement. I remembered the car trips down to the butter factory to get ice and the smell of something sweet baking in the oven and the sound of anyone arriving or leaving through the double wooden gates.

I remember

...my first day of Preps at Corryong Primary School and feeling very small and afraid
...the green of the paintwork at the school and the tin wash troughs with chrome bubble taps
...Kay Whitehead
...the big girls fussing over us and how that made me feel better
...the teacher Mrs Whitehead and how there were two of them and the younger Mrs Whitehead seemed friendlier
...trying to keep clear of the big boys in the school yard so that I wouldn't embarrass my brother in front of his friends
...sitting in the school room in the 3rd grade, being on the right hand side of the desk and how I preferred to sit on the right hand side
...how Mr. Hansen had very red hair and wore zinc cream on his nose in summer, even inside, and that he had something to do with the boy scouts
...that Mr. Findlay was very old and grumpy and how he had a round scar on the side of his head from when he was shot in the First World War
...how one teacher threw my drawing of a kangaroo on the floor because I'd drawn a helicopter in the background
...how the toilet block near the big Mulberry tree was out of bounds unless you really had to go and that I only went when I thought that no-one else was around
...being told that I should have been a girl for having long eye lashes and being caught by my mother trying to cut my eyelashes off
...crying at night because I hated my father for teasing me and how my mother said I'd get over it

...my brother trying to bring Robert Condron in to play while my grandparents were visiting and how I tried to stop him
 ...the fruit trees in the back yard
 ...playing French Cricket in the yard with my brother and how my mother made him let me win sometimes when I made a fuss
 ...developing a special bowling action after seeing Fred Flintstone ten pin bowling like a ballerina on the TV and how it caused my friends to mock me but how it nonetheless worked, occasionally
 ...losing my interest for cricket when we were allowed to use a real cricket ball instead of a tennis ball
 ...getting the hang of riding a friend's bike at a party I went to and my parents finally buying me one of my own; the pleasure of being able to ride around the town
 ...achieving a minor popularity through being able to draw the face of a pretty girl and how encouraging the art teacher was when I figured out a way to paint hair
 ...hiding under my parents' bed so that I wouldn't have to go to school and my mother hitting me for stripping the leaves off her plants in the garden, though this may have been something I did after she hit me
 ...discovering that I could run fast and hurdle and that other kids started choosing me to be on their side in games and how that felt pretty good
 ...being taught how to do a punt kick and a drop kick by the sports master and how he tried to be encouraging even though I wasn't very good at it
 ...being aware of the fascination the girls had for my ability to paint and draw pretty pictures
 ...being poked in the chest by Mr Hales for playing too roughly with the other boys
 ...the rows of pegs along the corridor walls outside the classrooms where we had to leave our coats and bags
 ...beginning to enjoy reading and writing
 ...feeling myself getting better and better at school and not understanding how or why and being convinced that it must be a fluke
 ...winning first prize for my stamp collection which was really my mother's and being afraid that it was cheating and that my brother would tell and I'd have to give the 20 cents back
 ...thinking that it was unjust that I'd won but not doing anything about it
 ...winning half a coconut for being equal best at doing the hoolah with a hoop. Kay Whitehead won the other half
 ...playing by myself in the back yard
 ...that the council put a transportable building from the Snowy Mountain Scheme on the vacant block behind our place and that became the Girl Guides Hall
 ...that Mr. Kidd who had a house next door to the Baby Health Centre had some sort of Vintage car which he looked after very well and that one day when he had left his garage door open I could see that he had another one inside exactly the same
 ...how Bill Ellis across the road had once been a boxer but gave it up to work as a labourer on the council and then he ran the Memorial Swimming Pool when it was built and that he was a born again Christian
 ...the boys who use to hang around our front yard so that they could watch my sisters who, it appeared to them, held a mysterious fascination.

And Betty continued to sit, and the rows of her knitting from the pattern continued to fall together like lines of words from a page, once read, now held together by sutures of thought. She remembered the winding road to Tumberumba. She had never seen the Otways. I recalled my childhood in Corryong. Mark's memories were filtered through his recollections of Colac.

And the rain on the roof ran in corrugations and away when it was not a showerhead, and the seat supported my weary arse, in sitting, as I sat alone in my apartment, astride a solid, straight-backed chair.



17. Straight-backed Chair

Performance Text A. Remembering

There are thirteen Acts of remembrance:

Acts of memory:

Memories:

1.

Just as Betty had sat and knitted from a pattern, or was it that she had 'read from a newspaper' and the lines of words on the page, once read, embraced and were seamlessly drawn together by stitches? Anyway, she was sat on one of those three solid, straight-backed chairs, and as she sat her body remembered Tumberumba. And the old Council Chamber chair remembered the shape of her arse and recalled what it was like to support a seated figure. And I remembered Corryong through the filter of Mark's recollections of his childhood in the Otways. And the rain ran off the tin of the roof when it was not a showerhead, and it remembered to pass through it when it was.

2.

While Betty had sat on the verge of the back veranda, plucking fetid feathers from a headless chook in the hot waters of a pale blue plastic bucket, or was it that the tired skin of her white puckered feet soaked in the tepid salty waters of a silver tin milk pail as she poured over the cryptic clues? Anyway, she was sat on the edge of the wooden decking that skinned the veranda, and as she sat her body remembered Tumberumba. And the hard wooden boards remembered the weight of her arse and recalled what it was to take it sitting down. And I remembered Corryong as Mark had recalled Colac. And the blood ran off and away from the quills of the dead chook when it was not a feather pillow, and it soaked into them when it was.

3.

As we had sat uncomfortably close on uncomfortable chairs around the stereogram, listening to the Goons, or was it that we had stabbed at our soft-boiled eggs with soldiers of toast at the breakfast table? Anyway, we were sat on or above the irregular square of floor, and as we were sat the itchy pile of the Axminster carpet that covered it remembered what it was, to give in to the weight of randomly placed chairs and casually arranged feet, and we listened as the studio audience laughed. And Ron and Betty laughed. And my brother and sisters laughed. And I remembered the smell of the damp and rotting leather upholstery of dad's old Morris Oxford in the shed on the block at Tumberumba.

4.

I had held on for dear life on the back of a grey elephant at the Taronga Zoo, or was it that my knuckles were white with the gripping of the leather reigns of a painted wooden horse at the Royal Easter Show? Anyway, my brother was lost in the crowd, and the beast, once mounted, remembered what it was, the worn and shiny weave of my little boy's shorts. The even pressure of thighs against flanks. Fists clenched tightly around bridle straps and show bags. The thrilling smell of fear and Fairy Floss in the flared and painted nostrils of a wooden sideshow pony, repeated in series around a suspended circle, like so many wooden Russian dolls.

5.

Just as I had thrown-up into an otherwise empty ice-cream container in the back seat of the Austin Freeway, as the car wove its way through dappled light and overhanging trees on the

drive down to Albury, or was it that the F.J.Holden was winding its way through the Snowy Mountains to get to Lake Jindabyne and I was looking down and into the black water below? Anyway, as I slipped back and forth in the tray of the wheelbarrow as my brother pushed me across the yard, the barrow remembered to dump me onto the grass when I was the annoying younger brother, but keep me safely contained in a plastic tub when it was the back of a moving car and I was half digested spew.

6.

While Betty was relieved to hear that my bow legs and pigeon toes would probably right themselves, if my attention wasn't drawn to them, or was it that the inevitability of an alphabet, picked out in the coloured chalk that framed the blackboard, would calm my restless legs? Anyhow, as I struggled up Playles Hill in heavy leather boots the grazing cows looked on with suspicion at the shape of my arse. And I recalled the smell of milk and cow shit. And I remembered the noise made by trees dripping with dew into leaf litter in the early morning mist at Dead Horse Gap.

7.

As my brother and I attempted to smoke stringy bark in a makeshift cubby that was an old refrigerator packing crate, or was it just rising steam from an armful of hot wet clothes straight from the copper that kept Betty flushed and bothered? Anyhow, as my throat burned it remembered the fire siren and the look on Wayne Gordes' face as Betty chased him from the yard with the garden hose. And I remembered being swooped by Plovers as I walked along Strezlecki Way. And the puffs of rising dust from the road at the start of a summer shower. And all the while the sound of women laughing and talking and the drinking of sweet white tea.

8.

I had tried to hit a tennis ball before I could hold a racket, or was it that 'the swinging bridge' on the other side of Khancoban was struggling for stillness. Anyway, my failing grip on the wood and gut remembered, in movement, what it was to hit a ball. And an uncertain tangle of ropes and beams balanced a shaky figure when it spanned a deep ravine. And the still dark waters of the Jeremal Creek remembered to hold me up as my fearful body learnt to float on its back. And I remembered the sagging nylon net strung between iron poles on the pitted tennis court at Biggara.

9.

Just as I had wondered at how my crooked front teeth were the same as my mothers and my cousin Sharon and my uncle Alf and my grandmother Broughton who had died when I was a baby, or was it that the irregular bars of the car's radiator grill were grinning lopsidedly in the face of oncoming traffic? Anyway, my father's shoulders remembered to support me up when I needed to see the Queen and Prince Phillip being driven through Khancoban, and hold me down when we were in the front of the Holden and I was struggling to see out in the days before seat belts and there was 'nothing to see'.

10.

Just as it rained mud on the windscreen in a downpour after a dust storm and the car horn got stuck in the main street of Tumberumba, or was it that the high throaty voice of Mrs Williams in conversation with Betty kept them screened and barely visible through fly wire at the back of the house? Anyhow, we got to see the ferrets in their cages behind the shearing shed, and I remembered how the signposts and guardrails shone in the car's headlights at night. And the ferret eyes glowed pink in the daylight. And I remembered the slow and satisfying journey

across the Murray River on the Wymah Punt, when it was called a punt, being just as slow and satisfying when it was also called a ferry.

11.

While Betty and I looked out through the carriage glass as we sat in the 'sleeper' on the train journey across to Adelaide, or was it that we were perched in a rocking boat on Hen and Chicken Bay with her cousin Ronald? Anyway, as we sat looking down and into the fluorescent waters of the Parramatta River Betty remembered baking potatoes in hot coals with her cousin Gloria, and I recalled the oil covered rocks near Cabarita Baths. And the dead eels lay caught in the slick left by speedboats. And as the rain fell, through the city smells of traffic and the gasworks, we stepped down the big steps from the bus and up again to the footpath on the way to somewhere else.

12.

As my heart raced out of time with the slow, dull grey-green of the painted walls on the first day of school, or was it that the bright and impossibly green new growth on the fruit trees in the backyard was somehow a portent for warmer days and happier times? Anyhow, as my father forgot to collect me from kindergarten I waited, like a dog with an eye for fallen food and an ear for uncommon movement. And as Betty waited she remembered the water lapping at the windowsills of the old farmhouse at Gumly Gumly, and I remembered the car trips down to the butter factory to get ice and the smell of something sweet baking in the oven and the sound of anyone arriving or leaving through the double wooden gates.

13.

And Betty continued to sit, and the rows of her knitting from the pattern continued to fall together like lines of words from a page, once read, now held together by sutures of thought. She remembered the winding road to Tumbarumba. She had never seen the Otways. I recalled my childhood in Corryong. Mark's memories were filtered through his recollections of Colac. And the rain on the roof ran in corrugations and away when it was not a showerhead, and the seat supported my weary arse, in sitting, as I sat alone in my apartment, astride a solid, straight-backed chair.

Performance Text B. Small Dance Catastrophe

The fire brigade officer called out "This is the fire brigade.
What the hell is going on in here?
Can anybody hear me?"

The words came back "I can hear you."
They were the first words we had.

It was the moment so many had prayed for but few believed was possible.

At one moment we are led to believe that it will only be a matter of moments.

At another moment we are given indications that it will be a matter of moments,
a matter of minutes.

As it stands at the moment, four movements have been removed.
There are five other possibilities in the space which cannot be identified as being anything in
particular and cannot be removed from the scene.
And there's an audience unaccounted for.

The search continues and more movement has been located and removed from the site.
More movements have been removed from the dance.
The long term survivor has been located but not removed.

He is still upright, in a horizontal predicament.
Prehistoric specialists are convinced that this is evidence of further ritual activity from the
Bronze Age.

Well anyway, we can see his feet.
It does seem extraordinary but he has moved.

What a small rewarding moment and how difficult it must be to continue.
If unchecked can't those small movements develop quickly into a major dance phrase?

They can!

The problem with a thing like this is that everybody knows everybody else.

Some of the audience have a relative unaccounted for!

Especially in events like this it's a big family, and the whole family is affected.

It's like a dance in a family.
Yes.... but I'm not giving up hope.

Everyone's different here.
Every individual is different,
so clearly the longer the dance goes on
the less chance of survival.

Can I be clear about this?

You are saying that the rescue team expressed concern to you at least fifteen minutes ago that this performance might end in disaster?

That is correct!

Reports are already coming in from an audience that is traumatised by how slow this is.

The movements that we now have in place,
under which he is carrying out this co-ordination,
were not in place at the time of the last disaster.

And the news remains pretty much the same as when we started.
The situation is that there is an achingly, painstakingly slow progress being made.

But we are getting closer.

At the moment he is working through two minutes of movement to get to an air pocket.
Do you have any idea whether he can get over and done with this part of the dance by this evening?

I do believe that the survivor was well prepared, yes.

He has obviously done a lot of wetland choreography in the past.

And we do have a multi-tiered system of disaster control.

When you watch him you can see that all of the bits and pieces are working absolutely together.

But it doesn't seem to make any difference.

My amateur understanding is that there are pieces of movement,
very large chunks of movement jammed together.
So it is not possible to quickly get the survivor out,
but of course they must do so in ways that protect him from further injury and avoid dislodging this extraordinary amount of material.

So he is in a system at the moment which is called choreography,
and all of his veins have gotten larger?

That is correct!

Well, emergency services...

And trauma counsellors.

... have been keeping family and friends of the well hung dancer trapped in movement, up to date with what is going on in here.

They are able to assist them as best they can.

His suspicious package has forced hundreds to evacuate.

And it does look like this particular erection is lined up with the sun rising between a slot and an exit sign on the horizon.

We have huge hopes that he is going to come through this.

In a situation that I was in, if somebody was in dire straits in the theatre industry, if a performance was failing, everybody rallied around to help, and if somebody had gone missing during the show and I was required to be involved of course I would.

I think the support of family and friends and community help a great deal, and of course counselling.

There are some wonderful people out there who are here to support dancers who have been through just this sort of choreography.

What sort of counselling will he need after this dreadful event comes to an end? What will he require?

Well, the best thing for me was just the support of my family and friends.

Just love and support gives you the confidence to go on dancing!

At this stage clearly a whole range of options are being considered.

We are looking at every one of them, and every possibility.

We have to appreciate that the entire stage area beneath him is still at massive risk of movement.

Choreography is afterall an unstable mass.

So we are looking at every feasible possibility here?

We are!

But isn't the essence of it anger? I mean.....

Look, it's a difficult dance.

We've been saying that for over twenty minutes!

The long term survivor will struggle to deal with the difficulty and complexity of the choreography.

But his reaction is to be angry, surely, that things can't proceed quicker.

You would have heard today from his next-of-kin.

Yes, he is struggling to understand why they just can't get a crane in there and lift him out.

Well emergency services and trauma counsellors have been keeping family and friends up to date with what is going on in here.

State of the art radar equipment has been especially brought in from Sweden. But is there movement still missing?

There is!

I have been involved in a lot of these performances and some of the movement....

Well it does get you like that.
The difficulty of course is with the survivor himself.
The adrenaline is pumping and he is working under extremely difficult conditions.

Yes it must be difficult and very hard on the survivor.

That's why his welfare is paramount.
We've got to keep fresh teams in there all the time to get the absolute maximum of human performance out of him...I guess.
Duty of care and all that.

But the performance of course continues.

There is a lot of activity going on in the confined space in front of us.

And at no time have we ever scaled down the search.

It is ongoing and in every interview I've given,
I have been saying that audiences never ever give up hope.

Nor emergency rescue workers.

We will not give up hope until the last piece of choreographic material has been performed in that confined space.
The strategies that we employ have proven to be correct.

It is a slow process.

Sure.
It is frustrating.
The area in front of us is highly unstable.

Yet there is the possibility of surprising and unexpected movement.

Once we get better access to the performer, one would give him a lot more attention because you could get to his arms.

Some fabulous news is that limbs are moving.

It means that we don't have to worry about spinal injuries
and we don't have to worry about damage from the routine.

If there is a routine.

I think we are all quietly getting excited about a little likely miracle about to happen.

If indeed he is about to do something interesting.
Did he describe what happened on the Wednesday night?

He did!

Absolutely, I'm sure you will keep us posted, thank you very much again.
.....and further news that has just come to hand,
A second movement was uncovered and has just been recovered from the choreography.
Plus another one which was pulled out five minutes ago.
That means now that three movements have been uncovered and then recovered,
another two pieces of choreography found but not recovered,
and thirteen audience still unaccounted for.

What did he say?

He said it was like a loud explosion.
He thought, actually the theatre was being bombed,
and within seconds the whole place erupted, and he was trapped by movement.
He got so confined in his confined space that he could neither dance nor escape.

Hopes of survival were desperately low.
With audience fears of the spread of disease hasn't the search now extended to music?
The composer is retrieving hundreds of musicians from a coastal resort.
They are spreading lime and disinfectant over absolutely everything.

It was then that he felt rushings of orchestral sound.
The place was flooded with music.
A number of times he could hear this rush of noise starting to build up behind him, and he just knew that he was going to get hit again.
The confined space that he was in...

He only had about two inches or an inch or two above his nose,
and what he would do was lift his head, quite remarkably...

And put it against the slab of sound above...

And suck in the air until it had passed.
And the diamond edged chain saws were stopped,
if only briefly?
They were!

There are still eight audience outstanding and you know who you are.

We have paused a couple of times tonight I believe, because of movement.

There's a hell of a lot of choreography here and you can see how steep the sides are.
All that is needed here is a lot of music...

And as far as I hear from my partners and staff...

We need white bread sandwiches and helicopters and we need cars...

And especially they say...

We need hot sweet tea and biscuits.
The Producer denies persistent reports that cholera has already broken out.
Is that true?

It is!

AFTERWORD

Consider, for example, as chemist and writer Hervé This does, on the writing of recipes:

Recipes have been denounced...as little more than degrading protocols. Indeed they are – but how, then, are we to transmit a culinary idea? Without giving weights and measures, without precise instructions, the amateur cook hesitates. But if the instructions are too precise, there is danger as well...How are we to impart technical intelligence, on the one hand, and artistic intelligence on the other, in a way that is both appetizing and digestible?⁴⁵

Hervé This was referring to a more conservative discourse where the focus is largely to do with interpretation rather than the actual pleasure of human response. Likewise, to engage with a research methodology that is creative and imagistic is a risky business. The connection between the rational mind, and our faculties of feeling and sensing, is tenuous when the main ingredient is a critical dialogue while the principal dish remains a creative experience. The task that I have set myself is, after all, not to prove through argument, but to communicate gently with the imaginative worlds of those who view the artefact. I have done this in acknowledgement of the special relationship that exists between performer and audience, reader and author; a place where experiences that are embodied and encoded in memory are given space and can be reflected upon. I have resisted, as much as possible, the use of a form of expression that appears to exist only in reference to the work of others. I take that as self-evident - the existence of more analytical minds than my own.

There-in lies the rub, that creative work may be both supported and diminished when referenced to the more highly evolved reasonings of another: a past French philosopher perhaps, who has spoken more succinctly; a great artist who has fashioned their artwork more beautifully; a writer who has expressed themselves more poetically; a builder who has constructed more coherently. Again and again, on the vellum that has been written over and scraped clean and used again, fragments of their artistry are still visible beneath and through the lines on the page. There is no need for traffic signals here. That is the point of this work.

All the while voices criss-cross the physical and emotional body implied within the anatomy of the artefact. Apparently contained. And we may remember a cloth that has been cut and re-cut - the lace that was first a bolt of fabric then a curtain; later, a wedding dress before it became a party frock; a blouse before a handkerchief. In this work, which may be seen as an old and much-loved dwelling, whose many rooms exist as a testament to the taste of successive owners, I have sought to shine a light on another time frame where past, present and future coexist. Teasing out the fibrous tissues that have already been put to many uses, moments are remembered. This process takes me beyond the frame of the artefact.

It is a paradox that the exactness of what is presented cannot be immediately discerned, because the thing that I am pursuing is everywhere throughout the artefact, that is the document and the performance event, and outside of the framework that would appear to contain it. I am interested in looking at one's experience of the written moment and the staged moment as if they were a dream-like event in which there is room for contemplation.

⁴⁵ This, H (2009) *Building A Meal: From Molecular Gastronomy to Culinary Constructivism*. New York, Columbia University Press, p.120.

So, what does a dream look like? We only know that the images may be happening simultaneously rather than as a linear event. In order to construct each of the 13 Acts of the artefact – remembrances to be seen as particles of a concept whose sum is greater than its apparent whole - I have made this work of words and images in refusal of a cursory reading. When experienced together the tales are serialized yet they also function as a chimera or mirage. Images appear and disappear only to reappear. As if playing at the fringes of an invisible force, this event risks taking me beyond the edges of traditional academic discourse. That is not to say that my concern with the incalculable effects of imagery and sensation on the body remembering cannot be described in critical language, just that my choice here is to make room for the possibility that the written moment, and the staged moment might have a multiplicity of meanings within a multitude of locations. There is a chance therefore, that the lineal sense in the pages of the document might be liberated from pagination, and the subtle shifts and overlays of text and image that are possible in live performance may also elude the boundaries of precise meaning.

In his essay *A Politics of Fact and Figure* Tom Conley describes sensation through the eyes of Deleuze in *The Logic Of Sensation*, as having “the virtue not only of moving across different levels of space and affect but also of bringing together different zones of intensity.”⁴⁶ Deleuze is describing here the paintings of Francis Bacon. While in *Proust and Signs*, however, Deleuze describes sensation more critically as the foremost cause of deformations, “an agent that deforms the body.” But back to Bacon for a moment, whose paintings appear to inhabit sensation itself - at once held fast to, and released from, all of the elements that they contain.

As an artist I have attempted to encourage the orienting of all of the potential narratives of the work into the sensation of witnessing. Again, on Francis Bacon, Deleuze writes of painting as “the possibility of all of these hypotheses or narrations at the same time”⁴⁷, which foretells of its existence outside of narration. This brings us nicely back to the role of the witness in determining how an artwork is experienced. To my mind this work has emerged out of a saturation of countless experiences that are at once within and outside of my creative control. “What gives order to the sum are clichés and nothing more. Nothing but clichés, everywhere clichés.”⁴⁸

The flexible matrix of memory fold past, present, and future time into the body of the artefact, as expansions, contractions, shifts in body, mass, and unforeseen torsions come to the fore.

“...and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint in your body.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Conley, T (2003) Afterword: *A Politics of Fact and Figure*. -see Gilles Deleuze (2001) *The Logic of Sensation*. MN, University of Minnesota Press, p.136.

⁴⁷ Deleuze, G. (2003) Trans. Daniel W. Smith. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* MN, University of Minnesota Press, p.70.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, G. (2001) *Cinema 1. L'Image-Mouvement*. MN, University of Minnesota Press, p.208.

⁴⁹ Whitman, W. (1855) Ed. David S. Reynolds. *Leaves of Grass* (2005). New York, Oxford University Press, p.vii

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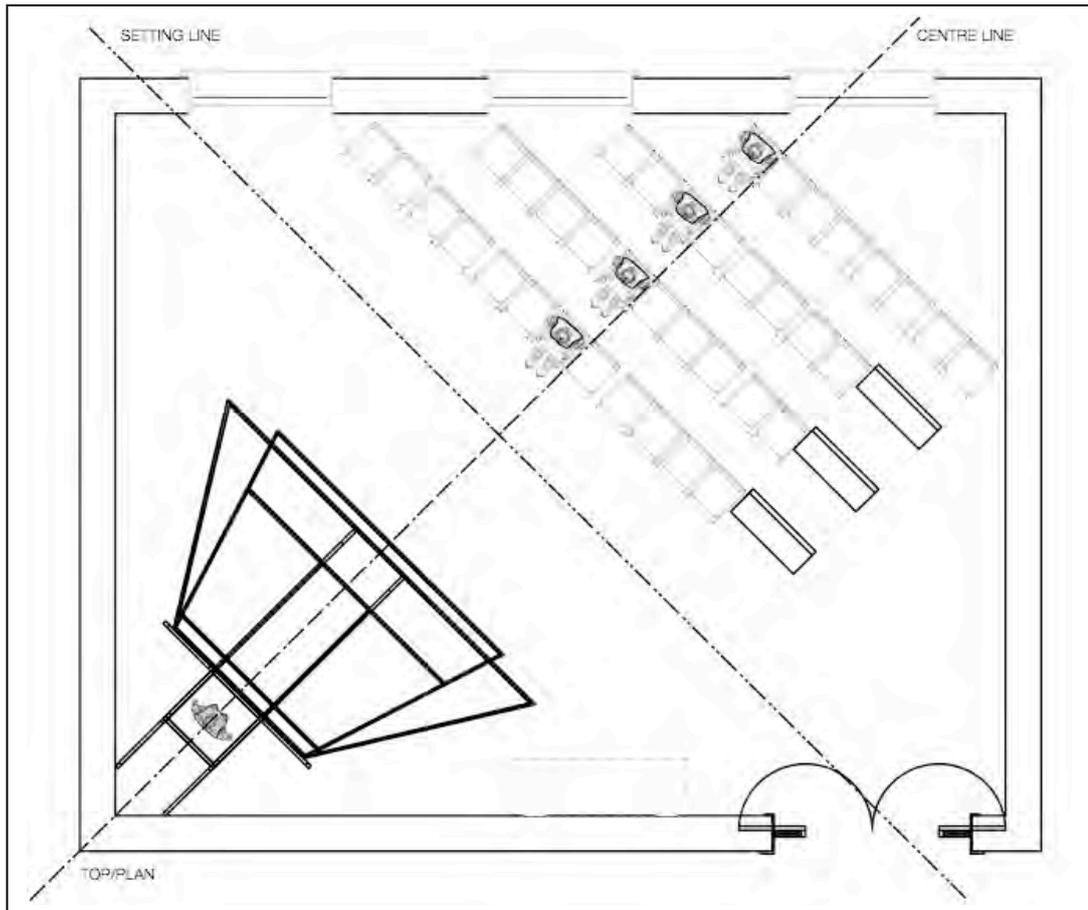
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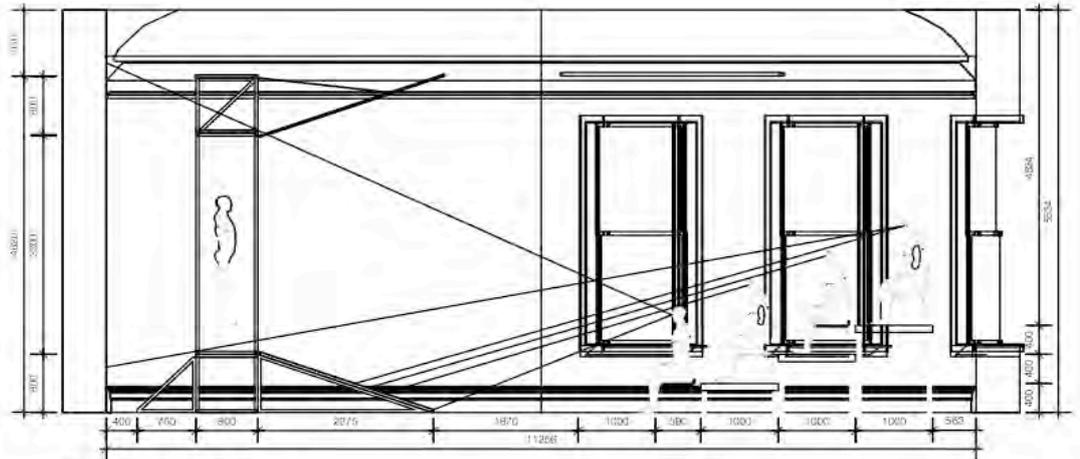
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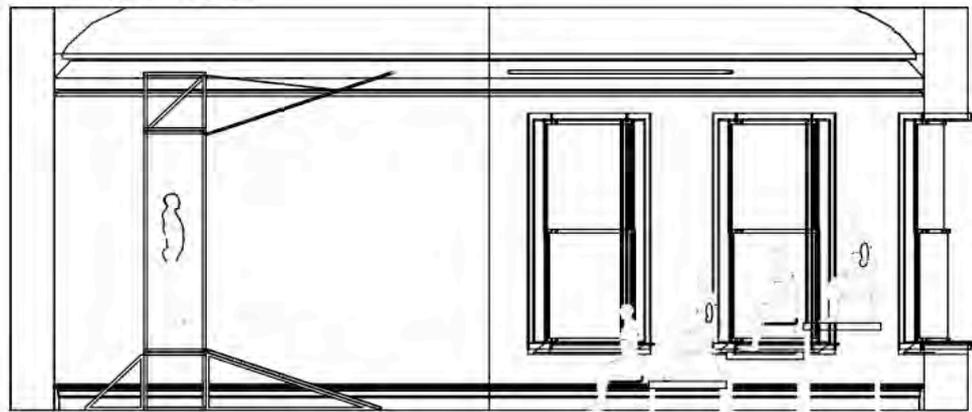
APPENDIX

Technical Drawings*, Performance Photos** & Performance DVD***

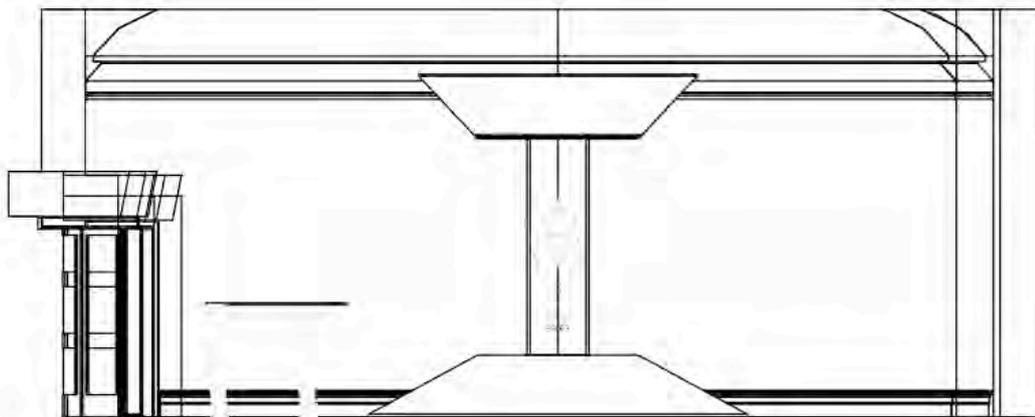




CENTER LINE SECTION W/ SIGHT LINES



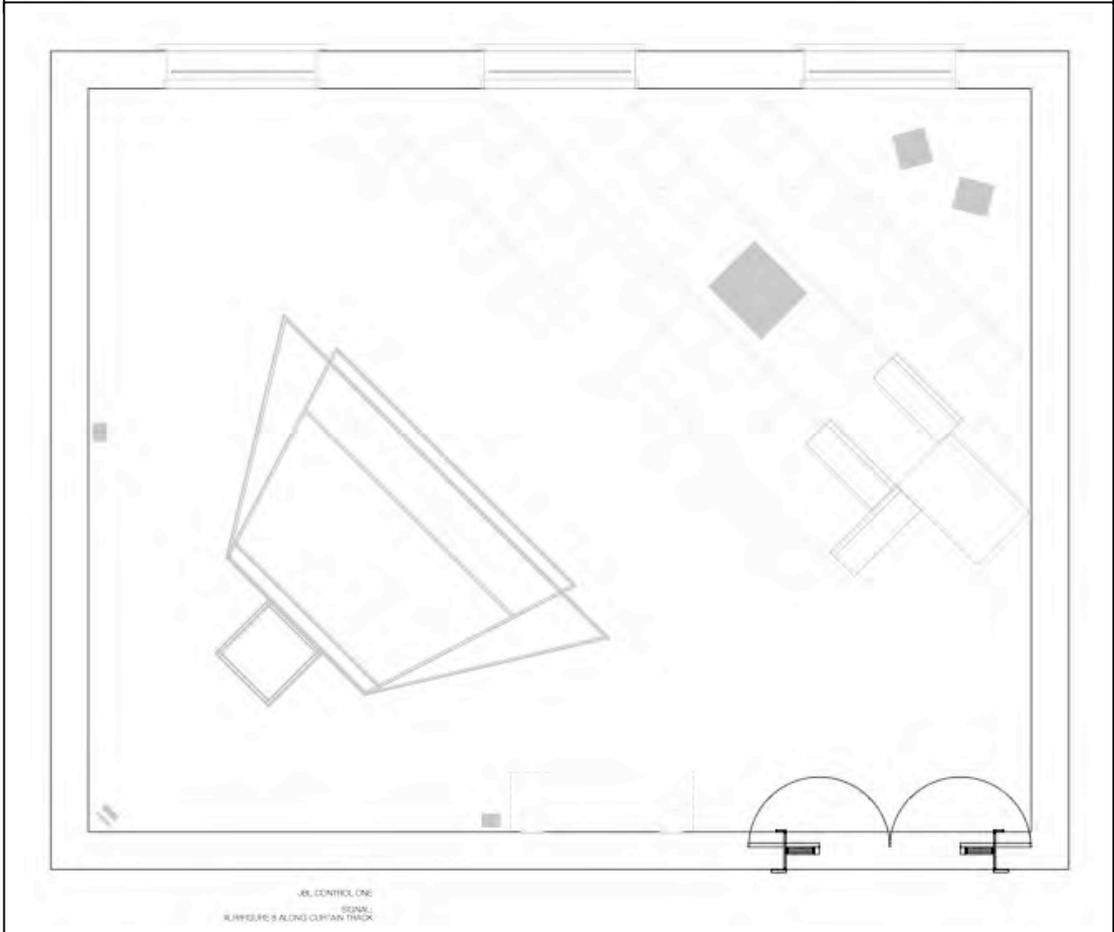
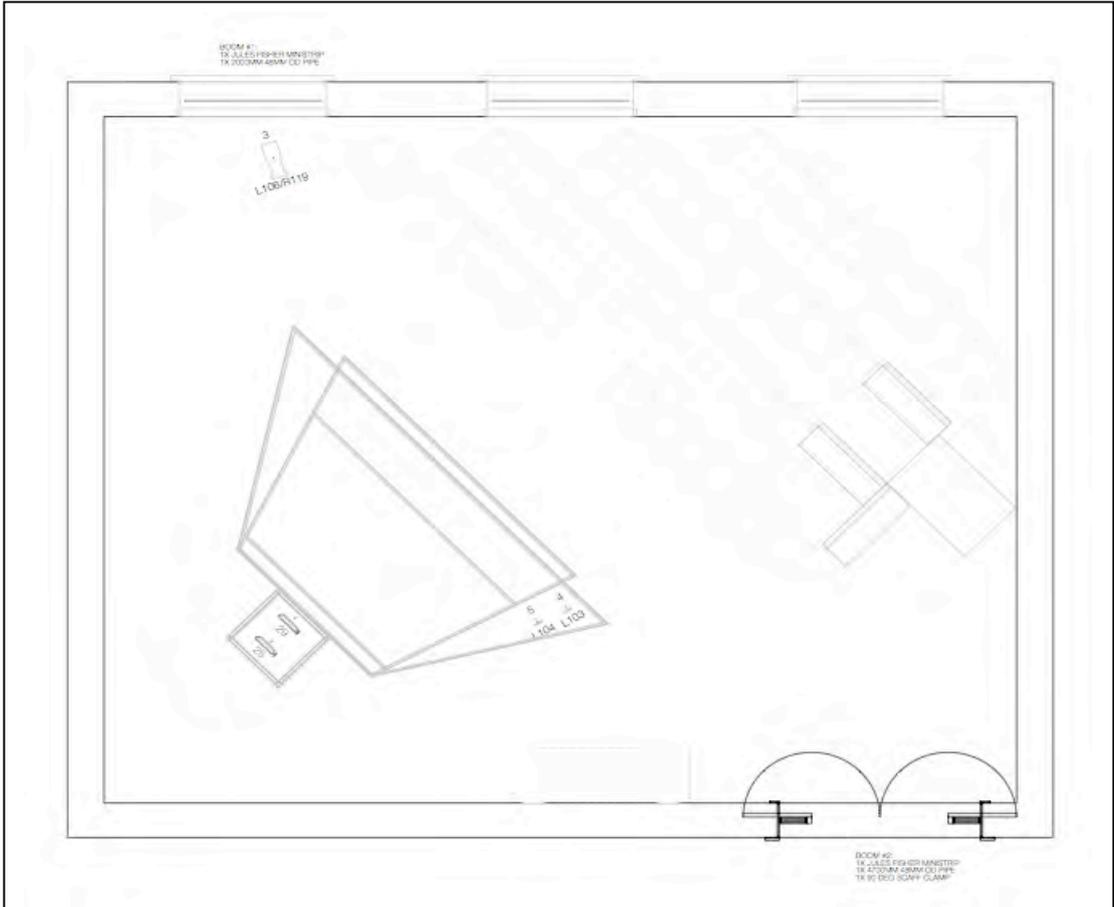
CENTER LINE SECTION



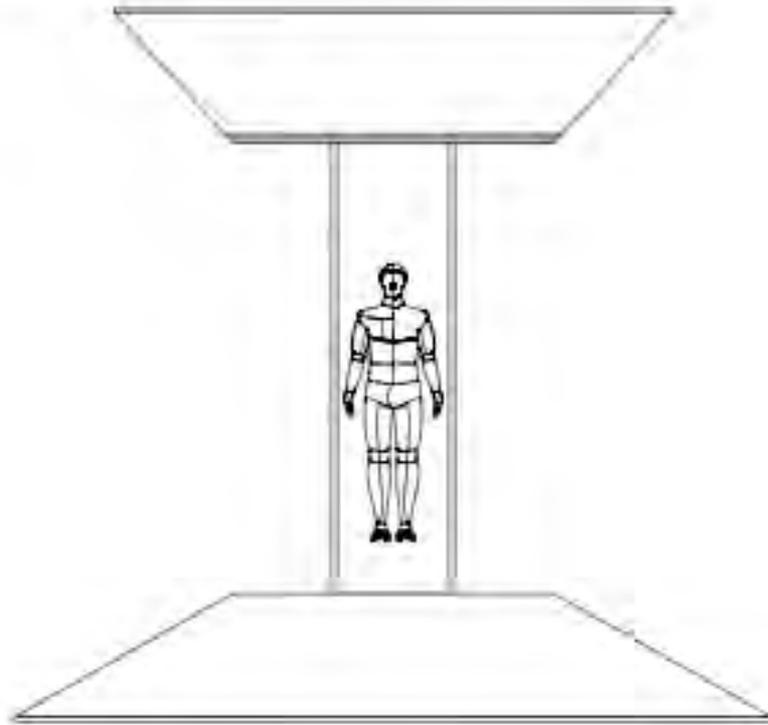
SETTING LINE SECTION



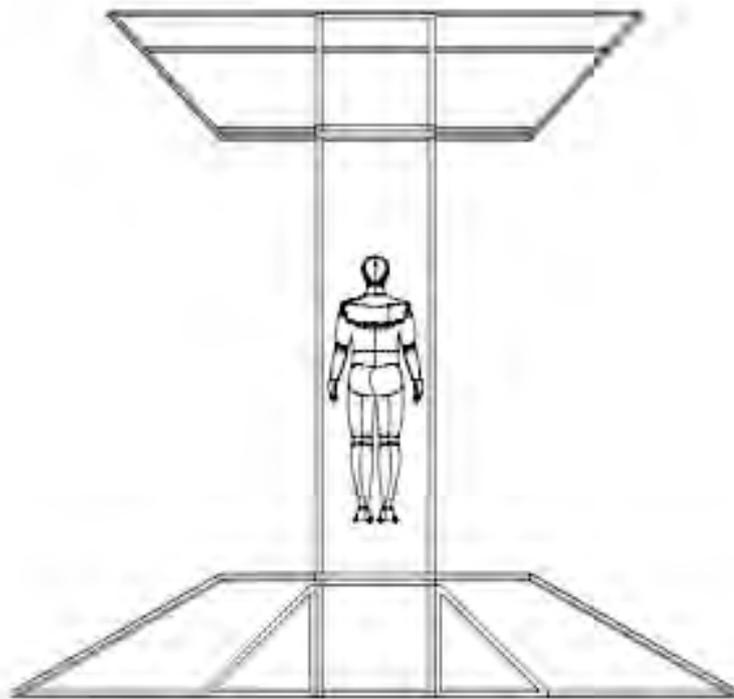
18. Performance Photo (b)



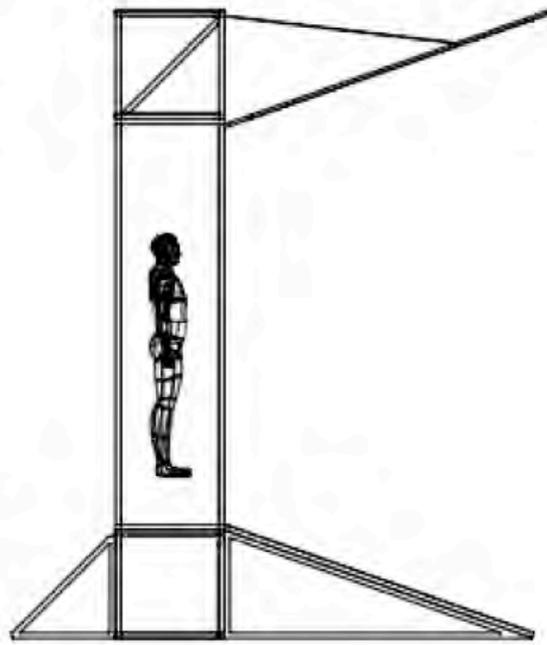
VESSEL - FRONT



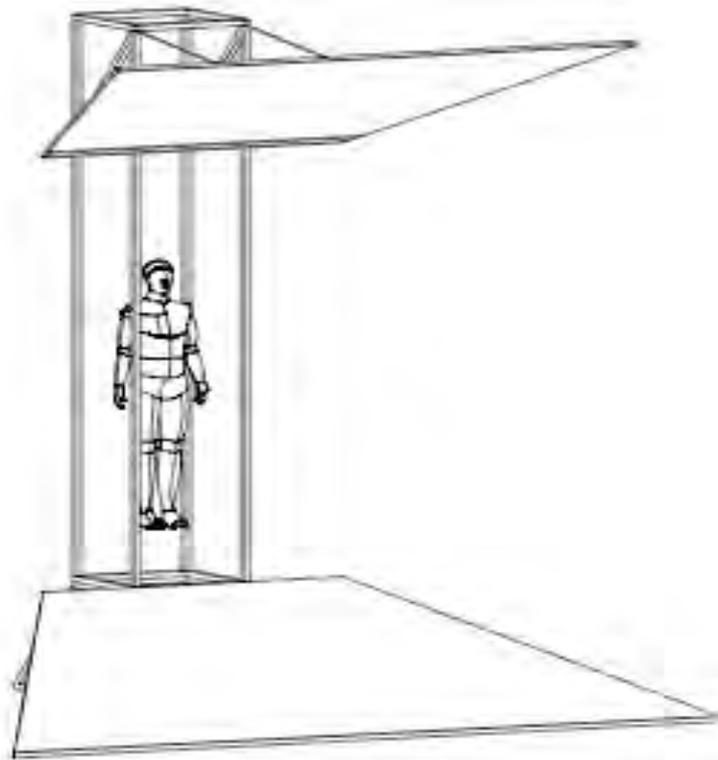
VESSEL - REAR



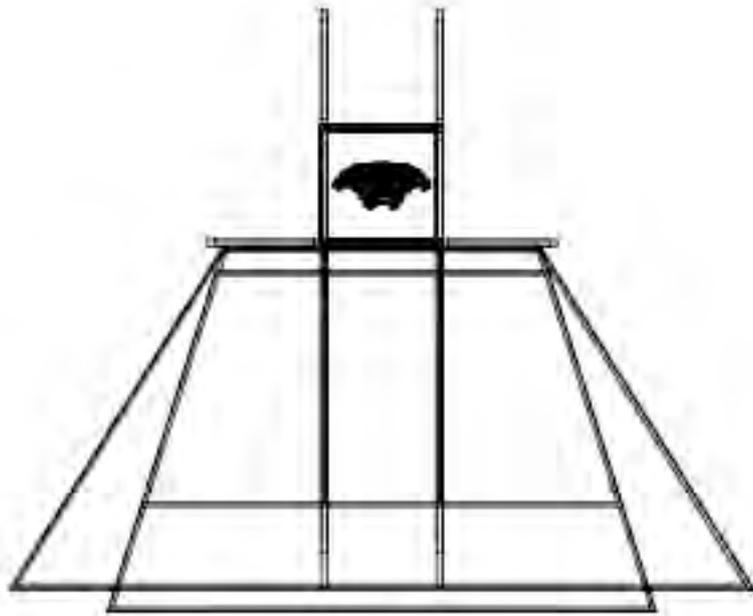
VESSEL - SIDE



VESSEL - ISOMETRIC



VESSEL - TOP/PLAN





19. Performance Photo (c)

* Hart, B. – Bluebottle3 (2011) I could pretend the sky is water: Technical Drawings for Trevor Patrick

** Hawkes, P. (2011) I could pretend the sky is water: Performance Photos of Trevor Patrick. Arts House, Dance Massive

*** Hinkley, R. (2011) I could pretend the sky is water: Performance DVD of Trevor Patrick. Dance Massive